GEORGE BARKER AND THE ENGLISH POETS:
"THE MINOR BIRD ON THE BOUGH"

A Dissertation submitted to the
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Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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The purpose of the thesis is to explore the implications of a statement made by the candidate in a recent article on the poetry of George Barker: "In Barker's work language and metre are for ever returning to the caves of their origin. His view of the English tradition is of a spiral through which the word refines itself to an extreme of preciosity and then twists back violently to a new kind of simplicity. In the history of these islands there have been several such moments, less reverses or revolutions than revaluations from an older perspective: the mediaeval alliterative revival, the Romantic Revival, the re-emergence of Sprung Rhythm in Hopkins, the verbal democracy of Auden." (Poetry Nation Review, 9, No. 5, 1983).

The dissertation takes each of these in turn and examines the effect which a reading of the work of the period has had on Barker's own theory and practice. The resulting conception in the poet's mind of a connected tradition owes much to the essay 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' by T. S. Eliot, who for over thirty years was both his publisher and mentor. Beginning with a consideration of the influence of Eliot's criticism on Barker's thinking, the thesis then progresses through successive chapters on Middle English Poetry, the Romantic Revival, Tennyson, Housman, Yeats, Hopkins and Auden to a conclusion in which Barker's own contribution to the perceived tradition is assessed.
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Published submission: 'George Barker at Seventy', a festchrift edited by the candidate, Poetry Nation Review 31, (9, No. 5), pp. 39-65.

This includes:

'The One That Got Away', pp. 41-3
'A Conversation between Robert Fraser and George Barker', pp. 43-7
'George Barker b. 1913 - A Bibliography', pp. 65-6
I saw William Blake large and bright like ambition
Absolute, glittering, actual and gold.
I saw he had worlds and worlds in his abdomen,
And his bosom innumerably enpeopled with all birds.
I saw his soul like a cinema in each of his eyes,
And Swedenborg labouring in his stomach.
I remember the myrtle sprouting from his hand
And saw myself the minor bird on the bough.

(George Barker, from 'Calamiterror', Collected Poems, 1957, p. 51)

No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone.
His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relationship to the dead poets and artists. You cannot value him alone; you must set him, for contrast and comparison, among the dead.

(T. S. Eliot, from 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', The Sacred Wood, 1920 p. 44)

O spirits of the Illustrious, stop buggering around with my typewriter!

(George Barker, from 'Asterisks', Essays, 1970, p. 131)
Speaking in a recent interview on the occasion of his seventieth birthday, the poet George Barker had this to say on his view of the English poetic tradition:

The issue in English has always been that the language over a period of roughly a quarter of a century turns in on itself and becomes extremely decadent and then has to be destroyed and washed up again. It has happened in the past and is going to continue happening. This is not only a matter of a technical aesthetic, but also of a political idea, namely the return to plain speech.¹

It is a statement which neatly combines two rather different kinds of concern arising from distinct, but almost contemporary, sources. In it the political fervour of the 'thirties, the demand that literature should descend from Parnassus and grapple with the realities of the street, conspires with a view of the unfolding of a literary tradition in which the will of the individual creator is assigned an important role which remains, nevertheless, subservient to the operation of certain impersonal, but largely rational, forces.

The circumstances which, during Barker's early manhood, made such a convergence of beliefs possible are not difficult to locate. In the early 'thirties, when Barker took his first steps as a poet, the political context of poetry, and the responsibility of the writer to a public wider than his own readership, were uppermost in the critical mind. This tendency was nowhere more evident than in Michael Roberts's anthology of contemporary verse New Signatures which in 1932 Barker was asked by John Middleton Murry to review for The Adelphi.² In an essay 'Poetry and Contemporary Inertia' which, later in the same year, Barker published in The Twentieth Century, organ of the
libertarian Promethean Society to which he was then informally affiliated, he quotes from Roberts's Introduction and then goes on to draw certain conclusions about the place of the poet in the modern world (see Appendix H):

"The poet", Michael Roberts wrote, "must be abreast of his own times." He must also be the precursor into the future of his own times: he must be "the fingertip of the consciousness of his period." He must be profoundly didactic and moral; I believe it is at the present time enormously vital that his didactics and morals be emphatically lucid, since what we do not seem to have today, apart from the urge to move along, is the vision of what we must move along towards. We have a semi-circular future: of which no more than a bare score of degrees are nearer to the ultimacy of which we must attain. It is the obligation of the poet, among other things, to provide men with some notion of where precisely lies the correct destination, and some sort of diagram about how best to get there."

The desired diagram, however, would be of little use unless spelled out in the most direct of terms. The relative lucidity thus made necessary would provide the poets of his time, Barker believed, with a unique opportunity to cut away from the enfeebled highmindedness of Georgian verse, away even from the impressive erudition of Eliot and Pound, towards a new earth-bound solidity, a new relevance and democratic grace:

The education of the majority entails the simplification and repopularisation of poetry, which again entails a readjustment of the precepts at present underlying our serious poetry. It also means that poetry shall become a passionate and profound instrument of national or international propaganda.
Thus, though contemporary political priorities created the context of an overdue re-appraisal of the poet's task, that very context implied artistic and linguistic consequences which the writer could not afford to ignore.

At the time he penned these remarks it is probable that it seemed to Barker that the revolution in taste which his argument appears to endorse was without precedent. As time went on, however, Barker, whose personal reading of the classical English poets was proceeding hand in hand with his absorption of Eliot's critical writings, came to see that the change in the prevailing poetic climate in his own time was but one of a succession of connected moments in history at which poets, whose language had, through an inevitable process of rarification, lost contact with the common roots of human experience, had been forced to take fresh stock of their position. At such moments it became necessary to refashion the instrument of language and to 'purify the dialect of the tribe' in order to provide a new stimulus for further work. The achievement of such changes was seldom the result of the efforts of any one writer. Rather was it the fulfilment of obscure historical forces which the individual poet had it within his power to advance but not to originate.

It will be seen that the version thus proposed of the relationship between the endeavour of any one artist and the onward sweep of history has much in common with the theory propounded by T. S. Eliot in his celebrated essay 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', originally published in The Egoist in 1919, but collected in The Sacred Wood of 1928, where Barker would have encountered it. In the article Eliot is concerned with the connection between the mental operations of the artist and his experience of the work of dead writers without reference to whom his contribution is meaningless:
To proceed to a more intelligible exposition of the relation of the poet to the past: he can neither take the past as a lump, an indiscriminate bolus, nor can he form himself wholly upon one or two private admirations, nor can he form himself wholly upon one preferred period. The first course is inadmissible, the second is an important experience of youth, the third a pleasant and highly desirable supplement. The poet must be very conscious of the main current, which does not flow invariably through the most distinguished reputations. He must be quite aware of the obvious fact that art never improves, but that the material of art is never quite the same. He must be aware that the mind of Europe - the mind of his own country - a mind which he learns in time to be much more important that his own private mind - is a mind which changes, and that this change is a development which abandons nothing en route which does not superannuate either Shakespeare or Homer, or the rock drawing of the Magdalenian draughtsman. That this development, refinement perhaps, complication certainly, is not, from the point of view of the artist any improvement... But the conscious present is an awareness of the past in a way and to an extent which the past's awareness of itself cannot show. 3

The young Barker lived in a period of acute change in both the social and literary scene, and was thus not surprisingly very conscious of development as a facet of the artistic process. The important question, however, is the manner in which he came to view such change. The essay 'Poetry and Contemporary Inertia' accords with Eliot in its conception of individual creative effort as an expression of the logic of history. There is, however, one important difference. For Barker, it seems, progress in the imaginative sphere needed to unravel along lines very different from those suggested by Eliot's "refinement perhaps, complication certainly", or, to the extent that it followed such a route, could only lead the writer down an undesirable cul-de-sac.

The reasons for this altered emphasis have much to do with the way in which Barker, along with many of his contemporaries, was inclined to situate himself in relation to his immediate forebears. His
review of *New Signatures* goes some way to illustrate this. Beginning
with a few sentences on F. R. Leavis's *New Bearings in English Poetry*,
which had also just appeared, it goes on to use the very phrase of
Michael Roberts's later quoted in 'Poetry and Contemporary Inertia' as
ammunition against Leavis's inclusion of Eliot in the modern canon. The
result is to cast doubt on the relevance of Eliot's poetry to the modern
democratic age:

Mr. Leavis talks a lot about the influence on the younger writers
of Mr. T. S. Eliot. It is perhaps active, probably active, upon
younger writers lacking that condition of being "abreast of their
own times, honest with themselves" which is declared in the
introduction to this anthology to the condition without which "a
poet cannot expect to write well."

Mr. Eliot is not a contemporary. He is concerned with
problems which have mistakenly entered this century instead of
oblivion.⁴

Thus, though mindful of the merit of the school of Eliot and Pound
- the very school which Leavis had heralded as a modern pantheon,
Barker could not help also regarding the direction its work appeared to
exemplify as representing a winding path of, in Eliot's own words,
"refinement" and "improvement" which would eventually leave the poet
stranded miles from the generality of the reading public.

Bearing in mind this personal reservation, which he was never fully
to abandon,⁵ Barker was forced to adapt Eliot's theory to his own
needs. Gradually as he contemplated the application of the idea of a
tradition to the dictates of the period through which he was living, he
came to adopt a view of the evolution of a particular literature as, to
use his term of 1983, "dialectic".⁶ Thus the refinement which Eliot had
seen as a local characteristic of literary development in any period came
to appear as one swing of a pendulum which, once it had reached its
furthest point, then swung back to a new point of departure, a new sort of simplicity. The analogy of a pendulum, however, has the disadvantage of suggesting that each poetic revolution begins at the same place. Barker's eventual view, on the other hand, would appear to be closer to a Hegelian scheme whereby a new thesis is formed out of the debris of an exploded, and newly redundant, synthesis. The development of literature in any age is therefore seen to be like the turn of a spiral which edges itself out to an extreme of sophistication and is then forced by its own kinetic energy to twist sideways to a new starting point which is, nevertheless, as seen from above, several places in advance of the previous extreme. It is a view which not so much confounds Eliot as re-interprets the impersonal development of a tradition which he rightly saw as underlying the patchwork of individual inspiration in such a way as to make the artist subject to certain implicitly political directives. In 'Poetry and Contemporary Inertia' Barker retains Eliot's classification of the personal and the impersonal, blending it, however, with a political logic which endows the impersonal element in an author's work with a polemical, and more immediately contemporary, purpose:

The poet will poetise not for the solution of any personal problem, but for the solution of a national and perhaps international problem. And in the same manner as the personal problem which the poet in the past has been forced to solve for himself has been a combination of the spiritual and emotional, so the problem which he will endeavour to solve for the community is also spiritual and emotional. The poet is a poet because in him the community is identified and articulated. Thus poetry will cease to be vitiated by the liabilities of the individual, and will be simply elucidated by his personal disinterested passion for words.

Presuming that one writes what one is compelled to write for the sake of other people, poetry, to be effectively valuable, must be intrinsically impersonal, and in verbal and grammatical choice quite personal. It is about the best compromise that can be
established between the individual and his obligation to other individuals.

We will return to the issue of personality and impersonality, and its relation to Eliot's essay, in Barker's early criticism in the earlier part of Chapter One. Suffice it here to say that, in 1932, Barker, along with Auden and other contemporaries, seems quite content to interpret the objective duty of the writer in terms of his social obligations, leaving the question of his relationship to an older tradition in abeyance.

There are nevertheless many ways in which Eliot's discussion of the awareness of past achievement and its rebirth in the present would have struck a familiar chord in the young Barker, who had already passed through several of the phases of historical indebtedness outlined in the quoted passage from 'Tradition and the Individual Talent'. True, he was never in danger of taking the past 'as a lump', partly because whole portions of the English heritage were at the outset known to him but patchily, and partly because, though, as he now remembers, soaked in history, his temporary political affiliations were more likely to predispose him against the past as a composite entity than towards it. As for an attachment to "one or two private admirations", Barker was, throughout most of his late teens and twenties, strongly addicted to the poetry of at least two men, namely William Blake, and, to a lesser extent, Eliot himself. As time wore on these youthful infatuations tended to yield to a more mellow and discriminate sense of what, as a poet with a voice of his own, he needed to take from these writers and what to reject. If a "preferred period" were in question, there were two candidates: the Middle Ages, in the literature of which he had been strongly interested since early adolescence, and the Romantic Revival. Again, however, as Barker's reading and experience matured, he was enabled to see these sacred moments as part of a much larger pattern, within which were many interconnections and from which he could learn
in many different ways. It was thus that it became possible for him to develop a fuller awareness of what Eliot terms "the main current" rather than the two or three tributaries which first caught his eye. And, just as Eliot had argued that the mainstream "does not at all flow invariably through the most distinguished reputations", so increasingly Barker came to distinguish twists and turns of the current which were very amenable to him, even when they carried him far away from the more fashionable and well populated stretches of the river. Increasingly the authors for whom he cultivated an especial fondness were less those who, like Eliot and Blake, were enjoying a contemporary vogue, than those whose fortunes were temporally at a low ebb. Thus Tennyson caught his eye in the 'thirties, and Housman in the 'sixties, long after his inter-war popularity has declined. Arguably it was this cultivation of neglected plots that enabled the mature Barker ultimately to hold at bay the influence of writers who, like Auden and Gerard Manley Hopkins (newly rediscovered in his youth), threatened to confine him within too obtrusively modern a poetic decorum, and thus to stake out areas of imaginative achievement more resolutely his own.

In the chapters which follow I shall try to examine in turn the impact of a reading of each of the above writers or periods on Barker's theory and practice. The evidence is writ large in both his verse and his criticism. In the course of a career which now spans over half a century, Barker has given us twenty six volumes of verse; he has also produced a steady flow of articles and reviews on the work of others, some of which were in 1970 collected under the title Essays dedicated 'To the memory of / Thomas Stearns Eliot'. It will be the object of this dissertation to concentrate on these critical pieces, some of which have until now passed without comment, and through them, together with a related reading of Barker's own poetic work, to investigate the changing views that he has held of those authors that are of importance
to him and the ways that these may have affected his creative output.

To the extent that the dialectical model above has supplied Barker with a way of looking at these authors as a sequence, it is important not to confine one's account of possible influences and affinities such as fit too conveniently into it. Barker has encountered the poets featured here at different times and in diverse circumstances, and his relationship to them varies in both kind and intensity. In the case of Blake, an early period of infatuation was followed by a longer one of subtler assimilation, whereas with Eliot the affinity, though complex, has been both profound and life-long. In certain instances, as with Tennyson and Hopkins, the effect has been less to leave visible traces on the work than to enable Barker to rethink certain aspects of his craft in such a way as to widen his versatility. The course of a particular relationship may be erratic and unpredictable: Housman, for instance, languished in his imaginative attic for years before, in the early 'sixties, suddenly descending the stairs radically to alter the decor of the living room. Throughout, however, I have tried to retain hold of one guiding principle: that, through years of sifting and reassessment, Barker has always favoured in these poets qualities of immediacy, reality and directness at the expense of elaboration, whether intellectual, allusive, theological, metrical or mythological. The causes which may have given rise to this set of preferences have already been outlined and are, I shall try to argue, comparatively constant throughout Barker's career. The recognition of this fact has, for the critic of Barker, a double significance. Firstly, it enables him to see the entire span of a rich and diversified career as a thing whole and true to itself. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, it enables him to take issue with one common and misconceived view of an in some ways unjustly neglected poet. Though Barker's own poetry has passed through successive phases of convolution and simplicity, the received attitude to
him remains that epitomized by the reference in the current edition of 
The Oxford Companion to English Literature to his "rhetorical and 
dionysian style". Such an opinion can only be based on a superficial 
reading of the volumes published during the first twenty years of his 
writing life: with reference to such books as The Golden Chains (1968) 
and Poems of Places and People (1971), it is totally misleading. It is 
to be hoped that the forthcoming account of influences and affinities will 
go some way to correcting this impression.

I begin with a long chapter on Eliot, who, from the time of their 
first meeting in 1934 until his death in 1965, was Barker's adviser, 
publisher and mentor. Through an analysis of Barker's early 
contributions to The Criterion, of the development in his middle years 
of a distinctive Catholic sensibility, and of the expression given in both 
verse and prose to Barker's growing sense of Eliot's inscrutability, I try 
to suggest the ways in which an original admiration deepened and 
amplified into professional respect tinged by growing suspicion of the 
intellectual over-sophistication of one "so / truly given to the form / 
and formulation of / a seeming meaning". \[11\]

I then examine Barker's early enthusiasm for the poetry of the 
Middle Ages. Beginning with an account of his youthful affection for 
the anonymous religious lyric 'Quia Amore Langueo', I pass on to 
investigate the ways in which his personal construction of mediaeval 
prosody affected the poetry which he wrote in the late 'thirties, leading 
him to a self-conscious artistry which was eventually to subside before 
the influence of the tighter, more direct ballad form.

In the third chapter I look at Barker's early obsession with Blake, 
whom Keynes's editorial work, and Middleton's Murry's criticism, had 
established as a cult poet of "vision", and try to see how this one-sided 
view of the Romantics gave way before a politically motivated 
recognition of the opening decades of the nineteenth century as a period
in which the material conditions of the world forced the writer into an attitude of practical compassion.

Barker originally came across the poetry of Tennyson at a time when his reputation was in an eclipse from which it was rescued by the criticism of Eliot and Auden, both of whom supplied Barker with ways in which he could underpin his temperamental affinity with certain principles of conduct. My fourth chapter attempts to demonstrate how the world-weariness and languor of Poems (1842), so attractive to Barker in his twenties, eventually came to seem of less importance than certain aural and more specifically "quantitative" effects which he and Tennyson share.

A. E. Housman was popular during the 'thirties when Barker attempted, without much success, to teach his lyrics to his students in Japan. This failure taught him much about the inimitable ambiguities which underly Housman's limpid surface but it was not until the nineteen 'sixties that, as Chapter Five attempts to show, Barker felt himself able to imitate the many-layered organization he prizes in the poems of A Shropshire Lad and Last Poems.

In 1932, when Barker had just launched himself on the literary scene, Gerard Manley Hopkins, whose poetry had just gone into a second edition, was newly proclaimed as a modernist by F. R. Leavis, whose New Bearings in English Poetry was one of the first books which Barker reviewed. Hopkins' effects thenceforth became part of the stock in trade of the poets of the 'thirties: Barker was not immune. Chapter Six examines the effect of Sprung Rhythm and related effects on Barker's early verse and then goes on to show how the cosmetic influence of an attractively muscular style eventually softened into a true appreciation of the freedom which the example of Hopkins offers to the poet in the twentieth century.

Chapter Seven examines the appeal for the younger Barker,
conscious of his half-Irish extraction, of the poetry of Yeats who in 1936 put him in The Oxford Book of Modern Verse. It then goes on to argue that, the importance of ethnic factors in Barker's verse slowly declining, Yeats's influence finally reasserts itself in certain guiding tenets of form.

One of the poets most affected by the Hopkinsesque vogue was W. H. Auden, whose Poems (1930) set a precedent for many of his contemporaries, or near-contemporaries, to follow. Chapter Eight examines specific instances of Audenesque effects in the early Barker, from asyndeton to the list-making, documentary use of the definite article. As time passed, and the paths of Barker and Auden diverged so the poetic etiquette of the 'thirties, so effectively marshalled by the older poet, lost its hold. It is with the emergence of a personal style distinct from the mannerisms of a period that our substantive account of influences ends.

I conclude with a consideration of the place of Barker's own work within a tradition, which, as I will have argued, he has always tended to regard in a certain light. Here I am concerned to contest the commonly held notion of Barker as a poet who fits snugly into a kind of New Romantic Movement - a conception on which the one full-length published account of his work - Martha Fodaski's of 1969 - is almost entirely based. Against this caricature of literary history, and the defensive positions in response to it which have been taken by successive waves of British poets of our own time, I urge a view of Barker as one who, learning from the broad spectrum of English poetry which he know and loves, has developed a personal way of working which sets him apart as a writer whose achievements transcend divisions of school and faction, as, to cite the title of a recent study 'The One Who Got Away'.13
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would have got nowhere in the preparatory work for this study without the help and advice of several individuals, only a few of whom I have space to acknowledge: Martin Dodsworth, my supervisor at Royal Holloway; Elizabeth Smart, Barker's second wife, who gave me access to much of the material reproduced in appendices, and for whose permission to include it I am grateful; John Heath-Stubbs, who talked to me at length about his view of Barker; Michael Schmidt, who commissioned the festchrift enclosed at the very end; Sebastian Barker whose appreciation of his father's achievement is almost heretical in relation to present-day susceptibilities; and Catherine Birkett my girlfriend, who alone can keep pace with the subject of this thesis in repartee, and who has encouraged me throughout. Above all, however, I would like to thank George Barker himself who, through two of the three years devoted to research for this project, has been unstinting in his encouragement, gentle wit, and unceasing supply of information.
NOTES AND REFERENCES

1 A three hour conversation between the candidate and George Barker, which took place at the poet's home in Norfolk on 30 October 1982, has been preserved in two different forms, both of which will be referred to during the course of this study. The original tape-recording is lodged in the National Sound Archive under the catalogue number N.S.A. 6537 WR, and will be identified as 'National Sound Archive, 1982'. A much edited and shortened version was later published in the magazine P.N. Review, 31 (9, No 5) pp. 43-47 in February 1983 under the title 'A Conversation Between George Barker and Robert Fraser', and will henceforth be referred to as 'P.N. Review Interview'. The extract quoted here is from the recorded discussion.


4 See Note 2.

5 Cf. the remarks on the "self-consciousness" of Eliot and Pound in P.N. Review Interview, p. 44.

6 P.N. Review Interview, p. 47.

7 P.N. Review Interview, p. 44.
Cf. Bibliography at the end of this thesis. The figure includes collected and selected volumes, but excludes criticism, plays and fiction.


Robert Fraser, 'The One That Got Away' in *P.N. Review*, 9, No. 5, February 1983, pp. 41-3.
George Barker first visited T. S. Eliot in his office high above Woburn Square in the Spring of 1934. The occasion was a response to a polite written invitation from the senior poet who had recently received by post a copy of Barker’s poem ‘Daedalus’, dispatched at the suggestion of Edwin Muir who respected it but found it incomprehensible. Eliot, frank and charming, said how much he admired the piece, which he promised to publish in the April quarter of *The Criterion*. According to Barker, on this occasion the possibility of a volume was also discussed.

Barker had known Eliot’s work well since at least 1930, when, coming across a copy of the newly published *Ash Wednesday*, he sacrificed the whole of his lunch money to purchase it. The effect on his own view of literature was profound and permanent. In 1957 he still had not recovered "from the surprising privilege of being alive at the same time as the man who wrote *Ash Wednesday*. From the moment of their meeting Barker adopted Eliot as a literary mentor, one whom he respected but, by his own repeated admission, scarcely understood. Over the years he wrote no fewer than five tributes to the elder man, four in the shape of poems and one a prose essay. From these, and from remarks in Barker’s critical writings and conversation, it is possible to glean an impression of his changing view of one who, throughout most of the period in question, acted both as his publisher and guide. The other side of the relationship is harder to assess. Eliot left no written record of his attitude to Barker. Nevertheless the fact that he accepted him onto the Faber list at the tender age of twenty two is evidence of his early confidence. During the later ’thirties, when Barker was living down in Dorset in a cottage loaned by David Archer, his first publisher, Eliot helped to defray his
expenses. Moreover, throughout the period of Eliot's directorship at Faber and Faber, the firm agreed to practically every publishing proposal Barker put to them. The one exception to this rule was the rejection of the True Confession (1950) and its exclusion from the Collected Poems both of which decisions were, however, taken at the insistence of Geoffrey Faber.  

Though the formalities of their professional relationship are clearly of interest (see letter from Anne Ridler, Appendix A), our concern here is primarily with the critical question of the total effect of one literary personality on another. Barker's indebtedness to Eliot's influence is not merely to be observed in overt tributes and passing references, but in the complete cast of his literary mind, the manner in which he chooses to view the poet and his responsibilities. On these matters Barker and Eliot are not always in agreement, but even where Barker has most emphatically departed from his master, the line of his argument betrays the fact that he has taken him as a starting point. There are comparatively few echoes of Eliot's poetry to be found in Barker's work. Consistently it is more Eliot the critic who has the deeper observable impact. From the very first Barker would seem to have taken cognizance of the elder man's critical theories and to have orientated himself with reference to them. Also when, especially in later years, Barker chooses to absorb the manner, voice or views of any of the great European writers, his understanding and response is very often filtered through Eliot's published account. At the time of Barker's first encounter with Eliot he was, it must be remembered, largely self-educated. His reading, though voracious, was patchy and heavily dictated by personal susceptibilities. He was badly in need of somebody of stature to lead him through the mazes of the European mind. To a large extent, Eliot came to fulfil that function. In order to give a satisfactory account of Barker's developing view of literature
then, it will be necessary to make provision for Eliot’s published theories, and more especially his conception of tradition, a modified version of which Barker came to share. It will also be necessary to take a look at the places in which Eliot sees fit to comment on the authors which Barker has also read and by whom he has to some measure been visibly affected. To the extent that the affinity thus established possesses a theological dimension, it will also be helpful to establish Eliot’s stand on the issues in question, and the extent to which Barker has found himself able to comply with it.

I

Before turning to these central matters, however, it may be helpful to ask ourselves the question as to what in the early Barker, particularly in the poem first submitted by him, should so have impressed the hard-pressed editor of The Criterion. After its appearance in the pages of the journal, 'Daedalus' re-appeared in Poems, the volume of the following year, and later began the Collected Poems of 1957. The positioning in the collected volume is of interest. Poems had commenced with the long Poeian phantasy 'The Amazons' which had since been much admired, David Daiches in an essay of 1947 being especially lavish with his praise. Despite this Barker chose to exclude it from the collected volume, bringing forward 'Daedalus' from its position as the fifteenth piece in Poems to head the selection from that book. By so doing, he was probably acknowledging the fact that he regarded its publication in The Criterion as the real beginning of his career, a moment to which all the previous work had been preliminary. In collating the final version, Barker seems to have compared both of
the previous texts. From The Criterion he adopts the parenthetical divide between Sections IV and V, and from Poems the lower case initial of the pronoun "who" applied to the spectre at line 59. With these limited exceptions, however, 'Daedalus' remained unaltered from 1935 until 1957, unlike other poems from the same book which experienced considerable revision.

There is much in 'Daedalus' which might have caught Eliot's eye. The stark modernity of its style, its ellipses, asyndeton and truncated syntax, all strongly recall the features which he had already met in the charade 'Paid on Both Sides' when submitted to him by the young W. H. Auden five years previously. All of these features are very characteristic of Auden's volume Poems which Faber issued in 1930, as we shall see in our account of Audenesque influences in Chapter Eight. Also, there is in 'Daedalus' a strikingly individual treatment of a mythological theme, and a concentration on disappointment and world weariness which recall features of Eliot's own early work. Lastly, there is a pervasive sense of the prophetic poetic conscience haunting history and an 'intimate revelation' of timeless truths which may suggest the role of Tiresias in The Waste Land:

II

Come where no crowds can trouble us divert us
No acrobats no hawkers bottles or street musicians
No towering necks like buildings overlook
Intimate revelation.

I take your hand
Spectre
And steadily lead you
Across morning haunted lawns in earlier
Days, and show
With a reversal of our growing older
How it began, what caused, the germ of time.

These lines are at once both like and utterly unlike Eliot. What is Eliotic is the personal bearing of the speaker Daedalus who is commenting on the factors contributing to his son Icarus' death. The poem is a dramatic monologue which, like 'Gerontion', is titled after the speaker rather than its subject. Throughout the reader is acutely aware of the self-absorption of the speaking voice, to the extent that, by the end of this section, Daedalus appears totally to have fused his identity with that of his son. In the strongly Barkerian line with which Section II ends ("I mourn him. Him I mourn, from morn to morning.") we are even unsure as to whether the aging engineer is regretting the passing of Icarus, of his own younger self, or of both.

It is this very line, however, which also marks out the divide between Barker's manner of writing and Eliot's. By repeating a pun introduced at line 21, it enacts a trick of verbal play of which the young poet was fond but which is _more muted_ in Eliot. Throughout 'Daedalus' the punning propensity of the language, notably the multiple pun on heron/hero/heroine in the last section, is completely Barker's own. Also utterly unlike Eliot is the phrase "no towering necks like buildings" which comes straight from the world of _Thirty Preliminary Poems_ (1933) and Barker's earlier involvement with the scientific utopianism of the Promethean Society with which we shall also deal in Chapter Eight. In sum, then, 'Daedalus' represents a blend of features with which Eliot may have felt a personal affinity and others which may have convinced him of Barker's originality.

Other poems accepted for _The Criterion_ over this period tend to
confirm these conclusions. In 'Winter Idyll', which appeared in the April issue for 1936, but which has never been reprinted, the inverted and abbreviated syntax is again prominent:

Winter Idyll

VAIN lavishly vain the great vesture
Blown over thrown over the bleak places,
Faultless superfluous like fallen
Blessing the placid snow. Vain the ablution
Of the desperate rain admonishing the tenements
Cannot the terrible intestinal stain erase
Catching their stomachs their spirits in twisted
Abdominal knots, hopeless: rain cannot remove
The hopelessness, the great winds cannot untie
The misery, the lightning cannot sever.

Their lives cannot by the reversal of summer time
Be dismissed, lost in night; nor can the squalor of their bodies

By large snow or chrysanthemums be concealed; the frost's Vice might respectably embalm them but cannot balm
The freezing in blighted areas, or the long anguish.

Useless the seasons to ease them, the autumn
Investing the cities with the atmosphere of mysteries
Misses them, and the winter cannot wreath
Their need, not in falls of white, while summer
Spreads widely over their heads like the paintings
Of paradise, removed and absurd.
Rather than darkness too deep for despair
Render their darkness decent with despair.
Darkness which whole heavens
Of snow descendant cannot enter or hide.10

This is a reworking of the snow theme from the 'Ode' from Preliminary Poems of 1933.11 It is also clearly the companion poem to the anthology piece 'Summer Idyll' from the American Selected Poems.12 Though more stanzaically organized than 'Daedalus' it has a certain amount in common with it. Notice the way in which the "reversal of time", which has here narrowed topically to a "reversal of Summer time" (a standard introduced by the British government in 1916), is mirrored in a reversal in the syntactical order of subject and object in all four verse paragraphs. There is also considerable repetition, play with alternative verbal arrangements ("over thrown" for "overthrown") and a kind of delayed internal rhyme which all contribute to the impression of a strongly personal style. Very distinctive of Barker's writing of the time, moreover, is the strong reliance on plurals ("useless the seasons to ease them") which recalls the first stanza of "The Amazons" of the previous year.13 One exception, however, is the most insistent plural of all, the pronoun "them", which hovers over the poem as a kind of inclusive object, and which has considerable significance for its political posture. Unlike 'Summer Idyll' this is a city poem, and the "them" of paragraph two are the London-bred working class among whom Barker grew up. There is much about the seediness of this townscape, which, together with its compassionate energy, recalls the Eliot of the 'Preludes'. Yet the degree of identification is very dissimilar. Throughout, the poet's tone of ambivalent empathy seems to hold an uneasy balance between the picture of contempt and pity in Eliot and the democratic inclusiveness on
which the lower middle class Barker has always prided himself.

II

It was not only as a poet, however, that Barker graced the pages of The Criterion. Before long Eliot was offering reviewing work to his protegé, who had already acted in this capacity for The Adelphi and The Twentieth Century. The texts chosen for his comment were such as were likely to engage his attention: Ezra Pound's A Draft of Cantos XXXI - XLI, reissued by Fabers in 1935, and a couple of mediaevalist editions, including the comparative edition of the anonymous religious lyric Quia Amore Languo, a project which, as we shall see in the next chapter, Barker had himself proposed. Both review pieces display the phenomenon of a highly individual, youthfully abrasive mind getting to grips with poetry which barely resembled his own. Besides the sharpness of their local comments, however, the essays are remarkable for another reason. Taken together with the discursive article Poetry and Reality published in the October number for 1937, they supply the framework for a continuing argument on a subject which evidently concerned Barker at the time: the relationship between the imaginative consciousness and the raw material of experience. The position taken up on this issue is subtle and evolving. Not only has it some relevance to the poetry which Barker was himself writing at the time; it also serves to situate him in relation to Eliot's declared statements. Though Barker's thinking is in no sense subservient to Eliot's, it consistently carves out for itself the same theoretical terrain occupied by Eliot's essay of 1919 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', reprinted in The Sacred Wood of 1920. 16
Eliot's discussion, it will be remembered, falls into two halves. The first concerns the "historical sense" which enables the individual writer to experience the work of the past as contemporary to his own, and the imaginative re-structuring of the literature of other ages which this makes possible. The second commences with a chemical metaphor. It invites us to consider the process by which the catalyst of a platinum strip assists the element of oxygen to combine with the compound sulphur dioxide to form sulphurous acid, while itself remaining completely unaltered. The scientific analogy is itself deliberate, since Eliot is engaged in devising a modern theory of the imagination for a twentieth century readership. The problem to which it refers, however, is the age old one of the relationship of the artist to the material of his own life:

The mind of the poet is the shred of platinum. It may partly or exclusively operate upon the experience of the man himself; but, the more perfect the artist, the more completely separate in him will be the man who suffers and the mind who creates; the more perfectly will the mind digest and transmute the passions which are its material.

By means of this analogy Eliot is able to develop what he calls the "impersonal theory of poetry" according to which that which the poet expresses is not his own subjectivity, or the objective facts of the surrounding world on which it dwells, but a transmutation of both which resides ultimately in a region distinct from either. Thus the substance of poetry transcends the division between subjective and objective truth, since it addresses itself to a fresh "art emotion" the validity of which pertains to the context of the poem. To the extent that the writer's own feelings need to be considered, they exist simply as crude elements on which the creative impulse can operate. To this extent, they have the same status as his reading, or indeed anything which has entered the
kiln of his consciousness. In any case, that which emerges at the end will be scarcely recognizable:

The business of the poet is not to find new emotions, but to use the ordinary ones and, in working them up into poetry, to express feelings which are not in the actual emotions at all. And emotions which he has never experienced will serve his turn as well as those familiar to him.

Consequently much is wanting in one standard Romantic view of the artistic process commonly misattributed to Wordsworth. The notion that art is, in the sense normally understood, a process of "emotion recollected in tranquility" draws from Eliot his most defiant rebuttal:

Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from the personality. But, of course, only those who have personality and emotions know what it means to want to escape from these things.

Barker quotes this last passage with much approval in 1948 in his later 'A Note on Eliot' (Appendix A). Already by 1935, however, the impact of Eliot's formulations is making itself felt. The Pound review addresses itself to the first series of ten Cantos in which the quaintier aspects of the mature style were beginning to make themselves evident (Appendix A). With reference to the emerging eccentricity of Pound's style, Barker is guarded. It is noticeable, for instance that the segment of six lines which he chooses to quote from Canto XL are such as are reassuringly close to the manner of the first thirty cantos. But Barker is concerned with grasping the theoretical bull by the horns: the problem of the later Cantos, as he chooses to see it, is less a problem of style than one of subject matter. Pound had staked out for his
imaginative territory a tract unusually large "due to his indefatigable
dealing with proper things such as Napoleon, money, Mr J. Q. Adams,
etc." Viewed with an eye schooled on the conventional poetic decencies,
Pound was thus unusual in applying himself to a world of stark fact. In
one sense then, the compass of Pound's poetry is too "real". It is not
in this light, however, that Barker chooses to see it. For him, the
poetry partakes of a particular kind of "unreality": the unreality which
results from the absorption by the writer of crude experience into his
imaginative system:

The rendering of portions of unreal worlds - worlds caricaturing or
representing by symbol that which the agent takes to be the
factual world - provides the more interesting artist with abundance
of subject. Such an artist is, indeed, as much of a purely
objective artist as it is possible for him to be; for it is not
possible for the poet, for instance, to portray in words the world
upon which he knows he walks and in which he feels he functions,
for this world cannot be transferred into worlds without having
passed, like the conjurer's swallowed ball, through his head; and,
like the conjurer's ball, it appears it cannot pass through his head
without suffering or attaining to some degree of change, emerging
roseate from red, obloid from round, or noticeably diminished in
size.

The alchemy of the imaginative process thus described is seen to work
at a peculiar pitch in Pound, transforming, in the passage quoted, a
catalogue of measurements, directions and place names into the stuff of
narrative verse. It is this ability to convert accumulated detail into art
which Barker seems also to have admired in Blake's prophetic books, and
which so influenced his own poetic style in the late 'thirties, when
documentary interest became fashionable (See Chapter Eight). Yet, at
this juncture, Barker is concerned less with underpinning his own poetic
practice than with doing speculative violence to the commonly
understood distinction between what is 'unreal' and what is 'objective'.

For Barker the world of the poem exists at the opposite pole from what is normally said to be the 'real' world, the world, that is, which we see around us. Yet for this very reason it possesses paradoxically the quality of 'objectivity', by which he means to imply fidelity to the object of the poem. We can hardly make sense of this assertion without identifying this poetic object with the "art emotion" of which Eliot had spoken. The poet is objective because he is true to an imaginative fact which transcends both the 'real' world and the world of his own experience. The marriage between truth and artifice celebrated is of a kind with the fusion of poetic resources which Eliot identifies in his own Introduction to Pound's Selected Poems of 1928:

The poet's work may proceed along two lines on an imaginary graph; one of the lines being his continuous effort in technical excellence, that is, in continually developing his medium for the moment when he really has something to say. The other line is just his normal human course of development, his accumulation and digestion of experience (experience is not sought for, it is merely accepted in consequence of doing what we really want to do), and by experience I mean the results of reading and reflection, varied interests of all sorts, contacts with acquaintances, as well as passion and adventure. Now and then the two lines may converge at a high peak, so that we get a masterpiece. That is to say, an accumulation of experience has crystallized to form material of art, and years of work in technique have prepared an adequate medium; and something results in which medium and material, form and content are indistinguishable.\textsuperscript{15}

The relationship between the artistic process and the material out of which it is transformed is the starting point for Barker's Essay 'Poetry and Reality' published, again in The Criterion, in October, 1937.\textsuperscript{16} Here Barker dilates upon his early propositions and consolidates his variation on Eliot by substituting for the chemical metaphor from
'Tradition and the Individual Talent' a metaphor of his own, that of spider and web: "The spider in mid-air spinning out its bowels suspends itself from some point of the real." Yet though reality constitutes the anchor of the spider's endeavour, its achievement is to be measured by the dexterity and consistency of the web. So the artist's success is to be assessed by the cogency of the imaginative world which his skill manages to create. Thus for the mundane sense of the word 'real' as applied to ascertainable fact, Barker is able to substitute another sense of the 'real' as cognate with the governing laws of art:

...the law of the real governing the action of the poem is internal; the violation of the poem's own laws is the violation against which the critic must protest, and not primarily against any apparent or supposed violation of external law.

It will be seen that here Barker has managed to bring his interpretation of the 'real' firmly into line with his revised construction of the 'objective' as expounded in the Pound review. The marshalling of critical terms thus realized owes its energy to the pressure of a polemical purpose: Barker has a fresh enemy in view - I. A. Richards, on whose theories from Science and Poetry and Practical Criticism Eliot has already adversely commented in his essay 'The Modern Mind' from The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism. In order to register the thrust of Barker's argument, some consideration of the controversy surrounding Richard's work may be in order.

Unobtainable for the best part of a quarter of a century until the recent reprint of 1970, Science and Poetry was nevertheless at the heart of critical controversy in the 'thirties. At the time of Barker's essay Richards had recently been obliged to issue a new edition (1935) in order to clarify his position on the so-called 'pseudo-statements' of which he believed poetry to consist. His critics widely believed him to
be doing a disservice to poetry by writing off its propositions as irremediably false. In fact he was trying to restore the respect of the intellectual community for an art which served our inherited emotional needs without emphatically asserting that which the scientific intelligence had revealed as untrue. In the face of a widespread collapse of traditional religious belief, Richards proposes a solution:

The remedy, since there is no prospect of our gaining adequate knowledge, and since indeed it is fairly clear that scientific knowledge cannot meet this need, is to cut our pseudo-statements free from that kind of belief which is appropriate to verified statements. So released they will be changed, of course, but they can still be the main instruments by which we order our attitudes to one another and the world. This is not a desperate remedy, for, as poetry conclusively shows, even the most important among our attitudes can be aroused and maintained without any believing of a factual or verifiable order entering in at all. We need no such beliefs, and indeed we must have none, if we are to read King Lear. Pseudo-statements to which we attach no belief and statements proper, such as science provides, cannot conflict. It is only when we introduce inappropriate kinds of believing into poetry that the danger arises. To do so is from this point of view a profanation of poetry.

To use the word "profanation" in connection with poetry at all was courting danger, since it brought poetry into the category of religious, a misdemeanour compounded by including, towards the end of his essay, the definitive sentence "Poetry is capable of saving us." It is this redemptive note which had drawn Eliot's ire. In his defence of poetry as a last ditch stand of moral and aesthetic sensibility divorced from any supporting structure of philosophical value or religious belief, Richards had thrown up certain contradictions against which Eliot launched himself with enthusiasm. In particular, in his capacity as author of The Waste Land he finds Richards's commendation of the poem
world, which should in no sense be confused, as it is frequently confused, with the obligation of the scientist to the real world. Accurate ascertainments about matter and time and space constitute the obligation of the scientist, and these ascertainments are only in a strictly limited sense more 'true' than the ascertainments of the poet about phenomena which transcend the real. I am referring to Dr. Richards's theory of the pseudo-statement. Regarded as scientific statement the ascertainments of poetry (e.g. Beauty is Truth, Truth, Beauty) may appear as pseudo; but, conversely, regarded as imaginative or pseudo statement the ascertainments of science may often be regarded as pseudo. Obviously the statements of poetry are not to be regarded as scientific statements, which is the only condition under which they become pseudo, for then it would appear that not only is science Truth, but it is also Beauty. 19

In this passage, the weaknesses of Barker's position become apparent. Concerned as he is to make a place for poetry distinct from the certainties of science, but not as yet possessing, like Eliot, the religious alternative to fall back on, he bestows upon it a special, secular perception of unquantified truth which is perilously close to the qualities with which Richards himself felt inclined to endow it.

The pivotal word in Barker's argument here is, again, "real". The effort he puts into his attempt to redefine it tells us much about the relationship that he was establishing with cultural traits emerging in the period in which he was writing. This was the period of Harrisson and Madge's Mass Observation, of the beginnings of the documentary film movement, of the eclecticism of the Surrealist collage. 'Reality', in the sense of what is commonly observed, was very much in the air, and it is hardly surprising if we find Barker constantly harping upon this theme. He returns to it towards the end of his review of medieval texts for The Criterion of April 1938, where he is discussing the uneven success of Alexander Montgomerie's poem The Cherrie and the Slae (Appendix B):
When the poem deals with real things such as animals, birds, places etc, then the act of poetry can be seen taking place between the things and the imagination of the poet. For I suspect that as a poem's remove from reality is near or far, so the poem is - if it can be written at all - simpler or harder to write, like adjusting binoculars.

The optical metaphor here represents a second attempt to define the relationship of poet to subject matter. The "adjusting" of which it speaks evidently corresponds to that "apotheosis" of reality mentioned in Poetry and Reality. In both cases it will be seen that Barker consigns a higher place in his analogy to the artist's power of choice than had Eliot who, in his chemical image of the imaginative process, was prepared to leave the poet-catalyst as inert. What they share, however, is a distrust of simple objective or subjective categories. In neither case is the essence of the poem seen to reside in its strict fidelity to literal fact, or in its expression of mental states, but rather in a dialogue ensuing between the two. The major difference is that, in Barker's analogy the hand of the poet remains firmly on the focus mechanism whereas for Eliot he is the passive attendant on a collision of impersonal forces.

It has been necessary to dwell for some time on the series of essays and reviews which Barker wrote for The Criterion in the middle to late 'thirties, because they help us to correct one frequent misconception of Barker's Artistic Purpose. In conversation he still stoutly maintains the 'impersonal theory of poetry' which Eliot devised, yet for decades he has been classified as a Romantic artist who views himself as his own invariable subject. Martha Fodaski's book, for instance, is largely based on this view, with which she begins:
George Barker's poetry discloses a fundamentally Romantic and religious sensibility. Keenly aware of the magic and the mystery of language and of the trial and tragedy of human life, his first-person speaker is seer and sinner, apostate and aspiring saint. Questor, prophet, interrogator, supplicant, or critic, he struggles to resolve contradictions between feeling and thought, gratification and guilt, and the beast and god in man.21

The terms in which this sketch are stated have little resemblance to the critical vocabulary of Barker, for whom the word "Romantic", rare either in his writing or conversation, is as suspect as it was for his mentor.

Questionable too, is the extent to which Barker's work relies on the emanations of his own personality. Even in so seemingly an autobiographical work as The True Confession of George Barker, there is considerable transformation, or, to use Barker's own term "apotheosis" of experience, to the extent that a friend and colleague such as David Gascoyne finds that it represents "gross self misrepresentation by the author." It might be fairer to say with Gascoyne that the first person narrator of the True Confession is a grotesque mask donned to shield from view the tender subjectivity of the poet, for whom, like Pascal, "le moi est hâissable."22

III

Gascoyne's reference to Pascal takes us forward to another period at which the influence of Eliot's thinking on Barker was particularly active: the time of the outbreak of war when, faced with the depravity of the nations and the betrayal of earlier political hopes, Barker was
forced to develop a personal understanding of the religious problem of Evil. Religious categories are not prominent in his earliest work; from 1939 onwards, however, he is increasingly preoccupied with them. The change can be accounted for partly by the harsh facts of experience, and partly by his turning back to re-read the classics of Roman Catholic theology, guided in this as in many things, by the criticism of Eliot. This represented a feat of bridge-building, for to the Barker of the early 'thirties, fed as he was on the progressivist daydreams of the Prometheans, the darker side of Eliot's thinking was virtually impenetrable.

To demonstrate this we only need turn to the review of the Aristophanic fragment *Sweeney Agonistes* which Barker wrote for *The Adelphi* in 1933, in which the tone of reverential misgiving is barely disguised (Appendix A):

Eliot, for all I can see to the contrary, wrote *Sweeney Agonistes* with the coccyx of that spine, fear. Of birth, of death, and of that immobility in which birth and death find some kind of union and some kind of interpretation. I am compelled by my youthful respect...to state that this poem (so far, for me, his most easily admirable work) Eliot has got down to the reservoir, the subject which lie nearer to exoteric earth than his detached intelligence.

These, however, are back-handed compliments: his "most easily admirable" is dismissive, and the "exoteric" soil of the subject is implicitly contrasted with the esoteric and "detached" qualities of Eliot's mind which Barker sneakingly admired. In this sense *Sweeney Agonistes* is seen to mark a falling away from the achievements of the earlier Eliot with which he cannot but make comparison.
I feel that in Sweeney Agonistes we observe poetry dissolving into a condition of exquisite, and perfectly lucid, decay. About it I perceive a pallour not only of subject, but as well of treatment: Eliot has contrived as deathly an elegy of his poetic decease as he has composed triumphal ode of his birth The Waste Land. The loneliness, as proximate to inanition, of Ash Wednesday, in Sweeney Agonistes has become a sort of valediction from death.

The word "inanition" here also features in the last of the sequence of Ten Sonnets published in Thirty Preliminary Poems of the same year, which also contains three elegies. In 1933 it was George Barker, and not T. S. Eliot who was preoccupied with death. The real subject of the dark comedy Sweeney Agonistes, the encounter with Evil, seems to pass him by. It is interesting that he closes his review by quoting the epigram from St. John of the Cross which, in 1950, he was to make the kingpin of his moral vision in The Dead Seagull, but without at this stage apparently recognizing its significance.

In order to discern the genesis of Barker's own religious thought we need to jump forward seven years to the year 1940 when, domicilled in Japan as Professor of English at Tohoku Imperial University, he began work on the series of drafts and typescripts which eventually emerged as the Sacred and Secular Elegies. These poems, published in America early in the war, and then re-printed in a drastically revised version in the book Eros in Dogma of 1944, enjoyed a more thorough process of gestation than most of the works of this very revision-conscious writer. The first stirrings emerged in Japan as a set of lyrics and prose-poems, some of which fortunately survive in typescript (Appendix A). The first of these consists of ten sections of an incomplete discursive prose work commencing 'In the name of St John of Patmos'. The rest consist of a series of four drafts of the poem 'O Dog my God, how can I cease to praise', which eventually surfaced as the concluding sonnet of the Sacred Elegies. The prose work opens with an introductory preamble as
to the circumstances of the war. After glancing at the author's incompetence, he having received "almost no instruction in the ordinary subjects of the academic curriculum", to expatiate on most matters which make up the syllabuses of public examinations, it then turns to the one matter on which he considers himself able to dilate: carnal knowledge which leads to the discovery of the divine law. Interspersed throughout the text are phrases and sentences which later found their way not only into the Sacred and Secular Elegies, but also into the Pacific Sonnets, and into other poems, including his first piece on Eliot. It is a quarry from which may be extracted not only the beginnings of a number of published works but also the origins of Barker's theology of sexuality. It is, for instance, the first work in Barker's hand in which the sexual act is seen as intrinsically Evil, Evil in its nature rather than, as in Calamiterror (1937) disastrous in its consequences. As such, we shall have cause to consider it later. From the point of view of Barker's evolving view of religious devotion itself, however, it is the drafts of the poem addressed to the deity which are of immediate interest.

The drafts of this poem which have survived consist of four foolscap sheets on which are typed, with written emendations, versions of a supplicatory piece, each cast in the form of a prayer. The spirit, and certain turns of phrase, of the writing is at times very close to Donne's Holy Sonnet 'Batter my heart three person'd God'. One version is especially close:

Dog, dog, your bone I am, who tear my life
Tatterdemalion from me. From you I have no peace,
No life at all unless you break my bone,
No bed unless I sleep upon my grief
That without you we are too much alone,
No peace until no peace is happy home:
O Dog my God, how can I cease to praise!

Like the Donne sonnet, these drafts are all appeals for spiritual discipline. Unlike it, however, they come from a "heathen heart" which has not found it possible to take the step of faith. They are cries from a man with a vivid sense of the divine presence but without the will-power to commit himself to the work of repentance. The impulse to write comes from a recognition of the fact of sin, which itself is sufficient to raise questions which demand a religious answer:

Dog, dog in my manger heart, drag at my heathen
Heart where the searing smoke of love
Goes up as I give everything to the blaze.
Drags at my fires, dog, drag at the altars
Where I over my tabernacles raise
The bleeding assassination I my murder.

The sin is ancestral: it is the 'sins of the fathers' arising from the fact of sexual knowledge:

Dog, good dog, trick do and make me take
Calmly the consciousness of the crime
Born in the blood simply because we are here,
Your father burns for his father's sake,
So will a son burn in a further time
Under the bush of joy you planted there.

Between these drafts and the eventual sonnet 'Incubus.
Anaesthetist with glory in a bag' there is some similarity of phrase, but
a radical change of emphasis. In the typescripts the only element of
actual sacrilege is the Marlovian trick of inverting God's name to its
canine form. The sonnet, on the other hand, begins with a range of
insults:

Incubus. Anaesthetist with glory in a bag,
Foreman with a sweatbox and a whip. Asphyxiator
Of the ecstatic. Sergeant with a grudge
Against the loot lovers in the park of creation,
Fiend behind the fiend behind the fiend behind the
Friend. 25

The muscular vehemence of the abuse builds up to a point at which
desecration becomes an act of passion and hence a gesture of inverted
hommage. Through the energy of his denial the prodigal finds his God:

Enthroned on the darkest altar of our heartbreak
Perfect. Beast, brute, bastard. O dog my God!
The advance made by this sonnet on the earlier versions lies in its recognition of blasphemy as a sort of potential reverence. It is perhaps a recognition nascent in the drafts. For a more precise source of the insight, however, we are once again driven back to the writing of Eliot.

In 1930 Christopher Isherwood published a translation of Baudelaire's journals, to which Eliot was invited to contribute an Introduction. In it Eliot is concerned to see beyond Baudelaire's superficial diabolism, which he takes to be a product of passing fashion, to the genuine preoccupation with Evil which lies beneath it. In this attempt to come to terms with the Christian scheme of value and judgement, the reflex of blasphemy played a vital part:

When Baudelaire's Satanism is dissociated from its less creditable paraphernalia, it amounts to a dim intuition of a part, but a very important part, of Christianity. Satanism itself, so far as not merely an affectation, was an attempt to get into Christianity by the back door. Genuine blasphemy, genuine in spirit and not purely verbal, is the product of partial belief, and is as impossible to the complete atheist as to the perfect Christian. It is a way of affirming belief. This state of partial belief is manifest throughout the *Journaux Intimes*. What is about Baudelaire is his theological innocence. He is discovering Christianity for himself; he is not assuming it as a fashion or weighing social or political reasons, or any other accidents. He is beginning, in a way, at the beginning; and being a discoverer, it is not altogether certain what he is exploring and to what it leads; he might almost be said to be making again, as one man, the effort of hundreds of generations.

1930, it will be remembered, was the year of Eliot's entry into the Church of England. At the time of writing he too was beginning at the beginning; he too was a discoverer, if in a more conventional mould. Ten years later, George Barker, isolated from Europe by his
Japanese professorship, contemplating the ruin of Christian civilization with a pained identification made all the more intense by distance, felt a need to explain to himself the phenomenon of Evil, then rampaging the world in visible form. It was a problem which once again raised the spectre of his mother's Irish Catholicism, suppressed since his late teens when, as his essay 'Coming to London' half jocularly records, he "sat down outside the Brompton Oratory to count those who entered and, finding seventy women to ten men, informally seceded from the Roman Catholic Faith." (Baudelaire: "I am always amazed that women are allowed into churches. What possible conversation can they have with god?"

By 1940, however, feeling his own way from a late adolescent reaction to an inherited Catholicism to a half-formulated acceptance of a religious frame of thought, he would have found the case of Baudelaire very pertinent. Like Eliot he was starting from the beginning, but, like Baudelaire and unlike Eliot, he existed in a state of theological innocence. He too was "not certain of what he is exploring and to what it leads". The method of orthodox meditation, the method of Ash Wednesday, was hence denied him. The drafts of a prayer written in Japan are a half-hearted attempt at that method, but by the time of the composition of the Sacred and Secular Elegies he has come to realize that, if he cannot be, in Eliot's words, a "perfect Christian", then neither is he a "complete atheist". He lives, like Baudelaire, in a state of partial belief, and, if this is the case, the reflex of "genuine blasphemy" may be more meaningful than a gesture towards conventional acceptance. If these inferences are just, they go a long way to explain, not merely the blasphemous edge of this sonnet, but the sardonic tone of The True Confession (1950) as well.

Barker's own most perceptive comments on the reflex of blasphemy occur in the context of a review of Harry Levin's James Joyce: A Critical Introduction published shortly after his arrival in America in the
magazine *The Nation* for February 21st 1942 (Appendix A). While praising Levin for his technical analysis of Joyce's language and fictive devices, he has reservations concerning the omission in his account of any consideration of private guilt, from which Joyce especially suffered.

This sense of guilt arises, I think, from the knowledge that blasphemy is possible only to those who venerate the objects of their blasphemy. Thus the clue, the whole clue, and nothing but the clue to James Joyce is not Dublin but Rome.

Joyce was, like Barker, a born Catholic who rejected the Church in his late teens. Throughout his life and work he wrestled and thrashed out at the religious establishment, like an unruly animal on the end of its lead:

It is because I recognize Mr. Levin's incontestable critical acumen that I am surprised he has not suspected that the hysterical and desperately heretical gestures of Joyce prove principally that he fought on the end of an orthodox religious tether. These gestures of blasphemy certainly do not prove that he had liberated himself from the orthodox. For Mr. Levin the act of Joycean blasphemy represents nothing more than a "rebellion" against the Roman Catholic church; but under this particular employment of the noun all the seven cycles of apostatic hell happen to be concealed. "Joyce," Mr. Levin remarks, "is orthodox enough to go on believing in hell." This sentence, properly speaking, should have presented us with the crossed keys to the solution of James Joyce. Both *Ulysses* and *Finnegan's Wake* were written in spiritual circumstances that only a Dante Alighieri...could perfectly visualize: for every word that James Joyce wrote took its dynamic from the thing he sought to escape. This, in two words, was God Almighty.
The allusion to Dante alerts us to the ultimate source in Eliot's Introduction to Baudelaire's journals, where the same parallel occurs. While ostensibly discussing Joyce, Barker seems to have in mind the case history of Baudelaire as presented by Eliot, with which he too is inclined to identify. It is interesting, for example that when asked about his attitude to Catholicism by Martha Fodaski in London in 1969, Barker replied that he was on a "religious tether", a phrase which exactly duplicated the wording of his Joyce review twenty seven years earlier.29

The second half of the review is concerned with a different kind of recoil, from the orthodox use of the English language. Joyce's wordplay, on which Levin had commented at length, but for which he had not accounted, owes its impulse, Barker suggests, to a reflex of linguistic irreverence which is the verbal equivalent of his spiritual blasphemy: 

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When he (Levin) states that "the real Romance is between Joyce and the language," then he really pulls a plum; as in the remark, at once so obvious and so necessary, though I know of no one else who has made it, that Joyce's "restless play of allusion depends, to the vast extent of his knowledge, on the acceptance of a linguistic status quo." I wonder that this observation did not invite the critic to suspect that here again the Joycean dynamic of recoil asserted itself. For this "restless play of allusion," continually in a state of flirtation with the language proper, amounts, in the end, to a retreat in the face of established authority. 

Here at last we get a clear indication of an acknowledgement of Eliot's influence: the notion of recoil owes much to After Strange Gods (1934):
It took Mr T. S. Eliot, with his judicious eye fixed on the reasons why writers write rather than on the way in which they write, to see that James Joyce, instead of being, as hoi polloi and the Bohemian suspect, the most heterodox, is in fact the most orthodox of writers. I imagine that Mr. Eliot was of this opinion because he recognizes in Joyce the writer who takes his drive from his hates, and Joyce's hates consisted of authority in the shapes of the British Constitution, the Oxford Dictionary, and the Roman Catholic church.

Nor is one surprised, when turning to the Eliot passage in question, to find a clear link both with the earlier essay on Baudelaire and with the spirit of blasphemy. While discussing Hopkins, Eliot has reason to remark that he was "not a religious poet in the sense in which I have elsewhere maintained Baudelaire to be a religious poet... or in the sense in which I consider Mr. Joyce's work to be pervaded with Christian feeling." Later, explaining himself, he adds: "No one can possibly blaspheme in any sense except that in which a parrot may be said to curse, unless he profoundly believes in what he profanes." 30

It was, however, eight years before Barker himself commented on the significance of Baudelaire directly. News of the World, the collection of 1950, has, as well as 'Verses on the Sixtieth Birthday of T. S. Eliot', a set of four sonnets to artists whom Barker admires, the third of which is addressed to the shade of Baudelaire. The piece is collected in the retrospective volume of 1957, but it may, nevertheless help to quote it in full:

Walk with me, Sir, when nothing perpends
The wilderness within me. When I adhere
To the trumped up altar because I fear
An obscure answer, see that your ghost attends
Me, for what reason? Knowing I do not deserve
Vision or vigil of your serpent spirit
Untwined from knowledge to make me that visit,
Nevertheless I entreat. I serve
Much the same master. Was your good a God?
I hate my ruler because he will not break me
Under the overloving justice of his rod,
Thus far but love I hate him. Take me
To that inverted golgotha you trod.
And, O Sir, show me the mirror that will break me!31

The first sentence reads either backwards or forwards: either the "wilderness within" him "perpends" ('to weigh mentally, consider', 1527. S.O.D.) "Nothing", or "nothing" broods over his inner desolation. In either case the Universe is post-Nietzschean, barren and godless, and the poet's spiritual sterility an image of it. In response there is a danger of clinging to a "trumped up altar", or opting for a conventional religious faith out of mere insecurity. Yet there is another course open to him if he can borrow from the Frenchman the positive knowledge of Evil which he, like the snake in the garden, possesses. Thus informed, the poet finds himself in the same boat as Baudelaire: though incapable of humbling himself before his Creator, he can at least assert both His existence and the hold which He retains over him by reviling Him. Thus the "inverted golgotha" along which both poets' journey transforms itself into a darkened mirror image of that via dolorosa along which Christ toiled. The Mirror reveals them both as steeped in Evil, and by so doing takes them to the threshold of self-knowledge, itself a preliminary to authentic conversion.

These ideas remain comparatively constant in Barker's thinking from
1950 to the present day. As late as 1982 we find, in his verses 'To David Gascoyne on his 65th birthday' a discussion of the problem of Evil, against which lurks, in Barker's own hand, a sketch depicting a sinuous snake uncoiling itself from the bark of a tree in full leaf, visibly the "serpent spirit untwined from knowledge" to which, in the sonnet of 1950, Baudelaire is compared. Barker, it must be added, has never read Baudelaire in the original, since he has little French. His view of the French poet is culled from his reading of Eliot's introduction together with impressions gained in translation. Interestingly, one of the few remarks attributed to Eliot about Barker is to the effect that as a poet he preferred him to Dylan Thomas, who suffered from an absence of a "sense of Evil". This again, would seem to be a characteristic of Barker's work which appealed to his publisher and caused him to retain an interest in his work after the arresting qualities of the early style had softened.

In an illuminating essay of 1969, Patrick Swift, friend and editor of the magazine X, with which Barker was for some time associated, sees fit to comment at some length on his relationship to the presiding muse of Baudelaire. Concerned as he is to separate Barker from the modernist intellectual mainstream, Swift is at pains to isolate the distinctive qualities he believes him to have adopted:

Eliot and Pound made use of certain aspects of Baudelaire's vision via Laforgue. But there remained an area uncharted even by Laforgue, an area of religious vision of evil, and of that remote but vital 'source inconsciente de la poesie' that has not, as yet, produced its most profound effects or yielded its true riches.
The first remark to make here is that Swift has failed to distinguish between the activities of Eliot the poet and Eliot the critic. Even if, in his creative work, he approaches Baudelaire through the eyes of Laforgue, in his critical essay of 1930 Eliot sees him through the eyes of Augustine, Pascal and that tradition in Catholic moral philosophy of which we shall have cause to speak later. Even after this proviso has been made, Swift's phrasing still seems unfair to Eliot. As Barker himself implies in his 'Note for T. S. Eliot', to which we shall turn in due course, there is abundant evidence in Eliot's poetry of a vivid sense of Evil, most especially in Sweeney Agonistes, which, by 1950, Barker had come to see in a different light. Despite this, Swift is correct in assigning one important element of Barker's relationship with the French poet, even if he underplays the extent to which Eliot's criticism helped to mould this. Starting with a brief quotation from Calamiterror, Swift then goes on to state a corollary to his argument:

Barker's view of the Evil one, the 'downward demon pull', suffers a gradual refinement of definition over the twenty five years covered by the collected poems.

There is not, however, any clear vision of the nature of beatitude and no notion of redemption, that one could seriously believe in, emerges.

Swift seems unaware here that his comments almost exactly parallel Eliot's analysis of Baudelaire's spiritual condition in the essay of 1930:

Yet... the sense of Evil implies the sense of good. Here too, Baudelaire apparently confused, and perhaps did confuse, Evil with its theatrical representations, Baudelaire is not always certain in his notion of the Good.
The only and incomplete vision of redemption which Baudelaire was able to produce, Eliot held, consisted in his inception of the genre of the "poesie des départs" which can be seen as "a dim recognition of the direction of beatitude." In Barker, as Swift partly acknowledges, the equivalent impulse towards the Good is supplied by a vision of the reproductive process, by virtue of which the innocent child emerges from the torrid cruelty of sexual union. This aspect of Barker's work, most fully explored in the verse dialogue Goodman Jacksin and the Angel, need not, however, detain us here, since it marks a point of departure from Baudelaire and an indebtedness to another, Rousseauistic strand in Romanticism.

IV

Before turning from Baudelaire, however, there is one other facet of his thinking as diagnosed by Eliot which we must examine. With Baudelaire Barker seems to share, not only a concept of human life as necessarily Evil, but also a belief that all that separated us from the swinish creation is our awareness of this fact. For Barker it seems this knowledge is one and the same as sexual knowledge. It is through sex that we discover Evil, and through Evil, the potential of Good. The origins of this view seem to lie in that period of mental transition we were able to trace through the surviving typescript of 1940. There is a passage in the incomplete prose sketch 'In the name of St. John of Patmos' which is clearly of relevance here:
I can recall, with some of the maudlin sensuality which perverts derive from titillating children, standing, as a boy of about nine, over the ten-year-old girl who had splayed herself out on the stone steps behind the tenement in which we lived. And I can see the terrified and delighted blue eyeballs gazing upward in bright crime as she wormed her hips out of their knickers; and I can feel the sensation of having solved all the enigmas of being human which ever came over me as I stood and looked down at the place we go home into so long as the grave is too big. And with that knowledge of handling all our origins I felt the death of Beethoven, the death of Samson, the abdication of Edward VIII and the origin of the established Church of England all together in my hand as it closed on the sex of vice, the nub of the womb, the bullseye, the x (Appendix A).

Later, as the protagonist relieves his fiancée of her virginity in Richmond Park, "I remember the gradual breaching of the hymeneal barrier, the edges coarse like an icehole with its red board saying Danger, which was the blood that first baptised me in Adam's sin."

It is this sense of sexual congress as the origin of our sense of sin which, as Patrick Swift remarks, gradually refines itself as Barker develops, eventually emerging in its most fully worked-out form in the novel The Dead Seagull and the first True Confession, both of 1950. While giving full weight to the puritanism which, as his friend Maurice Carpenter remarks, Barker inherited from his Irish Catholic background, there is an element of intellectualization in the equation of carnal with moral knowledge, that suggests a literary source. Once again Eliot's case study of Baudelaire provides a clear antecedent. Karl Miller in his essay on Barker, 'Rome's Rake', touches briefly on this passage, which, however, it is important to give in full:
In this book, the Journaux Intimes, and especially in Mon Corps a nu, he has a great deal to say of the love of man and women. One aphorism which has been especially noticed is the following: 'la volupté unique et suprême de l'amour gît dans la certitude de faire mal'. This means, I think, that Baudelaire has perceived that what distinguished the relations of man and woman from the copulation of beasts is the knowledge of Good and Evil (of moral Good and Evil which are not natural Good and Bad or puritan Right and Wrong). Having an imperfect, vague romantic conception of Good, he was at least able to see that to conceive of the sexual act as evil is more dignified, less boring, than to think of it as the natural, 'life-giving' cheery optimism of the modern world. For Baudelaire, sexual operation is at least non analogous to Kruschen salts."

Barker was to elaborate considerably on Eliot's meaning here, applying it to the facts of his own life as intermittently revealed in The Dead Seagull (1930) and The True Confession (1950), in both of which the earlier theme of love's destructiveness from Calamiterror (1937) was to combine with his renewed sense of theological culpability.

While recognizing the crucial role played by the Baudelaire essay in Barker's developing vision of God and man, it is also important to realize that the Catholic theologians themselves are far from unknown to him. Maurice Carpenter, writing of his early acquaintance with Barker in his autobiographical work A Rebel in the Thirties points to a source for what he calls "his... philosophy of the uselessness and fundamental repulsiveness of all human activity" in a passage from Newman's Apologia pro Vita Sua: "If there is a God, since there is a God, the human race is implicated in some terrible aboriginal calamity. It is out of joint with the purpose of its creator." This is duly quoted, amongst other statements from Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Francisco de Ossuma and Pascal, in The Dead Seagull, which, however, significantly extends the quotation to include the next sentence: "This is a fact, a fact as true as the fact of its existence, and thus the doctrine of what
is theologically called original sin comes to be almost as certain as that the world exists, and as the existence of God." Carpenter's remarks relate to the period 1932-34, when Barker and he were friends as well as literary collaborators, and before Barker's theological position had finally coalesced. At this stage the futility and torment of human life seems for him to have been what Carpenter implies that it was, an attitude. What we have in The Dead Seagull and contemporary works, however, is an attitude overlaid with considerable sophistication of thought, much of which he owes in turn to a critical reading of Eliot. It is this theological nexus which we must now examine.

Barker had been familiar with Newman's view of the human calamity since the late twenties, when it featured in the theological instruction which, at his mother's instigation, he received from the Fathers of the Brompton Oratory. After the war years, however, when the influence of Eliot's religious thinking deepened, it came to blend with the fundamental philosophical pessimism which underlies such works of Sweeney Agonistes, which, as we have already seen, Barker had reviewed on its publication. Whenever in the middle years of his career, Barker feels inclined to debate the large questions of guilt and suffering, it is with Eliot's stated position on the subject that he tends to begin. The conclusions which Barker reaches on these occasions do not always bear Eliot out. More often than not they start with an extreme caricature of Eliot's bleakness and then proceed to revise the impression with overlaid levels of spirited sophistry. The result is a rich theological tapestry in which the darkness of Eliot's vision represents one prominent strand. The clearest instance of such a transformation is the novel of 1950 The Dead Seagull which employs a disguisedly autobiographical story-line to engender a welter of paradoxes on the theme of sexual and moral knowledge.

The pivotal statement of The Dead Seagull is arguably to be found
in a quotation from St John of the Cross which occurs towards the end of the text:

Not until the soul has divested itself of the love of created things can it aspire to the divine union.40

This is an inverted form of the second inscription placed by T. S. Eliot at the head of the text of Sweeney Agonistes and quoted by the young Barker in his review of 1933. The immediate question to consider then is the construction that Barker came to put on this quotation in 1950 and the extent to which this coincides with Eliot's interpretation of it.

It might be helpful in this connection to quote a little of a letter of Eliot's to Bonamy Dobrée who had objected to this inscription:

I don't think that ordinary human affections are capable of leading us to the love of God, but rather that the love of God is capable of informing, intensifying and elevating our human affections, which otherwise have little to distinguish them from the "natural" affections of animals.41

The Dead Seagull concerns itself, not with ordinary human affections but with passion in extremis. Its doctrine is that all such passion leads to death. Since sexual passion of a kind is necessary for human reproduction, we are all enmeshed inextricably in a self-destructive cycle. The proposition is found in its most extreme form in the statement towards the beginning that -
I have a story to relate which proves that Love, with no blood on its knife, does not sleep easily, if it sleeps at all, until every one of its devotees lies dead. The great destroyer. In every bed. In every single bed. In every double bed.42

This, it may be thought, reads like the overture to a parable or moral fable tending towards the enunciation of a clearly perceived moral. It begs therefore the question of the genre inside which Barker is working. There are, however, other statements in the book which suggest some modification of the didactic enterprise:

I could, if I were to distort the characters and the events of my account, and especially if I were to vitiate the spiritual aura worn by these happenings - and by all happenings - and by these three people - as well as by others - if I were to twist this spiritual halo only a little out of shape into a perfect circle, my story would resemble a morality, and the characters could be understood, allegorically, in a greater significance.43

This reservation, occurring as it does much later in the text, could represent a shift of authorial intention. It could also constitute one element in a scrupulously held balance between the moral necessity of fable and the unpredictable contingency of imaginatively transformed fact. Only the text can tell us which of these explanations is the truer.

The principal characters in the tale are three: the trio of a love triangle. These are the protagonist, who, relating his history throughout in the first person singular, indulges in constant soliloquies; his wife Teresa, whose passive watchful innocence is stressed; and the seductress Marsden, who having read one of the protagonist's books, follows him down to Dorset and eventually lures him away to London. Since it is Marsden who on all occasions takes the initiative, her masculine characteristics are emphasized. When the protagonist is first
alerted by his wife to her existence, "I assumed - I suppose from the association of the first syllable - that the schoolfriend was a young man." She is, then, Mars the God of War; she is also, aptly when one considers the symbolism such early poems as 'Daedalus', compared to that apotheosis of early 19th-century hero-worship, the aeronaut. Moreover, she is 'pig-woman, Circe'. This indictment is qualified by the slightly later sentence: "It was not Circe who was ... the pig, it was her lovers". She is also Ariadne, whose devotees, like the priests of the "corybantic dance", mutilated themselves in her honour. The mythological echoes with which her name is surrounded are underscored by various references to allegorical fresco painting. On her first arrival at the cottage she "stepped down out of a Venetian ceiling into our hospitality". Marsden arrives in the protagonist's absence, and, when he eventually enters the room where his wife is already entertaining her, the combination of their two heads reminds him of a Renaissance painting.

The references to Theresa, on the other hand, all speak of passivity and tenderness. Her very name recalls Saint Thérèse of Lisieux. She is "nurturing tender Theresa", and, though on the same page referred to as "Aphrodite of the long legs", it is the Greek Goddess's loveliness and maternal solicitude that are primarily implied. One must not forget, however, that Aphrodite was mistress to Mars; the sexual ambiguities of the triangle cannot be ignored. The story portrays her throughout as victim. She hardly suspects the liaison between her schoolfriend and husband, and, when she can ignore it no longer, her attitude is one of patient suffering until the very last moment when she expires proclaiming, somewhat melodramatically, "I curse you!" Melodrama seems the right word here, since the atmosphere that surrounds her in her husband's recollection is one of hushed Victorian
reverence: "dead mother of a dead son" as she is ultimately addressed.47

The protagonist himself constantly refers to his own ruthless selfishness. He is also a victim, however, of Marsden's single-minded passion. He is not a seducer - he simply succumbs. Appropriately it is his femininity that emerges: he dreams that he is a hermaphrodite. His occasional acts of masturbation are interpreted by himself as violations of his own female image. After one such excess he remarks "Regal Theresa can you forgive me, now, from wherever you are? My least forgivable infidelities were those with myself."48 There is nothing whatsoever of the Don Juan about him, since, despite his evident sexual prowess he constantly stresses his helplessness, the fragility of his will in the rapacious hands of Fate, or perhaps of Marsden.

The question of the inadequacy of the moral will in the face of circumstance is central to the vision of the book. Both wife and husband, and, to a lesser extent Marsden herself, are depicted as impaled by a ruthless universe. The ultimate image of this state is martyrdom. Throughout Theresa is regarded, not merely as mother and saint, but also as sacrificial victim. During the protagonist's amorous sojourn with Marsden in London he is constantly tortured by visions of his abandoned wife "come to me like Alcestis from the Grave".49 The allusion is to the famous Milton sonnet, and, beyond it the mythological Alcestis who gave her life so that her husband, King Admetus of Pherae, might be saved. The theme of sacrifice is clinched in the name chosen by the couple for their stillborn son, Sebastian. The martyr's name runs like a litany through the text, and when finally evoked in the protagonist's confessional reverie, both mother and son are "You, my sweet Sebastian, shot full of wounds, a little boy trailing a martyrdom behind him, holding your mother by her hand, and she with her face wiped
away by the handkerchief of grief, you both have walked with me by
the lake."

If wife and child are exonerated by their innocence, and the
husband by his vulnerability, Marsden who in harsher moments appears
as the cause of the calamity, comes, in the final summing up to be
exempted from blame because of her ethical naïveté. Though causing
suffering in all around her she is herself blameless since she inhabits a
pre-moral universe in which crude moral judgements do not apply. This
point is made at several points in the book. Indeed for the protagonist
it is this very quality of ingenuousness which constitutes her fatal
attraction: "I love her because she is an animal as incapable of sin as a
tigress. She has no soul. I see in her not the misery of man separated
from his creator but the defiance of the beast who cannot envisage
god". Her animality is stressed many times. When frustrated by her
lover's determination to return to his legal spouse she tears and claws
at him like a caged lioness. For her the desire to possess is a simple
imperative that demands satisfaction and brooks no delay. Her
unthinking self-centredness is as evident in her transient affair with the
middle-aged Greek bohemian Theokopolos as it is in her lasting
infatuation for the poet-hero.

It is hard to discuss the delineation of the principal characters in
*The Dead Seagull* without, as in the above account, involving ultimate
terms of moral reference, Good and Evil, Innocence and Sin. In other
words, we are dealing with a novel in which the implied theory of
character entails a theology. The difficulty we are faced with involves
the nature of this theology. If Theresa and her husband inhabit a world
in which callous action involves suffering and remorse, and if Marsden,
the cause of their distress, dwells in a morally neutral terrain, we
would seem to be faced with a bifocal vision of ultimate reality. There
are several alternative answers to this puzzle. One, already illustrated
by the passage quoted, is that Marsden is literally sub-human, and hence sets in motion consequences in the moral terrain for which she is not responsible. This, however, is to fly in the face of much elsewhere in the book: Marsden's bestiality is merely a metaphor for her ferocity and her leonine grace. Another explanation is that the plot involves a paradigm of the Fall. According to this version of events, Marsden is a throw-back to the period of pre-lapsarian spontaneity which preceded the expulsion from Paradise. She is a sort of modern Eve, innocent yet of eating the apple who, let loose in the world of contemporary moral consequences, blunders into people in ignorance of the facts of suffering. A continuation of the quotation already given would lend some support to this view:

I see in her selfishness, further, the state of grace worn naturally by us all before the Fall, when the nude mother, with her puzzle of children about her, walked over the fields, unaware that she was again pregnant, unable to recall any events that might have given origin to her babies, conscious of the Sun, the earth, the satisfaction of the body and an incomprehensible tenderness towards these children. 52

We are concerned, however, less with the view that the characters hold of one another, than the perspective which the novelist, Barker himself, projects. In some ways The Dead Seagull is a very self-conscious novel; self-conscious in that the writer is constantly giving his hero sufficient rein to betray his most deeply held convictions, and then qua author stepping in to make his own comments using the character himself as a convenient mouthpiece. It is not surprising therefore if, in reading the novel, we find ourselves confronted with a series of competing views.

There is one theological world-view which is clearly active in the book, a scheme betrayed by the protagonist when he speaks of his view
of the world as "almost albigensian". Albigensianism implies the Manichaean heresy, a vision of the complete parity between the forces of Good and Evil. It is a view which the character resists from the moment he has articulated it, but it nevertheless influences the way in which he instinctively senses events. Implied in his more impassioned assessments there is often a view of Theresa as Good, Marsden as Evil, and himself as a poor lost soul wandering between them in a sort of perplexed Purgatory. It is this instinctively held view which influences the imagery he applies to each woman, the references to the madonna, the saints, martyrs and Alcestis in the one case, allusions to Circe, Ariadne and beasts of prey in the other. Where Marsden is bestial, Theresa is an angel. Where he can safely pray to his wife's departed shade in the concluding sections of the book, Marsden seems literally to carry Theresa's fully vindicated curse. Yet, as soon as he has uttered it, the protagonist knows this view to be both inaccurate and uncharitable. The "almost" in the above phrase is significant; Albigensianism is, after all, a proscribed heresy, and the speaker does not seem to regard himself as heterodox. The phantom of Marsden as Evil would seem to coincide with some inner principle of simplification, a habit of artistic and moral organization which the novel finally supercedes. It produces in the first instance a neat triangle or trinity of personages, a spectrum of moral virtue with the protagonist wavering bemused stage centre. If the chronology of the novel is examined, it will be found that recession from this viewpoint proceeds chronologically so that, although never finally eradicated, the Manichaean scheme lingers under the final impression like a previous imprint under a superimposed image.

That which succeeds it is the orthodox belief in all life as good. We come gradually to see the writer-protagonist as hesitating, not between opposed moral absolutes, but between two poles of attraction
which are both in essence noble. The force which attracts him to his
wife is that of ὑποτιμήσεως love; that which drives him towards Marsden is
natural desire. Both of these constitute ingredients in the orthodox
catholic view of marriage; yet, in the protagonist's case, they are
cruelly divided. In his relation to Theresa and his relation to Marsden
he shares one very important element: the act of intercourse. It is
around this act in its differing contexts, and the divergent moral
estimates to which this gives rise, that the theology of the book
ultimately coheres.

The conclusive statement is to be found immediately after the
passage on Eve already quoted:

... sexual love, to the truly innocent, to the truly innocent in a
state of grace, must be as naturally virtuous, as any other bodily
functions, and therefore indistinguishable from them. Without the
inherent and inherited magnification of original sin, we live in a
world where a sneeze and an orgasm hold meaningless candles to
one another, and illumine nothing.\(^5\)

In a state of complete uncorrupted innocence the protagonist's
attraction to these two different women would exist in a condition of
absolute parity. Unable to distinguish between right and wrong, he
would no more be able to discriminate between them ethically than he
can between two consecutive involuntary physical reactions. Insofar as
he is able to recover a glimmering of this prelapsarian ignorance, he is
able to view both Marsden and his wife as witnesses to a faultless
creation. That which makes him unable to sustain his vision is the
Knowledge of Good and Evil, and, with it, the power to discriminate
between love and lust.

Immediately after the above passage the novelist proceeds to
discuss the affinities of his story to the shape of allegory in the
sentence "I could, if I were to distort the characters and the events of
my account", which we have already considered. The proximity between the two passages is explained by the fact that it is only in the postlapsarian world of moral judgement that the allegory, with its polarized ethical categories, is possible. It is alone in terms of this allegory that the narrator is able, at the inception of his book, to anticipate his conclusion by stating "I have a story to relate which proves that Love, with no blood on its knife, does not sleep easily, if it sleeps at all, until every one of its devotees lies dead." Love has "no blood on its knife" since its mortal power resides, not in its rapacious ferocity, but in the fact that it provides a standard of judgement according to which we are all seen to fail. Only in the light of love can Evil, and with it suffering, be seen to exist.

When we have recognized this, we are in a position to see how far removed from Eliot's interpretation of the grand statement of St John of the Cross is Barker's. Eliot wished to imply that love of the Divine provides us with the necessary moral detachment without which it is impossible to love His creatures truly. Barker, on the other hand, has constructed a parable which is designed to prove that the simple knowledge of love is sufficient to make authentic relationships between mutually respecting human beings inconceivable. The sole and paradoxical qualification to this drastic conclusion is provided by the author's own stated awareness of the ultimate deficiency of his moral. Its inadequacy is perhaps comprehensible in that it supplies us with a vision of moral truth valid merely for the human observer with his limited perspective. There is indeed a world in which both Theresa and Marsden are equally worthy of love and grace, but it exists purely in the mind of God. It is perhaps of this divine vision of things, springing as it does from the act of pure genesis, that the narrator is granted an occasional and fragmentary glimpse, and in terms of which he is able to speak of Marsden's goodness.
The Dead Seagull can thus be read as a novel which, setting out with a sharply Manichean view of the universe, eventually superimposes upon it an idealism founded on a recognition of the restorative power of human love. The Manichean view, however, is essential to the whole enterprise, since it is the catalyst which Barker uses to set in motion his own provocative judgements. If, in the late 'thirties, Barker had been looking for a clear English commentary on the ancestry of Manicheanism he would have had to have looked no further than Eliot's introduction to W. F. Potter's translation of Pascal's Pensées (1931). Pascal, as Eliot pointed out, was heir to a doctrine of human nature as irremediably compromised deriving ultimately from the writings of St Augustine, who himself passed through an early phase of Manichean influence. The doctrine was active in seventeenth century France largely due to the agency of the Jansenists, whose influence was strongly present in the Convent of Porte Royale to which Pascal's sister had retired. To provide a concise background to the Jansenist controversy for the theological amateur, Eliot is forced, by his own admission, to simplify:

It is recognized in Christian theology - and indeed on a lower plane it is recognised by all men of affairs in daily life - that free-will or the natural effort and ability of the individual man, and also supernatural grace, a gift accorded we know not quite how, are both required, in co-operation, for salvation. Though various theologians have set their wits at the problem, it ends in a mystery which we can perceive but not finally decipher. At least, it is obvious that, like any doctrine, a slight deviation or deviation
to one side or the other will precipitate a heresy. The Pelagians, who were refuted by St Augustine, emphasized the efficacy of human effort and belittle the importance of supernatural grace. The Calvinists emphasized the degradation of man through Original Sin, and considered mankind so corrupt that the will was of no avail; and thus fell into the doctrine of predestination. It was upon the doctrine of grace according to Augustine that the Jansenists relied.  

Here Eliot's précis of theological issues impoverishes, it might be said, his reading of Pascal, much of whose intellectual playfulness in his second section on 'The Miseries of Man without God' was applied to expounding the glorious paradox of man's sinful nature which enables him to wrestle even his just into matter for marvellous contrivance. It is a side of Pascal which Eliot was obliged to neglect, contenting himself with the remark that Pascal, in attempting to refute Montaigne, had taken over more of the latter's optimism than he cared to admit. There is, in Barker's best work, and notably in The Dead Seagull a kind of counterpoint between pessimism and zest which results in a mock-seriousness barely hinting at its own sincerity. It is the sort of balance of which Barker himself was keenly aware in Eliot's own character, which he often portrays as a mixture of bishop, policeman and court jester. His poem 'Elegiacs for T. S. Eliot', written the day after his mentor's death, seems to suggest by its juxtaposition of phrasing, that this ironic inscrutability of personality was something that Eliot shared with Pascal. In speaking of Eliot's bracing effect on the deportment of the English literary scene, he ends by alluding to

...that sense of spiritual onus
Inherent in all Pascalian interpretations.
Also he loved bad jokes.  

The sprightliness of thought that lies at the heart of much of Pascal's writing is also germane to the tone of The Dead Seagull, which, when submitted to John Lehmann in 1950, was originally entitled The Smile on the Face of the Tiger, before Lehmann, mindful of the underlying seriousness of the content, obliged him to change it. The Dead Seagull is certainly a serious book, but there is much in the euphuistic drollness of its manner which suggests a dialogue between the darkness of its controlling vision, Pascalian in the drear sense, and an euphoric moral zest reminiscent of the reverse coin of the Pascalian spirit.

The complexity of spiritual organization suggested in the 'Elegiacs for T. S. Eliot' is something that Barker came to see in his mentor slowly. The sonnets and the longer poems devoted to the American, together with the 'Note for T. S. Eliot' of 1948, supply us with a panorama of Barker's changing view of a man who remained at the least in his eyes thoroughly inscrutable. Towards the end of the war Barker included in the sequence of 'Personal Sonnets' from Eros in Dogma one to his publisher. The tone is significant, and the borrowings from drafts of earlier writings are very marked:

Expecting a bomb or angel through the roof,
Cold as a saint in Canterbury Cathedral,
This gentleman with Adam on his mind
Sits writing verses on cats that speak: lives
By the prolonged accident of divine proof,
A living martyr to the biological.
Hell spreads its horrors on his window blind
And fills his room with interrogatives.
St Thomas doubting and not doubting,
Confident of God, but dubious of human,
I render my tongue merely as minor flame
To glorify this inglorious martyrdom
And when the bomb or angel breaks the vaulting
Trust he remembers, among the others, my name. 57

The prose source for much of this is the eighth section of the typescript 'In the Name of St John of Patmos', where Barker is discussing the nature of inspiration, and the sublime perversity which enables poets to go on writing in the middle of an international crisis. The sentences of immediate relevance run as follows:

To the poet the passion is a catastrophe of antithesis -personal passion brings on, sooner or later, the birth of a poem, and the impersonal passion of creating a poem brings on, sooner or later, the birth of doubt. So that here in truth is the spectacle of a serpent swallowing itself, in the life and work of a poet: he consumes himself daily in the hope that, when he dies, his skin will lie glistening like a crystal on literature. Once again, therefore, we see that in fact the poet is the apotheosized idiot. For who except poets in the year 1940 would go on writing with both halves of the world colliding like cymbals? But one of us sits under the roof of Canterbury Cathedral, anticipating the bomb through the 'fretted' vault, composing verses about cats that speak... (Appendix A).

The preamble here seems to develop that strain of thought present in the series of articles from the pages of The Criterion which we examined earlier in chapter. It has to do with the process of ingestion by which the poet transforms his crude 'personal' passion into the stuff of 'impersonal' art, a process earlier commented on by Eliot. By so doing the poet suffers a minor decease for he must literally die into his
own work, which then enters a realm over which he has no control. The symbolic immolation of the self on the altar of the impersonal thus enacted is also the theme of Barker's essay 'Therefore All Poems Are Elegies', reprinted in Essays. It would seem to be an attempt to marry Eliot's 'impersonal theory of poetry' with Barker's own susceptibility to the elegiac genre, which he comes to see as celebrating the poet's own martyrdom. It is significant that, in the typescript, after sketching this theory, Barker passes straight on to a list of contemporary poets commencing with T. S. Eliot. All three of the descriptive phrases used to evoke his presence here are taken straight into the text of the sonnet, where, however, they are used to structure a clearer view of his personality. Thus "sits under the roof of Canterbury Cathedral" becomes "cold as a Saint in Canterbury Cathedral", the allusion being to St. Thomas a Beckett, who can paradoxically be identified with the St. Thomas "not doubting" of the first line of the sestet. Interestingly this phrase is resurrected in A Vision of Beasts and Gods in 1954 where it is applied to Dylan "the one undoubting" Thomas. The references here, however, are specifically to Eliot's faith and obduracy. "Composing verses on cats that speak" is also retained in slightly altered form, but combined with the phrase "with Adam on his mind" to suggest that, as Barker later hinted in his 'Note for T. S. Eliot' that his publisher's fascination with the feline species arose from his awareness that they are "genteel during the day and diabolic during the Night." The original prose passage was written one year after the appearance of Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats (1939) in which Growltiger and Macavity had indeed reflected less savoury aspects of human behaviour. Thus the preoccupation with cats is used figuratively to convey intimations of Evil which are Eliot's inheritance from the Augustinian and Pascalian tradition. Lastly the phrase about "anticipating the bomb through the 'fretted vault'" becomes "Expecting a bomb or angel through the roof", thus combining Eliot's firewatching
activities which, during the early years of the war, he shared with Geoffrey Faber, with his theological awareness of the miracle of grace, the "dove descending" of Little Gidding. In this sonnet, the whole of Eliot's existence is regarded as a miracle of grace. Surrounded and encroached upon by the facts of Evil, he yet manages to remain apart, knowing but gentle, sorrowing but aloof. His chastity after the collapse of his first marriage becomes for Barker a state of private martyrdom scarcely imaginable. Aware of the darkest aspects of our common nature, he gives the impression of a kind of sacramental inviolability, a condition Barker respects but may not comprehend.

Four years after the publication of Eros in Dogma, Eliot attained the age of sixty. To celebrate this event Tambimuttu, editor of Poetry London edited a festchrift, to which Barker, among many others contributed. The result was 'Verses for the 60th Birthday of Thomas Stearns Eliot', reprinted in Collected Poems. In the same year Barker contributed to the New English Review an essay entitled 'A note for T. S. Eliot'. Both pieces mark a considerable advance in the younger poet's view of his publisher. It will therefore be helpful to discuss them, beginning with the prose tribute (Appendix A).

'A Note for T. S. Eliot' is, in addition to its function as tribute, a dissertation on a variety of related themes: the object of criticism, the relationship between the poet and his own subjectivity, the nature of 'originality', the distinction between religious and artistic acts. Fundamentally, it seeks to take up a number of the critical cudgels that Eliot used and to employ them so as to assert the 'responsibility' of the poet which both Barker and Eliot hold in such high regard, and to mark out areas of agreement and disagreement between two active, but possibly diverging minds. The sources of the references to Eliot's critical writing are twofold: the essay 'Traditional and the Individual Talent' to which we have already referred, and the assessment of
Matthew Arnold from The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism (1933). These two essays come together so as to supply the framework for a central discussion of issues which clearly impinge on one another. While 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' is concerned with the relationship struck up by the poet both to his own inner experience and the literary tradition of which he is heir, Eliot's lecture on Arnold has for its theme the relationship between the literary and the religious intelligence.

After an introductory bow in the direction of the senior poet, Barker plunges into a major statement as to his view of "intellectually responsible criticism" which seems to be in flagrant violation of the 'impersonal view' which elsewhere he seems to hold so dear:

This note is not an evaluation or a revaluation or an exegesis - because I have almost reached that stage, I discover, where the only serious form of criticism is simply an examination of the subject's personal charms.

The key term in this opening section is "responsible": it was a word prominent in the critical language of the time, one which Barker chooses to re-interpret. For the religious and cultural responsibility of Eliot, and the moral and educational responsibility of Leavis, he has substituted one of his own: "responsibility towards the human being". This is not a disavowal of the "intellectual responsibility" of which he earlier speaks: "I see a great deal more latent excitement in the idea of the recurring seven than I ever could in a bunch of dilapidated dahlias."

The poet has a use for intellectual structures: one recalls the fascination for numerical figures such as the Pentacle, which is so prominent in Barker's own poetry of the late 'thirties, and which seems to derive from Jessie Weston's From Ritual to Romance, one of Eliot's sources for The Waste Land. But the patterns are like cheques which
need financial backing, the credit in this case being supplied by the emotions. It is a formulation which directs us to the distance which Barker has managed to place between himself and Eliot's edicts. For Eliot the emotional life of the poet was mere grist to the mill of his professional achievement; for Barker, the shoe is now on the other foot. A poet's formal achievement is only valuable insofar as it reflects his subjective life. For Eliot, Barker asserts, this process of reflection operated through refraction: his art was an escape from inner pressures which he found unbearable. In order to substantiate this, Barker quotes the concluding sentence of the second section of 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', where Eliot is describing the relationship between the subjectivity of the art-object and the subjectivity of the mind which creates it. The paradoxical interpretation which Barker appears to reach is: that the impersonality he attributes to Eliot's verse is evidence of the intense feeling which lies behind it.

The rest of the essay is concerned with weighing in the balance the three properties that pertain to Eliot as "man", "poet" and "religious man". It traces a highly paradoxical argument which ends by striking a shrewd balance between Eliot's thinking on the relationship between these various faculties, and Barker's own. The third part includes a statement which, on the face of it, appears to fly in the face of the impersonal conception of poetry: "When it comes to the interpretation of any given poet, it is necessary to recall that the poet himself is in a very advantageous position. He is his own subject." Yet, Barker argues, though the subject matter of any given work may refer ultimately to experiences to which the human being behind the poet may attest, yet in the activity of writing he is responsible only to that part of himself which is absorbed in the poetic act. As soon as experience is transmuted into art, the divorce between the two realms becomes absolute, leaving the human subjectivity of the writer in a
position almost as detached from his own handiwork as is the average reader's: "But, whereas the poet may know all there is to know about the man - the human being - he knows very little about the poet inside himself. For the poet inside a man can only function on a single subject, and this is the poem he writes." It is difficult to make sense of these remarks without invoking Eliot's idea from 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', of an 'art emotion' pertaining to the context of the poem as distinct from the passions with which the writer himself happens to be endowed. The second, as Barker, following Eliot again, protests, are worthless, or, at least, in the special precinct of the poem have no more priority than the passions of ordinary men.

Barker then passes on to debate the importance of Eliot as critic. This might seem, at first sight, a fresh subject of discussion. In reality, however, Barker is simply continuing his previous argument as to the relationship between art and the material which feeds it. For, after a cursory look at Coleridge and Dryden, Barker devotes the major part of his discussion to a consideration of Eliot's relationship with Matthew Arnold. Here he leans heavily on the chapter on Arnold included in Eliot's collection of lectures The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism where the emphasis falls on Arnold's view of the moral function of literature. Here, as in his discussion of I. A. Richards included in the same volume, Eliot is concerned with holding at bay a philosophy of literature which inclined to permit it to usurp the role properly occupied by devotional religion. Through an analysis of Arnold's poems Eliot is able to demonstrate the provincial, circumscribed, thoroughly domesticated quality of a mind which, when it spoke of moral concern, meant no more than the reassuring house-rules of a schoolmaster. Eliot then passes on to the passage quoted by Barker. Addressing himself to Arnold's definitive statement that "Poetry is at bottom a criticism of life" he is able to comment "At bottom?
That is a great way down. The bottom is the bottom. At the bottom of the abyss is what few ever see, and what they cannot bear to look at for long; and it is not a criticism of life." It is this metaphor which Barker takes up and elaborates, making explicit what is implicit in Eliot. Eliot has left the significance of the "bottom" down to which our deepest experiences lead deliberately ambiguous, letting it hang in the mind as a suggestive nexus. For Barker, the only proper interpretation of Eliot's insight is the religious one. Where Eliot meant to suggest a cluster of spiritual and mystical associations, Barker prefers a more orthodox religious connotation the Pit. For Barker the superiority of Eliot over Arnold as a thinker lay ultimately in his rapport with the mainstream of Catholic thought, and his understanding of the spiritual categories implied by the theologians.

This leads Barker on to a discussion of the religious function of literature. Here too he is scrupulous in following Eliot's lead, though ultimately he is forced to differ from him. Eliot's view, as expressed in The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism is that literature and devotion address themselves to different ends. To oblige the writer to infringe on the domain of prayer is not only to ask the impossible, but to urge him to a fundamental form of blasphemy. It is this view which Barker takes up and paraphrases:

To Eliot, I think, the substitution of poetry for religion (whatever this may mean) could only seem as benighted and as purblind as to venerate a bunch of roses rather than the deity these flowers are placed here to glorify.

Yet Barker is forced to supply some kind of meaningful account of the meditative content of Eliot's later verse, which will enable him to formulate a conception of the relationship between Eliot the poet and Eliot the Christian, just as, at the beginning of his essay, he is obliged
to describe the confluence of Eliot the man and Eliot the poet. Here once again he is forced into the arms of a paradox. Though literature and prayer are distinct exercises, true religious literature inevitably engages the faith of the religious man who writes it. Thus, though literature may not usurp on the activity of prayer, it may draw on the resources laid aside by the praying creature. This is what Barker means by his statement in the last paragraph that "the poet cannot write without the benediction of the spiritual man, but the spiritual man can pray without the permission of the poet." Thus, at first sight, Barker seems to have achieved the same sort of balance between religious and artistic experience as he had earlier formulated between poetry and everyday life. Yet there is one crucial difference: whereas poetry transcends the dross of commonplace feeling, it falls short of authentic religious communication. Only in the very rare instances of a religious and literary masterpiece - and Barker's wording would seem to admit Eliot's own meditative work within this definition - do these distinct faculties merge to the extent that the words of the poet achieve, for a limited period, the liturgical eminence of a religious act:

But the moment the poet unfolds his faculties and speaks, then each of his various natures get together, and, in the poem, utter praise.

Barker's other tribute to his publisher in 1948 was his 'Verses for the 60th Birthday of T. S. Eliot', a poem in which he seems to be trying to reconcile the attributes of judgement and compassion which Eliot exercised in both his professional and private lives. There are intimations in the text of both the early and the later Eliot. Stanza Three would seem to summon up the world of the 'Preludes', of that compassion for "some infinitely gentle, infinitely suffering thing" which alone redeemed the bleakness of those stark townscapes. Here the
sleazy drabness with which Eliot endowed the backstreets of the human
city is construed as a condition of religious damnation: the "law"
against which the twig appeals is the Pauline imperative equating sin
with death. Thus the pity with which Eliot surveys the moral decay of
the social scene fuses with the pity of the saviour, since both are seen
as enacting a dispensation of divine grace. The "set imperial face" is
not merely aristocratic, but, by implication, almost god-like.

Stanza One evokes the same element in Eliot's personality as gave
rise to the single personal anecdote in the Note:

Some two or three months before declaration of war I went to see
Eliot in his office overlooking the garden of Russell Square [sic]. It
was late in the afternoon and there was about everything that
atmosphere of resigned melancholy that seems to precede all
catastrophic events. I forget what was the occasion of my calling
him - I think it was to say goodbye, for I was leaving England.
He was looking out of the window. And, after a while, in a tired
voice, he said: 'We have so little time.'

Here the pessimism of Eliot the man at the outbreak of war, the
pessimism which led him, in the last issues for 1939, to announce the
closure of The Criterion, is seen as part and parcel of a deeper
theological despair. The wording of the poem seems to lean on the
same source (the original version in Tambimuttu has "Russell Square" for
"Woburn Square", though this was changed in time for the piece's
inclusion in News of the World of 1950). Here, however, the emphasis
is not only on the elder man's temperamental melancholy, but/ on the
sad shrewdness of judgement that allows him to see through all human
pretension to happiness or perfectibility. It is the quality which
informed the writing of the sharper passages in After Strange Gods
(1934), on which Barker commented in his essay 'Poet As Pariah' of
July 1950:
The properties of a bank are remarkably like the properties of Eliot's critical writings: apparently well behaved and respectable, each conceals a ruthlessness and hardheadedness that I cannot think that the author of After Strange Gods would have found uncongenial.°°

By 1948, when Barker came to write the poem, After Strange Gods had been withdrawn and was not to be re-issued. The flinty insight which, in the harder passages of that book, had drawn Eliot into strident condemnation of secular tendencies in the modern world, had by 1948 given way to a mellow, but still disenchanted charity. It is this change of heart which the poem perhaps records when it speaks of "that dark neutrality,/ Which, in between love and disgust,/ Hates most of all its own mistrust." "Neutrality" is a word with both moral and political connotations; it suggests both the careful tolerance of a civilized Christian gentleman, and the scrupulous impartiality which, in the days of The Criterion, permitted its editor to throw open its columns to authors whose persuasions differed radically from his own.

The poem ends with a picture of the procession of the "huge negations" outside Eliot's window which reminds one of Barker's youthful interests in medieval literature, and especially in Piers Plowman, the procession of the Deadly Sins in the fifth passus of which is imitated in his earlier 'Vision of England '38'.°° Here the procession is staged for Eliot's benefit, and his lowering of his hand to "tame" the fury of the passing vision has in it again something of a royal gesture. Yet there is another element in the stanza which endows the gesture with a different significance. As the "negations" travel across Eliot's field of vision they inscribe on the grass of Woburn Square a text, the message of which - "that all / the lessons are ephemeral" is close to the sense of some of Eliot's own darker poems. As the vision passes out of view, Eliot leans down and signs it. The signature has the double effect
endorsing the pessimism of the negative message, and also mysteriously of lightening the burden of knowledge. His name both endows the words with authority, and "tames" the finality of the judgement. It is a combination of effects which perfectly suggest that quality of justice tempered with mercy which, at this stage in his career, Barker evidently saw as one of his mentor's most admirable characteristics.

When Eliot died on 4th January 1965, Barker commenced the composition of his 'Elegiacs for T S Eliot' printed the following year in the volume *Dreams of a Summer Night*. The word elegiac here refers to the genre of the elegy rather than to the elegiac metre proper since Barker, who at this stage of his writing career seems to have been interested in the imposition of conversational rhythms upon prosody, avoids the dactylic foot. The piece is divided into three sections, the first of which treats of Eliot's personality, the second of his effect on the English literary scene, and the third of the future state of culture without him. Where the two previous poems were remote and respectful, the opening of this obituary piece allows itself a note of informal affection: the phrase "old friend" would have been out of place in both of the previous tributes. Yet, though affection intrudes, it is not allowed to trespass on what Barker is still determined to see as the fundamental mystery and separateness of Eliot's presence, "a spy of the gods / Disguising himself as publisher, policeman, / Verger and bankclerk." He also takes over from his sonnet of 1940 the idea of the nocturnal, feline shadowiness of the underside of Eliot's character, the side exposed in the Possum poems and in *Sweeney Agonistes*. From his prose tribute of 1948 he takes over the notion of the passion lying behind the patrician facade. Lastly, from his 'Verses on the 60th Birthday of Thomas Stearns Eliot' he adopts the metaphor of imperial grandeur which runs through to the next section.

Yet, despite the borrowed images, there is in the Elegiacs an
entirely new centre of interest, focusing on the word "responsibilities" in section one, and its equivalents "porphyrogenitive" and "onus" in the second part. Barker had spoken of intellectual "responsibility" in his 'Note for T. S. Eliot', where, however, he was inclined to mean the poet's artistic responsibility towards his own work. Now Barker is prepared to widen the sense to include obligations towards verbal and cultural purity, and to what, in the Eliotian sense, might be called Tradition. Thus when he speaks of Eliot as "a memory reminding us at all times / Of our responsibilities", he has in mind not only the idea of a Christian society as expounded in Eliot's later diagnostic writings, not merely the state of conduct in the post-industrial world (the 'unreal city' of The Waste Land), but the poet's total responsibility both to his times and to what has preceded and will follow him. This becomes clearer in the second part in which Barker is concerned to situate Eliot in time as one who exacted from a previously slack and enfeebled cultural milieu a new and bracing conception of its directives. Thus the "chaffering of poetic riff raff" of the Georgians gave way to the "rigorous definitions" imposed by Eliot's own criticism. It was a contribution to the artistic self-awareness of a generation which caused a revision not merely of the poetic language of the present but a renewed sense of responsibility towards the past, a fresh solicitude for the future. In that sense it was a contribution to the unfolding of a tradition.

The last section of the poem is concerned with the prospects of a future released from the exactions of Eliot's scrupulous conscience. Eliot is a guardian of coherent values as before; but now, in long shot, he appears as an inceptor, the one title which the earlier 'Note' denied him. The comparison to Rahere, jester, visionary and founder of St Bartholomew's hospital and the Church of St Bartholomew the Great, sets the tone. The dedication, the idealism and the whimsicality of
Rahere are properties Barker has already discerned in his master: but he is now prepared to grant him, not merely the trusteeship of a tradition, but the foundation of certainties on which others may build. Without him there is a loss not merely of leadership, but of direction. The future is unknown, but this is where Barker takes his leave of him disappearing into a darkness he may not penetrate, presided over by the eerie presence of Rhadamanthus, Egyptian God of the Dead.

Death itself is a major theme in the poetry of Dreams on a Summer Night, much of which is devoted to a sequence of Memorials for Dead Friends. It is a theme taken up in the next volume Poems of Places and People, where, however, it achieves great intellectual definition. The 'Letter to the Corpse of T. S. Eliot' from that book can credibly be understood only in the context of the argument pervading the whole as to the impossibility of consecutive theoretical knowledge. It was a theme to preoccupy Barker for the next twelve years. The long elegy with which the book commences, 'At Thurgarton Church', points the way with its lament for lost coherences:

The proud flesh cries: I am not
caught up in the great cloud
of my unknowing. But that
proud flesh has endowed
us with the cloud we know.

Thus in the 'Letter' Eliot features as the bearer of intellectual definitions, the fabricator of steadying truths, much as he had in the Elegiacs. These, however, are now suspect roles, viewed in the light of Barker's renewed sense of the futility of all apparent precision:
What amulet is yours, what talisman carries your code to me now, what message could like the serpent of knowledge around that head once so truly given to the precise form of a seeming meaning?67

It is not Eliot who has changed, nor Barker's view of him. The 'precision' ascribed to him here is of a kind with the "accurate eye" with which he was held to observe humanity in the earlier birthday tribute. The reference to the "serpent of knowledge" takes us back to the sonnet on Baudelaire, with its view of the French poet's inverted sainthood, derived for the most part from Eliot's essay. There as here the serpent connoted the knowledge of Good and Evil, but whereas in these early pieces spiritual knowledge, even of a perverted kind, was seen as the path to wisdom, or at least to spiritual energy, here the snake writhing round Eliot's temples, like the serpent of the Egyptian (well seem to point to the devi0ness of intellectual sophistication.

The 'Letter addressed to the Corpse of Eliot' takes the form of a dramatic monologue in which the voice of the poet, undulating through its serpentine lines, makes a desperate attempt at communication with one who is felt, even in a notional sense, to have no continuing being. By definition, there can be no reply. Where 'At Thurgarton
Church' is a poem of a grieving agnostic, the Letter is a cry from a heart-broken agnostic. The sense of absolute helplessness induced by this state of non-communication may have its roots in the six-line poem 'Epitaph for the Poet' printed in the Collected Poems immediately after the birthday tribute to Eliot:

The single sleeper lying here
Is neither lying nor asleep.
Bend down your nosey parker ear
And eavesdrop on him. In the deep
Conundrum of the dirt he speaks
The one word you will never hear.68

There is much cogency in applying these lines to the Eliot of the nineteen forties, concerned as he was with a species of mystical knowledge which the rational intelligence may not fathom. Yet these are lines of commendation, and the "word" which the poet triumphantly possesses is a noble thing. By the time of the Letter the word has wrinkled to nothing, and not even the intuitive knowledge of a fellow poet may make it out. The Letter, one notices, is addressed, not to the shade, but to the corpse of Eliot. The strong implication behind both the title and the poetry which follows is that, with the exception of his physical remains, the man has to all intents and purposes disappeared.

Yet, despite the informing despair, there is one saving grace. The uncertainty to which, in this poem, all knowledge is seen to be subject extends to the knowledge of negation itself. Not only are we unsure of religious truth; we are even unsure of our absence of faith.
It is thus that the syntax of the poem follows a circuitous route around qualification after qualification, piled up in an attempt to define the exact level of our ignorance:

What word should I use to reach down into the mysteries of a Somerset grave or upward into what I do not see or if I see do not know what it is that I see?  

Bereft of any authentic answer the poet is forced to resort to a sort of ventriloquism. The "hollow head" is speechless, but in the mind's ear arise cries of "the lonely bittern at / evening by the lake" and the "torn out tongue / of the lark", voices which beckon from those that lawless and uncertain thoughts imagine howling. Deprived of knowledge, experience, or faith, the poet is driven back on his own imagination, fed by the resources of racial memory and folklore. For, as he strains his ear to the dust to interpret the inaudible syllables of his mentor's posthumous voice, he is left listening to a language beyond speech:
What

is it. What is it. What.

I hear you. I hear
you. I hear you. 70

After five attempts to define the mystery of Eliot, Barker, his
aging protege, is forced to admit that Eliot has disappeared, and the
mystery has enveloped him.
NOTES AND REFERENCES


2 Conversations with Barker, Bintry House, Itteringham, Norfolk, 26 October 1981. These informal discussions pre-dated the taped interview by one year, and have therefore to be distinguished from it. Subsequent references will be to 'Conversations, 1981'.

3 'Coming to London', p. 68.

4 Essays, p. 72.

5 Conversations, 1981.


14 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', Part I in *The Egoist* VI, No. 4, September, 1919, pp. 54-55; Part 2 in VI, No. 5, December 1919, pp. 72-73. Repr. in *The Sacred Wood* (London: Methuen, 1920), pp. 42-53. Though I can find no published reference to this source earlier than the 'Note on Eliot' of 1948 (see appendix A), 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' was widely available long before then, and the terms in which Barker discusses the issue of 'impersonality' in the 1930s are recognizably indebted to Eliot's essay, to which he appears to owe, not merely the premisses of his argument in the reviews and articles discussed here, but also, as we have already seen, his understanding of the meaning of a tradition.


16 'Poetry and Reality', *The Criterion*, XVII, October 1937, pp. 54-66. Repr. in *Essays*, pp. 79-90. All subsequent page references are to the *Essays* reprinting.


20 'A Conversation between Robert Fraser and George Barker', in *P. N. Review*, 9, No. 5, p. 47.

22 David Gascoyne, 'George Barker at Seventy' in *P. N. Review*, 9 No. 5, p. 60.


25 This sonnet is printed as Section IV of the fifth of the 'Sacred Elegies' in *Eros in Dogma* (London: Faber, 1944) and reprinted in *Collected Poems*, p. 128. In *Eros in Dogma*, the sectional heading is 'The Separation of Man from God', but in *Collected Poems* this is omitted.


27 *Essays*, p. 72.


29 Fodaski, n., p. 175.


One eight line section of this reads:

What I am moved to put to you here and now
as we both walk towards the blackwater river
is the proposition that even Augustine can seem
sometimes to be the two-handed instrument
of what we have no better word for than evil.
"All nature, insomuch as it is nature,
is good." What then, is the origin of evil
if not the impulse of the natural man?


I have in mind especially a stanza to which Swift (Homage to George Barker, p. 60) also alludes:

And out of the horn rumpled sheet
Where nightlong in their forking lock
The kissing kissers slew and mock
That image from which they were cast -
Out of that fouled and rocking nest
In which those justly outcast meet
And mount like stray dogs in the street -
Out, out the innocent image steps.

(Collected Poems, p. 198)

Maurice Carpenter, A Rebel in the Thirties, (London: Paperbag Book Club, 1973), pp. 44-55. The relevant passage was also reprinted from Carpenter's manuscript in Homage to George Barker, p. 44.


Carpenter, p. 44.

The Dead Seagull, p. 127.

The Dead Seagull, p. 101.


The Dead Seagull, p. 42.

The Dead Seagull, p. 43.
44 The Dead Seagull, p. 44.

45 The Dead Seagull, p. 45.

46 The Dead Seagull, p. 46.

47 The Dead Seagull, p. 133.

48 The Dead Seagull, p. 41.

49 The Dead Seagull, p. 82.

50 The Dead Seagull, p. 50.

51 The Dead Seagull, p. 103.

52 The Dead Seagull, p. 52.

53 The Dead Seagull, p. 53.


56 Conversations with John Heath-Stubbs.

57 The fifth of the 'Supplementary Personal Sonnets' from Eros in Dogma, p. 59 Repr. in Collected Poems, p. 153.


Dreams of a Summer Night, pp. 30-32.


*Poems of Places and People*, pp. 31-32.

*Collected Poems*, p. 178


*Poems of Places and People*, p. 32.
The Catholic sensibility which we observe in the poetry of Barker's later years has roots which extend back way beyond the formation of that nexus of theological belief and doubt which we had reason to discuss in the last chapter. As in the closing lines of his 'Letter addressed to the Corpse of Eliot' Barker records his reluctant sense of the certainty of extinction, he is reviving a theme and a tone of existential longing which carry the reader back further even than that day in Spring 1934 when Barker and Eliot met, to a strain of metaphysical nostalgia which echoes through the 'Elegiac Stanzas' with which Thirty Preliminary Poems (1933) begin:

Under the drifting land
Whose sifting hand
Claims one day or later
All matter's limbs

And sparkling veins
Escape in dark wooded places
Runnelling like willow trees
The lachrymose moist soil

Erasure of our pain
Cessation of unease, whose cancellation
Of decayed disgraces, perhaps gain
A less agitant more absolute location.
The cautious optimist of "perhaps gain", the oracular, civilized rotundity of "decayed disgraces", the final feeling of rest in some "absolute location"; all of these seem to speak of a cluster of feelings which have no immediate provenance in the spiritual atmosphere of the early thirties. This is not late Romantic angst or, despite the youthful self-consciousness of the phrasing, superfluous morbidity. There is something about the mood and cadence of these lines which appears to reach back to a time of sanctified, trusting consensus.

Much as Barker's religious upbringing may help us to understand this particular strain of feeling in his early verse, there are other factors which must be accounted for. From the time of his first cautious experiments with literature in his early teens, Barker had soaked himself in the poetry of the English Middle Ages. As he later recalls, impressions of the medieval scene were closely connected with the first impulse to write. He can still remember sitting at the age of ten in a back room of his parents' cramped tenement house in Chelsea watching rainwater dancing on the outside of the frosted window pane. As the patterns made by the water drops gradually arranged themselves into the outline of jousting knights, he tried to convey his reactions in a straggling work cast in the stanza of The Faerie Queene which he entitled The Tournament. He had not at the time encountered Spenser: both the form of the experience and the artistic shape which it assumed suggest less an acquaintance with Elizabethan or earlier literature than an exposure to nineteenth century Romance: a reading of Scott perhaps, together with a familiarity with such Romantic revivals of the Spenserian stanza as Keats's 'The Eve of St Agnes'. Within a few years, however, a diffuse and deflected impression of the Middle Ages gave way to a direct involvement with the literature of the period itself, a process much speeded up when, on his twenty first birthday, a
well-wisher bought him an entry to the London Library, on whose open shelves he encountered the editions of the Early English Text Society. Thus when, in the essay 'Coming to London' of 1957 he records himself as having, prior to his departure from the capital in 1935, "fallen in love with the whole of Middle English Poetry", he is in fact glossing over something much more specific: his growing sense of unease at the discrepancy between the popularized versions of medieval lyrics available in the anthologies of the time and his awareness of the true richness of this literature culled from the facsimiles to which, in the Library's precincts, he had access. From the beginning his appreciation of Middle English poetry would seem to have been both scholarly and creative, and these two facets to have proceeded hand in hand. Thus his sense of himself as an artist with a concern for his text made him anxious about the activities of less scrupulous editors and anthologists, while his immersion in the original texts fed him ideas for the arrangement of his own writing. It is this double focus which we shall have reason to examine in this chapter, where I shall try to suggest the way in which, during the course of his writing and reading life, Barker's loyalty tended to shift from the more florid examples of medieval artistry to an appreciation of the simplicity and directness of particular forms, and of the amorous and religious lyric, and the ballad in particular. We begin with a consideration of the one poem from the whole period of the Middle Ages which for Barker appears to distil the true appeal which the literature of the ages of faith can still make to our own.
In 1936, during a conversation with his publisher T. S. Eliot the twenty-three year old Barker happened to mention his early affection for the anonymous medieval lyric 'Quia Amore Languedo', and his regret that a version of the full text was not widely available in printed form. Fragmented versions of the poem were at the time relatively commonplace. One section, comprising 'The Appeal of Christ to Man' was, for example, included in incomplete form in the popular anthology Early English Lyrics, Amorous, Divine, Moral and Trivial edited by E. K. Chambers and F. Sidgwick, published in London in 1908 and continually reprinted. A different version of the same part was also to be found in The Oxford Book of English Verse (1900), where Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch acknowledges as his source a 'redaction' by A. C. Beeching, a poet whom he apparently admired. From his browsing in the London Library among the editions of the Early English Text Society, however, Barker was conscious that these modernized fragments of the Poem did not represent the whole truth. In 1866, for example, the Society had issued a miscellaneous volume (No. 15 in their series) edited by F. J. Furnivall and entitled Political, Religious and Love Poems. Drawing on an original manuscript in the library of Lambeth Palace, this supplies the reader with a complete text of both parts of the poem, including the hauntingly beautiful 'Appeal of the Virgin to Man', by which Barker was so impressed that by 1936 he had it by heart.

Eliot agreed that the failure to make the lyric in its entirety to the general reader marked a sorry omission, and thus undertook to contact a qualified editor who could be entrusted with the task of providing a convenient edition. As a result, in the following year, Faber were able to bring out a slim volume called Quia Amore Languedo edited by H. S. Bennett of Emmanuel College, Cambridge with
engravings by Eric Gill in his best erotic/religious manner. This slender book reproduces in modern type 'The Appeal of the Blessed Virgin to Man' in a comparative version drawn from two sources, the manuscript Douce 322 in the Bodleian and a slight variant from the British Museum Additional MS 37049. It follows this with two versions of the more familiar 'Appeal of Christ to Man' extracted from both available sources, a late fifteenth century manuscript in the University Library, Cambridge (H. h. 4. 12), and the Lambeth Manuscript 853 on which Furnivall had drawn.

Considering the circumstances which led to the book's commission, it is hardly surprising that, upon its appearance, Eliot should have asked Barker to review it for The Criterion. Barker's review, which is reproduced in Appendix B, aims to establish the poem in the reader's mind as the quite exceptional masterpiece he took it to be. It concentrates very much on the factors which the reviewer believed to have denied the poem this fundamental recognition. Three whipping-boys feature prominently: Quiller-Couch, in whose Oxford Book Barker had first encountered a bowdlerized version of the poem; E. M. W. Tillyard, who in Poetry Direct and Indirect (1934) had dealt it grudging praise; and Robert Bridges whose editorial treatment of his friend Hopkins' manuscripts represented in Barker's eyes, as we shall see in Chapter Seven, a very similar sort of narrow-mindedness. Bearing in mind the centrality of Tillyard to the argument - a significance which Barker repeats in his interview of 1982, it is as well to bear in mind his actual remarks on the poem. He is speaking of the factors which, in the earlier part of the twentieth century, had combined to bring the idea of 'sensibility' into disrepute:
What cheapened sensibility was the habit of describing it directly by its symptoms instead of expressing it obliquely through the various parts of the poem. Some of the great Romantic poets indeed described the symptoms admirably, but they left a method far too easily imitable by anyone who fancied himself more sensitive than his fellows. Earlier, through the discipline of oblique expression all excessive sensibility must have been discouraged, and, when got through, it had been changed and purified. For example, Quia Amore Langueo is a poem of sensibility, and of a kind that might well have become nauseatingly lush if it had been allowed to spread out into a substantive form.\textsuperscript{12}

Tillyard here is concerned with the medieval poem as an instance of the sort of obliquity which refines sentiments which, stated directly, might be embarrassing or otherwise unacceptable. His objection, then, confines itself to the nature of the underlying emotional content. He has no objection to the form which, on the contrary, bottles up the gush of raw passion in becoming jade. What caused Barker's anger, apparently, was a suspicion of certain unstated reasons which he believed to have prompted Tillyard to find the essential emotion unacceptable in the first place. Though Tillyard nowhere clarifies his reasons, and though Barker himself is reticent as to the grounds of his objection, the reference earlier in Barker's review to "too many professors of Literature" combined with his aversion, already examined, to the school of criticism associated with the name of I. A. Richards (and subsequently, as we shall see, F. R. Leavis) leads one to suppose that what he has primarily in mind is the imposition of a narrow, provincially English, castratedly academic notion of 'taste' on to the uninhibited stream of feeling which flows beneath the serene surface of the poem. It is this narrowness of taste which he associates both with the "literary decorum" which in New Bearings Leavis had seen as the root cause of Bridges editorial timidity, and with the scholarly
bashfulness which had led Quiller-Couch in the Oxford Book to leave out full half the text.

There is, however, another likely reason for Barker's dissatisfaction. The section of the poem which both Quiller-Couch and Chambers had decided to exclude, and which Bennett had been able to restore, was none other than 'The Appeal of the Virgin to Man', in which an element of subdued Mariolatry is present. The reluctance of Quiller-Couch and Chambers to include it, then, like Tillyard's objection to the emotional content of the whole, and like, too, Bridges' editorial nervousness over Hopkins, reeked for Barker of the imposition of Protestant norms over Catholic ones. The point may be reinforced by a brief extract from the Bodleian manuscript as given by Bennett:

In a tabernacle of a toure
as I stode musyng on the mone,
a crownd quene most of honoure
apered in gostly syght ful sone.
She made compleynt thus by hyr one,
For mannes soule is wrapped in wo:
I may nat leve mankynde allone
Quia amore languco.

I longe for love of man my brother.
I am hys voket to voyde his vyce;
I am hys moder - I can none other -
why shuld I my dere chylde dispyce?
Yef he me wrathe in diverse wyse
through flesshes freelte fall me fro
yet must we rewe hym tyll he ryse
There are many things about these lines which may have appealed to Barker. Doctrinally they are orthodox in a way which would have struck chords in his Irish Catholic nature. But there is something more than this, something very amenable to the sort of vision of life which we find repeatedly throughout his writing. 'The Appeal of the Virgin to Man' occupies that segment of the spectrum of medieval emotion where the religious and the erotic fuse. It is poetry which is adamant in its insistence on the absoluteness of the response required, and yet, as Tillyard also noted, it scrupulously avoids hysteria or undecorous flamboyance. To the extent that it moves — and the effect, as most readers will concede, is very strong — it moves as superlatively executed sculpture moves, or, more exquisitely, in the manner of a medieval or early Renaissance Italian triptych or altarpiece. About this poetry, as about little else in later English verse, there is a distanced but pleading remoteness which puts one in mind of the finer achievements of the Quattrocento.

There is abundant evidence that it is precisely this quality of frozen, semi-graphic restraint, in which feeling lies suspended and gesture is arrested in a phase of motionless eloquence, which interested Barker, not only in 'Quia Amore Languelo' itself, but in much medieval religious art. In his essay 'Coming to London' he recalls in his late teens playing truant from the menial jobs which he was obliged to take shortly after leaving the Regent Street Polytechnic by escaping into the depths of the National Gallery where "great paintings, like dolled-up women, wait to be admired." The reference to the stately elegance of formally dressed female figures goes some way to suggest the sort of picture which attracted his special devotion. Earlier the essay mentions
'the Duchess of Milan in a black dress', an allusion to the portrait of Christina of Denmark by Hans Holbein the Younger, which still hangs in the gallery to this day (see Appendix B). The qualities of that painting, however: dignity, and a calm maternal solicitude - are but reflections of the style of another, and earlier artist, with whose work, as he today acknowledges, Barker was at the time even more closely involved: Carlo Crivelli (c 1457-1493), six of whose works, including the famous Demidoff Altarpiece, now hang in Room Twelve. The Crivelli collection consists entirely of religious works, all of which concentrate on the Madonna and Saints (Saint Sebastian, constantly invoked in The Dead Seagull, is prominent), framed in most instances by a cornucopia of hanging fruit. The panel from the altarpiece reproduced in Appendix B alongside the Holbein, may help to suggest some of the properties which Crivelli has in common with English medieval meditative verse, and with 'The Appeal of the Virgin to Man' in particular.

The Madonna is seated on a throne in the centre of the panel with the Christ child held lightly in her lap. Though both have haloes, Our Saviour looks like a very ordinary, endearingly vulnerable baby sleeping with his head drooping on to his mother's left wrist. By contrast, the Virgin's posture is square-shouldered and formal, the upper part of her cloak hanging tightly over her torso, her position symmetrical as in an eikon. Two features offset the formality. The Madonna's right hand, elegantly slim, is held above her son's sleeping head in a gesture of arrested benediction, while on her face, tilted slightly to one side, dwells an expression of undeniable sadness. The abundance of fruit on either side of the throne suggests munificence and overflowing Charity; the far-away look in her eyes, the slight pout of the delicate mouth, the desolation of thwarted love. Without overstressing its doctrinal connotations, the whole composition contrives to suggest limitless Grace.
held just beyond the grasp of the viewer - or, in the original setting, worshipper - whose reluctance to sacrifice all in reciprocal devotion is dimly felt as the cause of the Virgin's dejection.

It was not long before Barker felt moved to imitate the effect of the Crivelli paintings in verse. Some time between 1933 and 1935 - the dates of his first two volumes - a miscarriage suffered by his first wife Jessica Woodward\(^1\) supplied the impulse behind 'Luctus in Morte Infantis':

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Count them as they cluster
Like young frond around
That passing throne a cloud
Embellishing their master!

Thousand on thousand, charming
The upward birds, that ascend
To take the recent hand
In support in first performing.

O that adept evader
Of the bubble or bomb
Who from the immediate womb
Leaped cloudward, to border

The budded throne! He, though scarce
Earth breathing once
Intuitively analyzed the air
Contagious of fatal and sour
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III, so sprang
Immaculate with his spring
Upon the skies' steps
Laughing with his leaps.

His radiant flesh is
Interchangeable
With his spirit’s iridescent;
Which up flies we cannot tell

Distinguishing, only the flash
Of that ascendant flame,
For barely his spirit flesh
In being became.

Oh in summer he came with roses
And with them rose
Over the rose trees, and over
The mountains and the roseate clouds, never

With next summer or often
To visit with them, and laughter,
The gardens, nor to know
From whom he was called to go.

The incident is identical with that behind the "bare bloodred babe" of Calamiterror (1937) which we will discuss in our next chapter, and which, although published two years later, was also begun at this time. In 1982 Barker recalled the origin of the visual imagery in the earlier
That's Carlo Crivelli. I remember writing that poem (and I wrote that poem one hell of a long time ago). I can still see in my mind's eye now a Carlo Crivelli with two lovely pillars which looked as if they were made of either wood or stone, and a wonderful Madonna with one of those little pomegranates and a baby... 

Though the altarpiece might be in question, the reference to "columns" seems to identify this picture as 'Virgin and Child Enthroned' (National Gallery, No. 307), in which the Madonna and Christ again occupy the centre of the picture, flanked this time by veined marble columns. To the right stands St. Francis, and to the left St. Sebastian, both of whom, as we shall see, feature in Barker's work. The puzzling aspect of the poem, however, is its upward momentum which corresponds with nothing in either of the two pictures already discussed. The only item in the Gallery's Crivelli collection which contains an element of heavenward flight is his Vision of the Blessed Gabriel (No. 668), in which the Saint kneels before an elliptical miniature of the Virgin and Child elevated to glory. Around the top of the picture hangs a branch from a tree festooned with fruit. This picture was purchased by the gallery in 1861, and Barker must have seen it. There is another canvas from the Gallery, however, which probably supplied at least some of the visual details: Tintoretto's The Origin of the Milky Way, a detail from which is also included in Appendix B. This painting, which was one of Barker's favourites at the time, shows the stars being formed out of milk sprouting from the breasts of Juno; it has all of the energy and cosmic movement which the Crivellis lack. Undeniably, however, the final serene effect of 'Luctus in Morte Infantis' is closer to Crivelli than to Tintoretto. Both the poem and Crivelli's Virgins possess a quality of suspended animation, and both are suggestive of an
"evasion" of offered possibilities, even if, in Barker's case this sense is complicated by his Pascalian dread of human contagion (topically focused on the "bomb"), the "fatal and sour" from which the child has attained a happy release. The qualities which Crivelli and this poem have in common, moreover, are more important than those which divide them. Both spring from a Catholic imagination in which ritualized feeling is second nature and the Christ Child the ultimate channel for frustrated personal feeling.

In Tillyard's *Poetry Direct and Oblique* of which, in his review of the Bennett *Quia Amor* Barker is so quick to disapprove, there is a relevant discussion of the way in which early religious art may distil urgent private feeling without in any way betraying the reverend decorum of the worshipper. His example is the basilica of S. Apollinare Nuovo in Ravenna built by Theodoric the Great around 500 A.D. where, below the windows of the nave, stands a frieze of Christian Saints and Virgins, of which Tillyard comments:

The Virgins, executed in a broken, glittering, large-pieced technique, flash at you with a variety that multiplies as you look. The monotony of the face is the proper balance of the ever-changing flicker of the gorgeous dress, saving from total immersion in a sea of shifting patterns. Not that the figures grow any more human when looked at any longer: they grow less so.  

Tillyard later states that the nearest literary equivalent to the obliquity thus described is the great thirteenth century Franciscan hymn *Stabat Mater*, then ascribed to Jacopone da Todi (d. 1306). After quoting the first two stanzas of the Latin text, he continues:
However impressive, the hymn is direct: it does not go beyond describing and emphasizing the scene it describes. And the larger obliquity of which it forms a part is not literary but active and ritual.22

Twenty nine years after the appearance of his review we find Barker, not long returned from a second period of Italian residence, giving us a literal translation of the Latin hymn, remarkable for its simple and direct language:

The sorrowing mother was
standing beside the cross
her son died on
as through her heart of hearts
pain like a flock of darts
flew sobbing in.

O such affliction then
the mother of this son
knew as she saw him,
she trembled where she stood
felt her own flesh and blood
rush to adore him.

Who is the one will not
weep to see all that
this woman suffers?
who without compassion
look on the immolation
that she offers?23
The parity of feeling between this and the suppressed ardour which both Barker and Tillyard, despite their disagreement, sense in 'Quia Amore Languo' does not need to be emphasized. Nor does the statuesque dignity of the Virgin and Son depicted in the poem, reflective of a similar perspective to that found in the paintings of Crivelli. There is, however, another quality here which Barker's earlier reworkings of the medieval would not have led us to suspect: an austerity and economy of style very different from that in the pre-war writing. From henceforth, so it seems, to be medieval for Barker is to be simple, and through simplicity to express 'direct' feelings. The result is strong, accessible language such as in the poetry of the English Middle Ages is alone to be found in the religious and amorous lyrics, and, in a very different way, in the ballad. It is a connection which we will come to very soon.

Meanwhile, an anecdote of Barker's perfectly illustrates our drift. When, during the early 'sixties, he made a visit to Assisi whilst living in Italy, he had reason to ask the monks from the Monastery at which he was staying what recompense he should make for the board and lodging with which they had so courteously provided him. Their answer was that it would suffice if, during his stay, he produced just "one little poem". The result was:

A Little Song in Assisi

Sprightly the cockrowing
Sun from that stone bed
High in the hilly morning
where a saint lay down his head
steps gallivanting.

All small things including
bird lizard and beast
and the dayspring beginning
dance from the doors of the east
like lambs skedaddling.

There is such an alighting
tenderness in the air
like wings after hovering
that a dove might be here
hidden but apprehending.

Peasant and priest toiling
over the patched hill side,
the acolyte at his hoeing
seen from that iron tressel
the saint's huge brother rising

until, like a lark, lifting
the valleyed Umbrian veils,
the heart of Francis, dazzling
bird in the air, reveals
the grace of that ragged man
transfiguring everywhere. 24
Once again the simplicity, the gravity of attention, the pure ceremony of form, observable in the orchestration of the dawn and the directness of nature's praise for its creator, all focused upon the unpretentious, ragamuffin presence of Saint Francis, patron saint of all things simple. Behind the lucid façade, however, glows not only strong feeling but the sort of literary intelligence which in the seemingly commonplace of the jumping sun is able to recall a moment from Dante's *Purgatorio* illustrated in Blake's engravings. It is with the influence of the poetry of the English Middle Ages, however, that, in deference to our title, we have chosen primarily to concern ourselves. We must therefore turn now to another, and more quintessentially English mediæval tradition which can be seen as active in Barker's work from his early twenties on.

II

*Quia Amore Langueo* was far from the only medieval English text of which Barker would have found editions on the shelves of the London Library. The Library stocked all of the titles in the series issued by the Early English Text Society. Prominent amongst them were late medieval texts pertaining to two distinctive but related traditions: the Dance of Death and the Debate. There is much evidence that, during the first three years of his publishing life, Barker was much preoccupied with both of these motifs, which constantly turn up in his writing, sometimes independently, and sometimes together. They provided him with a way of realizing in his prose and poetry of the period the issues of mortality which, as we have already seen, obsessed him from early on. And though the influence of medieval genres soon faded, the
subtler effect on Barker's writing was permanent, and can be observed in a modified form to this day.

It was in his prose in which the first unmistakeable signs appeared. Janus, published by Faber in the same year as the 1935 volume, consists of two contrasted novellas: The Bacchant, executed at great speed between 10th and 22nd January 1934, shortly after the arrival of Barker and his wife at a cottage in Piddlethrenhde, Dorset, loaned to them by his first publisher, David Archer (to whom the book is part dedicated) and The Documents of a Death, completed on November 2nd of the same year. In the printed text the stories appear in the opposite order to their writing, so that the comparatively mordant Documents of a Death sets the opening tone. Between its title page and the beginning of the main text appears a transcription of the meditative medieval lyric 'Erthe out of Erthe' in a fifteenth century version drawn from the Thornton Manuscript in the library of Lincoln Cathedral (see Appendix B).

The Thornton version of the poem appears in the Chambers anthology already mentioned. In 1934, however, there were two editions issued by the Early English Text Society which Barker could also have consulted: Perry's Religious Poems in Prose and Verse (1889) and a comparative edition of twenty four manuscripts of the poem edited by Hilda Murray of Royal Holloway College in 1911. Although Barker's punctuation is identical to Chambers's, there are two reasons why it seems likely that he had looked at Murray's work. In the first place, his positioning of the poem as an implied prologue to the story which follows is in accordance with the observation in her Introduction that the poem "was frequently inserted on the spare leaves at the beginning and end of a manuscript". Including the text at the very beginning of his own book, then, Barker may well have felt that he was being true to
medieval precedent. Secondly, the version he gives differs from Chambers's in three places. His first line was "wondirily" rather than "wondirily" wrought; his second "on erthe" for "one erthe", and his sixteenth "into erthe" for "unto erthe". Though the second and third of these variants might have been due to personal taste or oversight, the first strongly suggests an acquaintance with the longer version reproduced by Murray from the Porkington Manuscript.

If Barker was aware of the Porkington Manuscript, it would have strengthened his appreciation of a fact which he may in any case have known: namely the strong relationship existing between Erthe out of Erthe and one locus classicus of medieval morality debate, the Visio Philiberti. For Murray's Introduction not only details her sources for the Porkington Manuscript, but also directs the reader to the most conveniently accessible contemporary edition, in the anthology Early English Miscellanies in Prose and Verse (1855) edited by James Halliwell.²⁹ Here the reader would have found 'Erthe upon Erthe' [sic] printed immediately after a contemporary English rendition of the Visio Philiberti itself to which, in the Porkington version, it forms a kind of epilogue. If Barker had seen this, it would provide us with one source for the influence of the morality debate in his work in 1934.

For Janus is not the only work of the period in which a semi-narrative meditation on the theme of death occurs. In October 1934, between the writing of the two halves of that book, Eliot had chosen to include in The Criterion a short piece in dialogue form called, after the manner of such works as 'The Owl and the Nightingale', 'The Hawk and the Dove' (see Appendix B). This contains an invitation from a rapacious Hawk to the Dove whom it is about to destroy in mid-air to disclose the secret of its inner serenity:
We are less widely traversing now, my friend: but the accipitune point of death follows on my wing, and must soon strike. If solely to defer for two seconds the certitude of my stroke, divulge to me the declensions of your spirit at this almost posthumous moment.

"Accipitune" is a corruption of "accipiritine" or hawk-like which also finds its way into the fourth of the Ten Sonnets from Thirty Preliminary Poems. Verbal approximations were relatively common in Barker's early work, a fact of which Eliot himself was perfectly aware (See letter from Anne Ridler, Appendix A). This particular inaccurate Latinism, however, seems to point to a reading of medieval bestiaries, in which birds were referred to under their Latin denominations. In any case, throughout 'The Hawk and the Dove' an allegorical mode of thought is clearly intended. The Hawk for instance appears to be symbolic of a pure destructive principle matched against forces of life and growth which it barely comprehends. After killing the Dove in to a tree, it attempts to instil into its victim a sense of the "indescribable geography of unbeing's horror", only to find that the dove welcomes its moment of release:

Hawk, as your shrill beak promises that I need not fear the work of being killed, the act of dying, so the profound foundation of that sleep Love promises that the geography of death resembles the enlarged geography of sleep, whence all hunters have been exorcised. That Death, in fact, magnifies sleep, which, in turn, reduces Love. And I of all creatures have been permitted in living [sic] the authentic sleep of love, rather than the partial admixture of all three, which other creatures experience in living.
Thus, far from fearing death, the Dove regards it as a means to the world of expanded consciousness it had already experienced, more intensely than other creatures, in sleep, in which the dreamer's natural sympathies are enhanced to a pitch of absolute benevolence ("so that, for example, having dreamed of being the Ant, you henceforth decline to dominate the Ant"). In facing physical extinction, therefore, the Dove is enticed by "the unequivocal intimations of celestial smiling, the flight to the sun in spirit rather than form, and the unshakable sleep in love."

This dialectic between the forces of life and death, together with some of the image patterns attending them, is shared by The Documents of a Death, in the opening section of which the emblem of two competing birds is also found:

Poised upon my hands flutter the twin birds, being and unbeing. In diametrical directions exerting their strength, to draw my heart to either respective end. Gradually I am conscious of the moving of my heart to the right side, following the bird of being. I am conscious of no resistance from death's opposing end. Glancing, I observe that the bird of being had reversed its direction and overtaken its ostensible opponent, now extending, compared with the other bird, an enormous breath against which neither the bird of life nor my own strength can offer contention. The lighter bird of being, obstructing my line of sight, entirely conceals the form of the bird of unbeing. But I now know, it is from that latter bird the power moving and drawing me wholly comes. And being, I repeat, acts only the servitor or instrument of death, to whom, as groom the bride to god, being, the minor bird, brings by the body blindfold, the beating soul.\textsuperscript{31}

The last sentence would seem to be a reference to the Visio Philibertii which consists of a philosophical discourse between a body on a bier and the soul which is about to leave it. In the passage from Janus the disputants in the debate are figuratively represented by the
two birds, one of whom, standing for the relatively feeble forces of life 
(or "being", the term repeated in 'The Hawk and the Dove') is 
characterized as "the minor bird", a phrase which three years later 
Barker was to revive and in Calamiterror (1937) apply to his own 
talent. The dialectic then flows straight into the plot of the main 
story, which seems intended to demonstrate that death ("unbeing") can 
only in the end prove stronger than its rival, life, or that in the words 
of the inscription at the end of Erthe out of Erthe, Mors solvit omnia. 

The story is told through the words of a young male narrator, 
whom the reader supposes to have left behind the Documents referred to 
in the title after a final, successful attempt on his own life. His 
despair, and consequent desire to die, are caused by his unreciprocated 
passion for a young man met while on holiday in Capri. When, on their 
joint return to England, the friend rejects his advances, the narrator 
twice attempts to take his life by drowning. On the first occasion he 
is lured to the water's edge by a pale, Narcissus-like face shimmering 
just beneath the surface. This figure never speaks, but beckons as an 
entrancingly anaemic memento mori, imaginatively related to the three 
Narcissus pieces from Poems (1935). In the terms of the prologue, 
he is then symbolically related to "unbeing" and his final success is 
driving the narrator to suicide also seems intended to prove that in the 
end death offers the greater chance of fulfilment. Throughout life on 
the other hand is portrayed as a distracting but hollow pageant, the 
passage of which leaves the protagonist feeling no more than the 
fleeting nostalgic regret evoked by Villon's 'Ballade des Dames du temps 
Jadis', whose refrain ("mais ou sont les neiges d'antan?") is alluded to 
in translation: "I see the streets cluttered with girls in rags, and young 
men, alien as artificial flowers, and I decry the life. Where are the 
snows? Gone, and we are alone." 

Though containing echoes of Barker's poetry of the period, Janus
has no verse equivalent. It was eighteen years before Barker came round to structuring a whole poem on the principle of the medieval debate. It was not until the Christian doctrine of the fall became a major focus of attention in the post-war years that such an enterprise seemed timely. In the 'thirties Barker was, despite his evident interest in religious verse, temporarily agnostic: by the late 'forties, however, he had, as we have seen, returned to the faith bequeathed him by his mother and was increasingly preoccupied by the claims of the spirit in its contest with the rampant flesh. This would seem to have driven him back to the tradition represented by the Visio Philiberti. The tradition is a long one. The Visio itself is but the most famous of its medieval representations; later the line stretches out at least as far as Marvell's 'A Dialogue between the Soul and Created Pleasure'. Arguably, 'Goodman Jacksin and the Angel', the centrepiece of the collection A Vision of Beasts and Gods is a reworking of this seam though without any ostensive reference back to the ultimate medieval sources.

There is, however, good reason to connect the poem with this tradition to which both its own title, and the title of the volume in which it appears, might be taken to refer. There is, moreover, a certain similarity between the discursive shape of Barker's poem and that of the version of the Visio Philiberti found in the Vernon manuscript.

At the commencement of the medieval text the soul chides the body for its fall from prosperity and taunts it with its new impotence: "Wer beth thi londys by extorcyone take? / Thin huz pallys that thou hast belde, and tarys?" Starting up from the bier, the body then accuses the soul of neglecting its responsibilities in refusing to direct its desires aright: "Remember, O soul, what thou hast offendyte / More than I, thou cannyst the not excuse." The soul replies that the charge is unreasonable, since the body would not obey its commands: "But thouz
the world and the fende alsoo / In no wyze wold never assent thereto."
The disputants argue as to which of them stands in greater need of punishment, and the soul, who has already visited Hell, is forced to recount a vision of the Devil and the horror of eternal damnation. Philibertus, the narrator, ends with a solemn vow to dedicate himself to poverty, chastity and obedience.

Barker's poem of 1953 also takes the form of a debate between the physical and mental resources of mankind. Goodman Jacksin, as his name implies, is a prototype of man in his compromised, fallen condition, the prey to sensual feelings, unable to realise his best intentions. He is also, however, a very ordinary Sussex farmer. At the time of writing the poem Barker was living with his third wife Cashenden Cass in a seventeenth century woodman's cottage near Blackdown, Sussex, in deep countryside close to the Surrey border. As, upon its publication, he told the Poetry Book Society:

'Goodman Jacksin and the Angel' derives its topography or setting from the situation of the old cottage in which I live here on the borders of Sussex and Surrey. This cottage is set half a mile up an old public right-of-way through deep woods, and halfway along this lane, dividing Surrey from Sussex, stands a five-barred gate at which this dialogue between a farmer and an angel is supposed to happen.36

The poem shares with the Visio Philiberti a structure of accusation, counter-accusation, and a kind of resolution in which mutual blame and responsibility are acknowledged. It yokes this, however, to an earthy evocation of the details of everyday life. Typical of the technique of the poem is the way in which the five-barred gate on which the farmer is imagined leaning metamorphoses, in the angel's eyes, into "the five-barred star", the pentacle familiar from the Tarot pack as a symbol of worldly prosperity.37
Many influences are at work here. Like Louis MacNeice's 'Eclogue by a Five Barred Gate', which is in some ways similar in form, the poem seems to be drawing on the cult significance of the pentacle resulting from Jessie Weston's discussion of its significance in *From Ritual to Romance* (1920), the effect of which on Barker's work we have already observed. In 1936 Barker had used the pentacle as a political symbol in '5 Stanzas on the 5 Pointed Star'. In *Goodman Jacksin*, however, he is closer to Weston's analysis of it as a fertility symbol, so that, in inviting the farmer to "get dam off the five-barred star", the angel seems to be delivering a challenge to his sexuality, an argument which he backs up by pointing out the intimate connection between sex and death. This the Farmer resists by implying that on the contrary, the process of procreation represents the only visible evidence of immortality that he has. It is an argument on which we touched briefly in the last chapter:

> With these bright eyes I have witnessed
> What the bright ploughshare sees,
> The running generations harnessed
> In green laws to divine decrees:
> The seeding generations under
> Every winter solstice stir,
> And, from the earth at a dead end,
> A daughter rise up, praising her.

In this paradox lies the crux of the poem: that sex, in itself cruel and Evil, gives rise to the miracle of childbirth in which the image of our original innocence is reborn. The Angel and the Farmer then steer
closer to the course of the Visio Philiberti for five stanzas in which each claims credit for the miracle of parenthood, viewed as a means of temporal salvation. The argument here reads as a kind of obverse parody of the medieval text, in which the Body and the Soul each attempt to evade the responsibilities for their mutual damnation:

My Goodman Jacksin, for this prize,
This curious privilege of dirt,
You, man of clay, you, bright of eyes,
Are but responsible in part.
A very little part. You lay
Your rags and bones down in a grave
To fructify dirt in a way -
But this is all the part you have.40

The contest is also like the Middle English text in reaching a rough resolution in which both admit to their insignificance in the face of a mystery of which they both stand in awe. The Angel discloses that in approaching God, the ultimate source of creativity, he is motivated less by love than by dread. The farmer, for his part, can only visualise the Creator as a pallid projection of immortal chastisement, or a narrow and unyielding administrator reminiscent of the Urizen of Blake's Four Zoas. Upon this the Angel tries to kindle the Farmer's imaginative sympathy by suggesting that God shares with him the privilege and indignity of fatherhood: he too has been supplanted by his sons and lived to see them develop a free will at variance with his own. It is thus in his biological role that, paradoxically, Goodman comes closest to the condition of the Father. His immersion in the pleasures of the flesh is
hence partly justified as an attempt to realise the condition of immortality:

Thus the antimony of Love [sic] 
Invents its propositions. We 
- Fourteen stone and an Idea - 
Turned tables truly have.
The sibyl trudges through the mud 
To show me her humility, 
And I trapeze on a dizzy cloud 
To teach Azrael not to fear.41

In the orgasm the human animal experiences a momentary reflection of divine bliss, while at the same time prolonging both the curse and the possibility of expiation. It is with this spicy dialectic that the poem ends: "I and my soul go up in a flash / I and my soul go down."

The debate tradition surfaced again twenty-three years later in the aptly named volume Dialogues etc (1976)42, in which informal meditations on death and time are interdispersed between staged conversations on these topics by the mythological Gog and Magog. If one attempts to read too strict significance into these two figures, however, the guidelines are apt to be confusing. Magog, who is listed in Genesis among Noah's grandsons43 was for Ezekiel one of the neighbouring powers ruled over by 'God, chief prince of Meschech and Tubal', on which the God of Israel wreaked a terrible vengeance.44 For the author of Revelation Gog and Magog were two of the "nations which are in the far quarters of the earth" which after a thousand-year spell Satan gathered to himself in a last-ditch stand against the forces
of Heaven. In addition Gogmagog, as Graves recalls, "was the name of a giant whom 'Brut the Trojan' is said to have defeated at Totnes in Devonshire in his invasion of Britain at the end of the second millenium." Perhaps for connected reasons local tradition preserves Gog and Magog as twin guardians of the City of London, where their statues stand in the City Hall. For Barker, explaining his thinking behind the volume in a radio broadcast, this very confusion is a source of delight:

These two obscure deities or demons represent precisely what they are, obscure deities or demons. They mean almost nothing to us now, and for this reason I felt at liberty to put my own interpretation on them as representing a pair of opposing or sympathetic impulses of the spirit in individual man.

The warring impulses in these dialogues have to do with different ways of reacting to the fact of death, which for the purposes of this collection, is construed as "a state of spiritual paralysis brought about by spiritual cynicism." The first two dialogues occur on either side of a poem, entitled 'Azrafel', which describes the arrival of the Hebrew and Islamic Angel of Death in an unguarded moment. In the first, Magog accuses his fellow demon of cultivating precisely the sort of neglect which invites death's entrance, only to find that Gog has all along been active in instigating his murder:

Gog: Where were you when the angel called
banging at the door?

Magog: I was too fast asleep to know
what he was banging for.
Where were you when they blew my brains like eggs out on the bed?

Gog: I was standing with a little gun pointed at your head. 48

It is at this point that one realises why Barker is so indifferent to Gog and Magog's precise historical significance. The biblical and other sources are irrelevant to his treatment of these figures, who serve as embodiments just shadowy enough to allow to filter through the last quixotic flickerings of those two personae of medieval debate: the soul and the body. The comedy relieves them of much of their portentousness, since they act throughout rather like a music-hall act, comedian and feed, a Laurel and Hardy duo whose solemn faces provoke a mixture of laughter and tears. They are, however, just differentiated enough for us to discover in the manically irresponsible Gog with his juvenile pranks aimed at a high-minded elder brother, a reflection of the body in its contest with the soul. Like the soul and the body, too, they end by getting their heads together. Their altercation lasts for only the first two dialogues; beyond they sing a common song of dread and forboding.

A remarkable feature of Dialogues is the simplicity of its technique in comparison with that of A Vision of Beast and Gods of two decades earlier. Throughout the 'sixties Barker had, as we shall see, increasingly preoccupied with ballad forms as a catalyst for the right kind of lucidity and directness, a development which culminated in The Golden Chains of 1968. The form of the stanzas already quoted from the first dialogue is recognisably that of, for instance, the Ballad of Sir Patrick Spens, with its alternating lines of four and three stresses. It is the stanza form used for five of the eight dialogues, the others being
in free verse. In the *Dialogues* it would appear then that two very different medieval legacies come together: on the one hand, the highly literary debate, on the other, the oral ballad, which we will discuss in due course.

III

By now it should be evident that Barker's attraction to the poetic legacy of the Middle Ages has been both thematic and structural. The debate tradition supplied him with a neat quasi-dramatic form on which to hang his insights into the spiritual condition of man, insights which in turn hold a deep affinity with medieval teaching on mortality and transience. The direct influence of the debate tradition is, however, intermittent. There is also, however, a far more pervasive manner in which Barker's poetry has been influenced by medieval models, and this has less to do with theme of structure than the sound of the verse in the head. The poetry of the early or very late Middle Ages is of less relevance here. The sound which echoes through much of the verse, especially up to 1950, often owes much, however, to the poetry of what in the 13th was still known as the 'alliterative revival', and to *Piers Plowman* in particular.

To identify the elements in Langland's technique which particularly interested Barker, it may prove instructive to quote a few lines from the fifth Passus in the B text from the edition which he himself consulted in the 'thirties;
PERONELLE PRAVDE-HERTHE • PLATTE HIR TO THE ERTHE,
And lay longe ar she loked • and 'lorde, mercy!' cryed
And byhizte to him • that us alle made,
She shulde unsowen hir serke • and sette there an heyre
To affaiten hire flessche • that fierce was to synne:
'Shal neuere heize herte me herte • but holde me lowe,
And suffre to be myssayde • and so did I neuere.
But now wil I meke me • and mercy biseche,
For al this I have • hated in myne herte.49

This passage, from Pride's confession during the pageant of the Seven
Deadly Sins may be used to illustrate Skeat's view of Langland's
prosody, and more especially the extent to which Piers Plowman was
thought to hark back to Anglo-Saxon models. In such lines, Skeat thought,
alliterative lines of the Old English form had been coupled together to
construct longer lines sub-divided by a pause or caesura adopted from
French verse. Within each line the unifying principles were held to be
alliterative and accentual. The metric norm is expressed by lines 63,
65, 67, 70 and 71, in which there are two stresses or "loud syllables" in
each half-line. Lines 64, 66 and 68, on the other hand, illustrate
Skeat's observation that "more than two (loud syllables) are frequently
found in the first half-line, but rarely in the second."50 The
alliterative content of each line is effectively controlled by the first
loud syllable in the second half, called by Skeat the "chief letter". With it agree two of the stressed syllables in the first half, which share
with it either an initial consonant or a vowel. Thus the chief letter of
line 67 falls on the highlighted syllable "fierce" with which agree both
'affaiten' and 'flesshe'; that of line 70 on "mercy" with which agree
"meke" and "me". Lines 64 and 66 offer an intensification of the alliterative effect in which there are three agreeing syllables or 'sub-letters' in the first half. In sum, it is reasonable to say that two predominant aural effects remain in the memory after reading: the first has to do with the fall of alliterated syllables, the second with the momentary hush which occurs half-way through each line, causing a slight lull in the onward momentum of the verse similar to a formata at the end of a musical phrase. Both of these principles have had their effect on Barker's poetry, though the manner in which they manifest themselves has changed from one period to another.

At first the medieval echoes had to wrestle with those from other sources, reaching an unsatisfactory compromise. A sonnet from Thirty Preliminary Poems furnishes an early example of a poem which, in an attempt to integrate a diversity of influences, stretches a received form almost to breaking point:

Dark dreadful death I dread your approach:
Knowing as I know you roll nearer every hour,
Fear of your fearful embrace spreads great folds
Of coldness like an ocean over me; I cry, How
How can I withstand, stand up, repel
The ever invading eternal wave whose swell
Beginning at birth, declines into what afterwards
Reaching its crested height at the second the heart
Sick of resistance, sinks to succumb like a stone
Marking the moment buoyant life departed.
Not beaten, not beaten, but utterly fatigued
These four limbs fall deaf to the word defeat:
Aware by divine kindness that this descent
Through cubic nothingness resembles supine rest.
This is an early effort, composed according to a note Barker himself supplies after the text, on the evening of 25th June 1933, when he was just twenty. It is evident that he is trying to combine a number of different effects in one poem. The sonnet is a Renaissance Italian form imported into England at the beginning of the sixteenth century, and in its Henrician practitioners like Wyatt and Surrey there is no systematic alliterative element. The closest the Tudor Age came to this sort of effect was in a few of the 'Amoretti' sonnets of Spenser, another poet attracted to the sound of earlier verse. Moreover, Barker's alliteration seems to go hand in hand with a marked metrical freedom. It is difficult to read lines two or four without applying six stresses, whereas the rest have only five. While Sidney included hexameter sonnets in *Astrophel and Stella*, such deliberate mixture of metres can only be accounted for by assuming that Barker was neglecting stress patterns traditional to the form in favour of alliterative models whose accentual requirements are flexible. Thus line 2 may be construed as focusing on the 'chief letter' "roll", with which the open vowel is in "knowing" and "know" agree. The construction is not true to the fourteenth century convention, however, since, if we take the caesura as falling after 'know', there are four accents in the second half of the line. Nevertheless, the bonding of a whole line through vowel repetition was to become natural to Barker, and has as we shall see in Chapter Four, important consequences later in his career. By 1933, however, he is already experimenting. Some lines, such as 1, 3 and 12 are soaked in alliteration; others, such as 7, begin in this way, but abandon the effect before they reach anything as conclusive as a chief letter. Nor is the caesura a constant feature. It is noticeably present in the first line with its strong implied pause after the word "death"; line seven also rests briefly at the comma. Elsewhere the effect is clouded by the
desire, fashionable in the 'thirties, to allow clauses to ride into one another. The sonnet is interesting, however, in illustrating Barker's early fascination with the possibilities of a new alliterative revival, and his attempt to combine this with a metrical freedom which, as we shall have reason to suggest, he also saw at the time as a characteristic of medieval practice.

It was not until the poetry of his third collection, Lament and Triumph (1941) that Barker allowed the music of the fourteenth century to dictate the sound of his verse in a more consistent way. The book brings together individual pieces from the late 'thirties, most of them written between Poems (1935) and the outbreak of war. In these years Barker was increasingly drawn to the wider canvas of the political panorama. Much of the period was spent working on Calamiterror (1937) and the Elegy on Spain, works which document his own dawning public awareness. Not surprisingly, therefore, the example of Langland's great poem proved irresistible. 'Vision of England '38', the poem with which the volume opens, owes, as Martha Fodaski observes, as much to Piers Plowman as it does to Shelley's Triumph of Time or, one might add, even to The Mask of Anarchy. In it the poet, sleeping 'not in Malvern or Alexandra palace ... but in Brighton', is visited by a dream through which parade personifications of the contemporary English crisis. His dream takes the form of a pageant replete with allegorical tableaux which remind the reader as they pass both of the procession of Deadly Sins in the fifth passus of Langland's poem and of the later recreation by Spenser in the first book of The Faerie Queene: "some moved in shapes of gluttony or envy, others / Rode pride like lions, and some bore their own flowers." "Malvern or Alexandra Palace", the homes of the medieval poet and of the new medium of Sound Broadcasting, serve as fitting limits to the imaginative world of a work which attempts to suggest the movement of the old alliterative verse
forms under an apparent modernity of surface detail. Throughout it Barker employs a generally muted alliterative technique which moves into the foreground wherever the context demands it. Here are two stanzas from the episode in which the shade of King Alfred hovers over the bathers in Weymouth Bay prophesying war. The caesura and stresses are marked:

Then I saw that they floated • in blood and blossoms
The blood of the bathers • the blossoms of the boughs
That made the boats • under the dreadnought boms
Crushed and bruised • under the huge bows.

Alfred arraigned • 'O my people, what have I done
Unto thee, unto thee! • O Arthur Arthur!
Go, boy, over to Glastonbury • and ask for Arthur,
Ask there for Arthur. • Say England needs a father,\textsuperscript{55}

There are three time levels here: the immediate present with its imminent threat of war, the chronicled past of Alfred raising Saxon England to a pitch of defiance, and the legendary past of the medieval Arthurian romances. The last two of these take us back to a period where the alliterative norm seems natural, and the present is made to fuse with them imaginatively. Correspondingly, though no one line falls quite within Langland's convention, the actual movement of the verse is strongly reminiscent of Piers Plowman, in which, moreover as Skeat remarks, irregularities were common.\textsuperscript{56} A relatively close approximation to Langland's practice is the last line of the first of these stanzas, in which the vowel of the chief letter "huge" is matched with those of the
sub-letters "crushed" and "bruised" in the first segment of the line. Even here, though the fall of accents is true to Langland, the effect is complicated by the additional consonantal alliteration on "bruised" and "bows". One possible reason is that, here as throughout this poem, Barker is trying to reconcile alliterative practice with a rhyme scheme to which the stanza form is essential. He is thus faced by an incompatibility of conventions. To overcome this problem he is attempting to integrate the two principles by making alliteration central to the aural cohesion of each stanza. Hence the first stanza coheres around the consonant 'b', and the second round the vowel 'a'. This attempt leads to interesting effects. In an effort to fix the unifying consonant in the reader's mind, the first stanza overdoes the required alliteration by adopting four rime-letters, one on each accented syllable. Alliterative patterns appear in one half of the line, and then disappear on the other side of the caesura, especially in the second stanza in which the unifying vowel has to complete for elegible syllables with supplementary consonants such as to the 'g' of 'go' and "Glastonbury".

The pronounced effort made in 'Vision of England '38' to bind individual stanzas together by effects which do not depend on stress patterning may well be evidence of the fact that, for Barker at this time, the attempt to revive medieval codes of practice involved a gain in metrical freedom which had to be compensated for by other kinds of rigour. What is certain is that, in the 'thirties, Middle English poetry attracted him as a phase of the English tradition prior to the imposition of too strict a qualitative prosody. In the early 'thirties, many poets had newly discovered an independence from metrical rigidity for which they took their cue from Gerard Manley Hopkins, whose Sprung Rhythm
influenced Auden and others. For Barker, however, the new freedom, and the precedent of Hopkins that lay behind it, appeared to be but two recent and connected moments in a tradition which went back a lot further than most of the innovators of his time seemed to believe. In 1982, he explained how this idea formed in his mind:

I discovered that between 1200 and 1450 English verse was written in the Sprung Rhythm which Hopkins restored to it quite deliberately as an act of rehabilitation, not as an act of innovation. All English verse until about 1500 or 1600 is written in Sprung Rhythm, that is the rhythm of prose imposed upon verse. One of the things that fascinated me about this liberty of metrical processes was not merely that it gave one more freedom of manoeuvre - that wasn't the real point - but that it was less rhetorical about it. And so a poem of mine such as 'The Allegory of the Adolescent and the Adult' is done in the medieval way and quite deliberately so.  

'The Allegory of the Adolescent and the Adult' is the sixth of the pieces in Lament and Triumph. Like 'Vision of England '38' it was written during the few months which Barker and his wife spent on the Sussex Coast prior to his departure for Japan. It is a poem which yokes a Wordsworthian theme - the discovery of the power implicit in the ordinary - to a modernist technique based on medieval example. Not only the title but the individual lines are strongly alliterative. At the same time the rhythms are very much those of the speaking voice relating an event fresh in the memory:

Hollyhock here and rock and rose there were,
I wound among them knowing they were no wonder;
And the bird with a worm and the fox in the wood
Went flying and flurrying in front, but I was
Wanting a worse wonder a rarer one.

So I went on expecting miraculous catastrophe.

What is it, I whispered, shall I capture a creature
A woman for a wife, or find myself a king,
Sleep and awake and find Sleep is my kingdom?
How shall I know my marvel when it comes?

What is remarkable here is the way that the regular striding gait of the opening lines of the first of these stanzas gradually breaks down as the speaker's melodramatic search for adventure dissolves, leaving him to express his continuing wish for fresh experiences in a line which combines considerable alliteration on the consonant "w" with an equally marked informality of rhythm: "I was / Wanting a worse wonder, a rarer one." Despite this, his pace quickening, he carries on in his heady pursuit of strangeness, the rhythm quickening as he does so, only to find at the end of the next stanza that his increasing wonder at the non-appearance of the extraordinary can only phrase itself in a question where the relative laxity of the rhythm is again apparent: "How shall I know my marvel when it comes?" Thus not only the rhetoric of language and rhythm, but the rhetoric of fantasy break down to reveal an ordinariness out of which the truly wonderful at length emerges.

It is the sort of flexible, informal use of metre of which Barker was especially fond in the years immediately preceding the Second World War, and which, much later, revived in such volumes of verse as In Memory of David Archer (1978) in which Barker wishes to speak familiarly, without pomp, and with the kind of affectionate, undemonstrative candour fitting for a set of imagined colloquies with the old friend and former mentor after whom the book is named.
Both *vision of England '38* and *The Allegory of the Adolescent and the Adult*, however, demonstrate a grasp of another technique which though associated initially with his experiments in medieval revival, later separated itself out as a quite independent resource of Barker's verse. From the very beginning of his writing career the caesura has been important to him. As early as 1931, at the age of seventeen, we find an entry in a notebook which runs:

caesura? to-hesitate-step

The hesitant stop at the end
or in the middle of a line

Eighteen pages later, he returns to the same tack:

**Cesura** (cesura) a syllable cut off
at the end of a word at the completion
of a foot: a pause in a verse. 60

The discovery of the meaning and power of the caesura coincided with Barker's discovery of Early English texts, with eventual results which we have already examined. The effect was strong enough, however, to outlast the trappings of medievalism in Barker's early writing, and to become a technique of poetic structuring which he cultivates to this day. At certain periods, for example the early 'fifties, the tendency was particularly strong. There have even been
times when Barker seems to have endowed the "hesitant stop" in the middle of lines with an almost mystical significance. He still believes silence to be endowed with an ominous power. It is a form of potency which the poet invokes at his peril. In his view the caesura, the brief breathing space in the torrent of words, represents, as he recently put it, "the maximum accommodation which the poet can afford to make with the commodity of silence". This belief, implicit in his practice, has also received theoretical elaboration. The fullest account appears in his 'Letter to a Deaf Poet', addressed to his friend the South African poet David Wright, translator of Beowulf and Chaucer. Wright, who has been deaf since an early age and whose only means of understanding when spoken to is to lip-read, had earned Barker's admiration by turning aside from those whose words he considered tiresome, thus reducing the speaker to helpless confusion. In the 'Letter' Barker reflects on the power of silence, a gift of which every poet stands in awe, but which he is forced continually to violate: "for the poet is a man who performs upon silence - the silence that preceded and will succeed all existence - exactly the same operation as a painter performs upon space. He colonizes it." Since silence constantly challenges the poet's capacity to speak meaningfully of regions where knowledge is uncertain, it is his painful and futile duty to assail it with every weapon in his power. Poetry is an invasion of realms where reason dare not enter; its practice is hence a quasi-religious act comparable to the construction outside Athens, of an altar to the Unknown God. In the language of the letter, there is a commitment to the endless task of attempting to communicate the incommunicable. In rising to the occasion, the writer is privileged to play out in miniature the original act of God who breathed on a soundless void to bring into existence the forms of the created world.

The relevance of these speculations to the practice of the caesura
in Barker's verse of the time can be observed in his 'Ode Against St. Cecilia's Day', published as the opening poem of the collection *News of the World* in 1950, the year of the 'Letter', but written on 22nd November, 1949 when Barker, who was then resident in Rome, visited the Basilica of Santa Cecilia on the saint's feastday to find to his dismay no celebration save a minor mass in a secluded side-chapel. The great vault of the nave, "the aural house and the sibylline skull", was still apart from the slight reverberation of the distant priest's voice; yet this very peacefulness seemed to breathe more powerfully on the majesty of music that had the shrill cacophony of the recent war. Then occur the lines:

Sleep, wormeaten weepers. Silence is her altar.
To the drum of the head, muffled
In a dark time, the sigh is a hecatomb.

Tender Cecilia silence. Silence is tender
As never a voice was. Here, dumb-
Struck she mourns in the catacomb of her grandeur.

Every one of these lines has a caesura, coinciding in all but one case with a punctuated break. It is essential for a meaningful reading of the poem, however, to realize that, in Barker's usage, all caesuras are not of equivalent length. In the last line for instance the slight implied lull after "mourns" sustains the effect of lamentation without otherwise delaying the onward movement of the syntax. Contrast this with the solemn hush demanded in lines one and three, or, more decisively, with the well of silence which intervenes between the two repetitions of the word "silence" in the fourth line. Here the voice can
afford to rest for a full two seconds without doing violence to the
eral context: indeed the first "silence" could almost be read as a stage
direction. Notice too how close this and the first line come to the
fourteenth-century rubric, though in both cases the alliterative rules are
met by vowel agreement (in Langland, as in Anglo-Saxon there is no
necessity to repeat the vowel exactly; a similar vowel will do, though a
marked affinity with the chief letter is common). Indeed, though the
only line to qualify under consonantal agreement is the fourth, most of
the others meet the provision for vowels as they do the accentual
convention, since no line has more than two stresses in its concluding
half. As in 'Vision of England '38' this effect is supplemented by a
marked desire to bond the whole verse unit together by alliterative
elements which straddle the lines. The short 'e' sound carried over from
lines four to five is a subsidiary instance of this, but the single sound
which most effectively cements the entire structure is the reiterated 's'
corresponding to the soft 'c' of Cecilia's name. Read with a mind to
these observations, this verse paragraph seems like a congregation of
assonant words, which, with their ancillary pauses, crowd round the
open rim of the central silence in the fourth line, pleading entrance.
For in speaking the poet has conspired with the "underground sleepers"
to whom the poem is addressed in encroaching on the very stillness he
is celebrating. By inviting the dead in this passage to desist from their
clamour, he is helping to make reparation by enshrining a moment of
symbolic tranquillity, and by so doing, acknowledging the contingency of
his vocal art. The caesura thus acts as a token of the ultimate
insufficiency of words in their encounter with meaning.

News of the World is not the first collection in which Barker
employed an exaggerated use of the caesura. An earlier case can be
found in the sonnet at the end of the 'Sacred Elegies', already discussed
in the last Chapter. Here we find the poet busily engaged in the task
of slighting his Maker, the more effectively to evince the power He holds over him:

Incubus. Anaesthetist with glory in a bag,
Foreman with a sweatbox and a whip. Asphyxiator
Of the ecstatic. Sergeant with a grudge
Against the lost lovers in the park of creation,
Fiend behind the fiend behind the fiend behind the
Friend.67

These lines consist of a series of sharp staccato phrases interrupted by rests. The effect is to permit the insincerity of each insult to reverberate in emptiness so that the reader may detect the craven awe that lies beneath the apparent petulance. The tone of each phrase is hence conditioned by the silence which surrounds it. One is reminded forcefully of Barker's own customary manner of reading, in which phrases of from three to seven words are dropped meticulously into a pool of attentive silence. Each particle of meaning is stabbed home with an incisive jab of the right hand, but, between each gesture, voice and arm are frozen, less in anticipation than in an effort to catch echoes.68

The connection between articulation and physical movement suggested above comes closest to exact evocation in a short elegiac piece of a decade later, 'On the Death of Manoléte' from A Vision of Beasts and Gods. Here the accidental death of a bull-fighter is celebrated in lines that recall the symbolic combat depicted in the taurobolia of Mithraic temples which, as Frazer reminds us, 'represent Mithras kneeling on the back of a bull and plunging a knife into its
flank." Lines 5 to 9 run:

Did the sword shriek in his hand? The sand
Wept as he fell. You, king, die. The Miura
Groaned as he gored his god. But the long
Face of a stone and a saint only set surer
Into the calm that had always crowned it. 69

The object here is to contrast the frenetic physical activity of the bull fight with the calm and repose of death. The phrase "you, king, die", reiterated thrice in the poem, feels like three sharp sword thrusts. There is a tense physical urgency here which reminds one of the energy of that intensively alliterative line from the Sacred Elegies sonnet "Fiend behind the fiend behind the fiend behind the / Friend", which itself gives the impression of three hard face-slaps followed by feint which turns into a caress. In both instances the effect is heightened by the pauses which ensue, corresponding, in the Mithras poem, to the delayed reaction of the crowd. The bursts of action amid the expectant hush are highlighted by brief flurries of alliteration: "sword shriek in his hand", "groaned as he gored his god". Then the long sustained progress of the last movement issues in the definitive silence of death, expressed in the exaggerated pause between the stanzas.

Though the alliterative framework of late fourteenth century verse may have faded as a discernible influence in Barker's work, the caesura itself continues to exert its full power to this day. An instance by Anthony Thwaite is the sonnet numbered as Poem XLIV
in the recent sequence *Villa Stellar* (1978). This begins with an
evocation of the apparent "life serene" of one who sits chatting to
two old ladies as bed-time approaches. Then, in the sestet, it
opens on to a contrasting vision of pure horror:

The floorboards of the ballroom open up.
The flames. The pillar of. Who are you. Blood.
Something is burning somewhere. Waltz of Death.
The fire. I am I am. The Flesh. The Cup.
He would start screaming if he only could.
I feel the fangs and smell the stinking breath.

The fragmentation of the inner lines here would be powerless
without the iambic pentameters which frame them. This is a
sonnet whose irregularities suggest the interruption of a sedate
pattern. Even in the fourth line we notice that the full stops
coincide throughout with breaks between the feet. The supremacy of
ghastliness is conveyed at the end of the second line by the simple
expedient of splitting the last iamb: the mind expects the fall of the
heavy syllable 'blood', but is forced to wait for an instant in which
it senses the inferno lurking beneath the floorboards. Nor has
Barker forgotten his old habit of alliteration. Lines 3, 5 and 6
begin alliteratively but, as in earlier poems, lose touch with the
effect after the caesura break. Again, as in earlier pieces, the
pressures of alliteration are enhanced by an effort to bind the verse
unit together, in this case by the omnipresence of the consonant 'f'.
It might be claimed that the frequency of the breaks in lines 2 and
4, runs counter to the unambiguous tradition of a caesura breaking
the line cleanly in half. It is, I would suggest, better viewed as an
attempt to extend the principle by importing silences after each of
the principal four 'loud syllables'. Nor is this effect isolated in this
one poem. It occurs with some frequency, though not with equal
intensity, throughout a volume which seems, among other thematic
concerns, to convey "the futility of speech" by summoning the
silence which lies behind all words. Poems VIII, XXIV, XXIX and
LIII also use it to some effect. The highlighted deployment of it in
this one sonnet, however, does suggest a remarkable continuity of
poetic practice and principle since the poem 'Dark Dreadful Death'
of forty-five years previously, which also sought, if less successfully,
to reconcile the rhythm and cadence of the traditional sonnet form
with a verbal music with its roots in the Middle Ages.

Barker continues to draw on medieval forms. In 'Anno Domini'
(1983) he is careful to indent every second line markedly so as to
give the reader the opportunity of reading each couplet as either two
shorter lines or one longer one. By so doing he is, as he
acknowledges, registering the importance within the English versical
tradition, of the practice fundamental to both Langland and the
Gawain poet of collating the shorter lines of Old English poetry into
longer lines with a highlighted break in the middle. The
typographical convention thus adopted is true to the letter of Skeat's
observation on the editing of manuscripts contemporary with Piers
Plowman: "Poems thus composed may be printed either in short lines,
or in long ones, as is most convenient":

In a time of fashionable evangelists
to retire to small vegetable allotments
in a time of doctors and aristocratic actresses
to eavesdrop on the dialogue of worms;
in a time of national anthems and brass bands
to conduct rigorous callisthenics for corpses;
in a time of bald-headed administrators
to erect beribboned maypoles and encourage card-sharpers. 74

It is a return to the fountain head.

V

So far in this survey of medieval influences on Barker's writing we have concentrated principally on affinities both graphic and literary. It would be unwise to conclude, however, without mentioning two other dimensions of Barker's art through which late medieval influences of a more popular sort are apparent, springing from two kinds of activity with which his name is not normally associated: music and politics.

In his interview of 1982, Barker had reason to recall a short period early in his first marriage when, newly settled in Dorset, he received regular visits from two intimates of his London years with whom he shared a number of enthusiasms: his brother Kit, and the poet Maurice Carpenter, who in his autobiography A Rebel in the Thirties recalls this period quite clearly. Here is Barker's account:

Maurice was four or five years older than I was... and he was already a dedicated Marxist. At the same time he was a very competent musician and composer. He made up tunes, and then he and my brother who were both musically inclined would set to music several of the songs of Campion and such like men, and seeing as they could both play instruments,
sometimes in the evening I would sit and listen to them, or sometimes sing even. Maurice was quite interested in medieval literature, but my brother was passionately interested in it.  

When in 1978, Maurice Carpenter died, he left a collection of poems of various lengths, some of them ballads, others mini-epics incorporating elements of the style of Langland, posthumously published as The Tall Interpreter. From these it is possible to derive a vivid impression of the peculiar network of interests which make up his world picture, for unlike Barker, who in many ways outgrew his early enthusiasms, Carpenter retained his passion for politics and medieval literature until the very end. The vision expressed through these pages, a vision which it is very probable that the younger Barker to some degree shared, is of an English radical tradition stretching back to the Peasants' Revolt, and embodied in the popular imagination in ballads and songs. Piers Plowman was seen as part of it. Here is Carpenter defending his conception of the poet's duty from the introduction; the sense of a betrayed tradition, in need of revitalization, is apparent:  

Except for the work of a glorious few, language has been allowed to become desiccated and thin; poetry has become a tiny comment on the margin of life. In spite of the physical penury, the deprivations of time, life is becoming spiritually and culturally richer for more and more people. This richness needs to be carried into the realm of a newly created language. We cannot forever draw on the resources laid up for us in the Elizabethan age. From the verse of The Tall Interpreter it is clear that the resources Carpenter has in mind stretch back much further than 'the Elizabethan Age'. The continuity between this and the view of the poet's obligations expressed in Barker's early article 'Poetry and Contemporary Inertia', discussed in the Introduction, does not need to be stressed. Both proclaim a common faith in poetry as an instrument active in history for the liberation of the common man. Much of the burden of evidence for this view at the time, it seems, fell on the ballad.
There are many sources to which in the 'thirties Barker had access for a knowledge of the British ballad tradition. In the collections of the London Library alone there were two prime reference works: Child's *English and Scottish Ballads* and Buchan's *Ancient Ballads and Songs*. Many of the ballads which he learned at the time have stayed with him throughout life, but he seems to have been particularly attached to those with a cutting political edge expressive of a keen democratic vision. Prominent among these is a ballad usually called 'Geordie', though less commonly 'Gight's Lady', of which Child has several local variants, both Scottish and English, Buchan one more and Cecil Sharp's *Fold Songs of Somerset* (1904) yet another. Buchan's collection also supplies a note which purports to describe the background to the poem:

(the ballad) recounts the affair which actually took place in the reign, or rather the minority of King James VI. Sir George Gordon of Gight had become too familiar with the laird of Bignet's lady, for which the former was imprisoned and likely to lose his life, but for the timely interference of Lady Anne, his lawful spouse, who came to Edinburgh to plead his cause, which she did with success - gained his life, and was rewarded with the loss of her own by the hand of her ungrateful husband.

The popular rendition of this story in the ballad misses out the tragic débâcle, stressing Geordie's relative innocence, the harshness of the verdict, and the noble stand of his wife. The Somersetshire version given by Cecil Sharp ends thus:
O Geordie stole no cow nor calf
And he never murdered any,
But he stole sixteen of the king's white steeds
And sold them in Bohenny.

Let Geordie hang in golden chains,
His crimes were never many,
Because he came from the royal blood
And courted a glorious lady.

I wish I was in yonder grove,
where times I have been many,
With my broad sword and pistol too,
I'd fight for the life of Geordie.\(^{84}\)

There are many reasons why, in the politically conscious 'thirties, this might have seemed attractive to Barker. Firstly, the ballad can be construed as a poem about oppression since the culprit stole no livestock and harmed none of the peasantry, his only crime being to offend his overlord, for which he almost forfeited his life. Secondly, 'Geordie', though a corruption of 'George', can easily be construed as a reference to the suffering working classes of Newcastle. Thirdly, the last stanza in the Somerset version would strike a very sympathetic chord in the mind of one who was, as we are shortly to see, currently obsessed with the political vision of Blake.

Thus at Christmas 1939, shortly after the outbreak of war, we duly find Barker adapting this very ballad to the circumstances of a collection of patriots who, in various places in Europe and England, had stood up to Fascist pressure and been forced to pay the penalty.
The poem, called 'The New Geordies' (see Appendix B) is one of a number which Barker wrote at this time which take a panoramic view of the contemporary world crisis. The following stanzas champion the plight of political martyrs from Ireland (a back projection this), Central Europe and East Africa:

Michael Collins hung in chains
Across the harp-tongued Channel
Sang like a sweet bird in a tunnel,
Seeing daylight far away.

Benesh hung in chains of tears
Between the swastika and the drum
Heard terrible syllables in a dream
Sell history to the abattoirs.

Haile Selassie hung in chains
Among the Abyssinian mountains,
Saw the Imperial Mussolini
Pissing on his palace ruins. 85

Like the Geordie of the original ballad all of these men had offended the high and mighty (the British Government; Hitler; Mussolini) and all had gone to the wall. However, for those who knew the ballad there was in the words of the first of these stanzas "daylight far away". Like the balladist Barker can see light at the end of the tunnel; Geordie, symbol of the people, will finally be released. It is a hopeful plea for the times.

Thirty years later George Barker brought out a volume of poetry named, after a phrase in the Geordie ballad, The Golden
Chains (1968). We will have an opportunity to discuss this volume at length in Chapter Five. Suffice it to say here that it consists of a chain of little lyrics, each four lines in length, in a quatrain stanza reminiscent of the ballad form. The theme, said Barker, in his interview of 1982, is the problem of poetic language. The book is a deliberate exercise in simplicity, the end product of a long period during the 'fifties and 'sixties when Barker, in reaction against the complexity of his pre-war style was making a concerted effort to refine and purify his medium.

The reason for the volume's title, and for the inscription from the Geordie ballad with which it begins, would seem to be various, but an informing logic is clear enough. For, though Barker's political beliefs of the pre-war years are now a thing of the past, a vestige of them survives in a resilient belief in the socially redemptive power of strong, direct, and democratically responsible language. It is not a cause to which Barker has always been true. Indeed, The Golden Chains, in making reparation for an earlier complexity, may be seen as making acknowledgement of the author's previous linguistic betrayal. Yet it is the purpose of this thesis to suggest that, throughout the changes and developments to which Barker's own style has been prone, the effort to forge a language fit for the man in the street has been a salient principle. Among the literary periods which we shall have cause to examine, in none is this guiding idea more evident than in the poetry of the Romantic Revival, Barker's relationship to which we must now discuss.
NOTES AND REFERENCES


4 Conversations, 1981.

5 Essays, pp. 71-2.

6 P.N. Review Interview, p. 44.


11 P.N. Review Interview, p. 44.


13 Bennett, p. 5.

14 Essays p. 72.

15 Essays p. 71.

16 Questionnaire submitted to George Barker in February, 1982 as a preliminary to the recorded interview. See Appendix H.

17 Conversations, 1981.


19 National Sound Archive, 1983.

20 Questionnaire, Appendix H.

21 Tillyard, p. 15.

22 Tillyard, pp. 37-8.


25 Illustrations to the Divine Comedy of Dante by William Blake (London: Hertford House for the National Collections Fund, 1922). The allusion is to Plate 71, *Purgatory* Canto 1: 'Dante and Virgil Again Beholding the Sun as They Issue from Hell.' Ascription of image behind this passage made by Barker during Conversations, 1981.


28 Murray, p. ix.


30 Thirty Preliminary Poems, p. 23.


35 There is, for example, some similarity in title to *A Disputation between a God Man and the Devil* in *The Minor Poems of the Vernon Manuscript* ed. F. J. Furnivall (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner and Company for the Early English Text Society, 1892), pp. 329-54. The argument, however, is very different.


38 '5 stanzas on the 5 Pointed Star', *Left Review*, III, No. 4 (May, 1937), p. 12. The pentacle is also associated with Solomon, and in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* with the five senses.


40 *Collected Poems*, p. 192.

41 *Collected Poems*, p. 192.

42 George Barker, *Dialogues etc* (London: Faber, 1976)

43 *Genesis*, X ii.
Ezekiel XXXVIII and XXXIX passim.

Revelation XX ii.


Dialogues etc, p. 12.


*Lament and Triumph*, p. 11.

*Lament and Triumph*, p. 17.

Skeat, 1869, p. xxxiii.
57 National Sound Archive, 1982 and *P.N. Review* Interview, p. 45.


60 Notebook, 1931. Black covers with red binding 8" x 5½", 157 pp. See Appendix H.

61 Conversations, 1981.


63 *Essays*, p. 47.

64 Conversations, 1981.


68 For another account of Barker's reading style see Michael Schmidt, 'A Late Conversion' in *P.N. Review* 31 (9, No. 5), February 1983, p. 56.


72 Villa Stellar, p. 35.

73 Skeat, 1869, p. xxxii.


75 National Sound Archive, 1982.


77 The Tall Interpreter, p. 7.


79 Ancient Ballads and Songs of the North of Scotland, ed. Peter Buchan (Edinburgh: W. & D. Laing and J. Stevenson etc., 1828).

80 Child, pp. 123-42.


84 Sharp, p. 6.

85 'The Neo-Geordies' in *Seven* No. 7, Christmas 1939, pp. 2-3.

CHAPTER THREE. "THE CRYSTAL, THIS MOMENT":

GEORGE BARKER, BLAKE AND THE ROMANTIC REVIVAL

In the September of 1933, John Middleton Murry, editor of the Adelphi, patron, man-of-letters, published with Jonathan Cape a major study of the thought of William Blake. At the time Murry was corresponding with a twenty year old poet by the name of George Barker, who, according to his later account, had been so touched by the older man's portrait of his friend D. H. Lawrence in Son of a Woman (1931) that he "sat down and wrote what professed to be a year's journal" which he then despatched to the author for his comments. The episode appears thinly disguised in the early novel Alanna Autumnal, the protagonist of which, a twenty year old literary aspirant, spends his time contriving verbal experiments which he promptly sends to the august Mr. Levison "England's premier critic of pure literature" in the hope of an encouraging response. In the novel Levison keeps his correspondent on tenterhooks; in life Barker was luckier. Murry invited him to tea with his co-editor Sir Richard Rees, where he was handed a review copy of New Signatures, Michael Roberts's first anthology of modernist verse which had just been issued by the Woolfs at the Hogarth Press. The date of their meeting fell in mid-summer 1932. Roberts's anthology appeared earlier in the year, and Barker's slightly abrasive review, with a covering note from Murry himself, in the June issue of the journal.

According to his biographer F. A. Lea, Murry had been working on the text of William Blake for two and a half years while living at Larling, Norfolk with his third wife. They were years of public neglect and revilement during which his developing personal strain of religious belief failed to find a sympathetic ear in any except a close loyal following. From Keats and Shakespeare through to God he had received worse and worse reviews. When Son of Woman appeared in
1931, he had been accused of disloyalty and the denigration of genius, Hugh Gordon Porteus in Twentieth Century sounding the familiar Huxleyan accusation of "Burlappery". When Rayner Heppenstall's flattering biographical study appeared in 1934 the same reviewer, writing in Time and Tide, gave vent to what was a commonly felt distrust:

From the Old Rectory, his integrity factory, Mr. Murry continues like a renegade freelance vicar to preach his lugubrious apostatical sermons and in the intellectual underworld he still enjoys the support of a small fan following.

Among this select band of supporters was Barker whose open admiration, reflected in the Levison passages of his novel, must at this time have been welcome:

No matter of his opinion of my impassioned drivelling, he is a man invigorated with a splendid catholic philosophy, a philosophy which hit me like a sexual projectile. I mean that against it I could raise no barricades, because, somehow, I knew that to experience it - as experiencing the philosophy of other men - must be terrifically to my betterment as a unit of contemporary literature.

On its appearance in the Autumn of 1933 Barker was asked to review William Blake by the editors of Twentieth Century, the organ of the Promethean Society to which he had been regularly contributing both as poet and reviewer for the previous year. His piece appeared in the November issue of the magazine, but there is some sign that he had been familiar with the main drift of Murry's thinking in it even before the book's publication. Murry had finished work on the manuscript in December, 1932; when he met Barker he was working on the final draft. About this time Blakean issues feature in Barker's own work. Lodged in the Bodleian Library at Oxford is a typescript of a work
entitled Octologue of Emotions produced, according to the heading "at the February Press by C. G. and A. G. Barker in the Summer of 1932" (see Appendix C). Alfred Gordon Barker is the poet's artist brother Kit, with whom he was later to set up the Phoenix Press, served by an old hand press intended for menus, in the garage of the parental home in Ealing. February is the month of Barker's birth, a convenient label for the most modest of private ventures. At the very end of the typescript, in Barker's own hand, is added the note "Dedicated to J.M.M. and J.W.J.W." J.M.M. is Middleton Murry, whom Barker had only just met, and J.W.J.W., to whom Thirty Preliminary Poems is also inscribed, Jessica Woodward whom the poet was about to marry. The poem itself has Blakean echoes. The opening stanzas are reminiscent of the penultimate stanza of Tyger in its description of the cosmic reaction to the ferocious energy the poem celebrates. Thus "when the stars threw down their spears, And watered heaven with their tears" yields:

After all the tears that fell
into patriotic mud;
The Historical patrimonial tears,
And the first tears of God -

It appears
That the years
must be two thousand of God's tears for us.
The reference, however, is also to Urizen's first moment of dawning pity over his children described at the beginning of the sixth book of the Four Zoas which Murry thought such a turning point in Blake's religious understanding. In the fourth lyric we are invited to "combat actual objects, cottonmills" in lines whose hortative tones suggest the Lawrence whose Fantasia of the Unconscious Barker admired so much. The theme, central to the poem, of contesting the mechanization of man's physical responses is common to Blake and Lawrence, as Murry had not been slow to point out. Murry, who had intended the Adelphi as a continuation of Lawrence's programme in the Fantasia, had seen both writers as prophets of energy. Barker, whose reviewing style at the time imitates Lawrence's brusque assertiveness, seems to have carried the association over into his own concept of Blake, as demonstrated by these lines which connect the Derbyshire cottonmills Blake saw as symbolic of the industrial revolution with the marshalling of man's instincts against which Lawrence railed. Both Blake and Lawrence disliked cities, seeing in "each charter'd street" evidence of "mind-forg'd manacles" which warp our capacity for love. Barker takes up the theme:

If you will remember the forces which attract you
Towards swarming licentious centres
With evil gummed, (Orderly streets
Make an Orderly City) you will notice,
The order of your day is order, day and night
Drawing lust to act in day, and in night lust.
The ambivalence of feeling here focuses on the word 'act' which with its mixed violent and sexual overtones is characteristically Blakean in its uncertainty about the varied expressions of man's energy. Later, in Calamiterror, Barker was to write simply "Sin is not to act". There is a similar ambivalence in his way of viewing technological progress, in one place hymning "that marvellous / Marvellous machine, our human body", at another bewailing the destructiveness of lorries rumbling along country roads "Nonchalantly cancelling out latent maturities". The fifth lyric closes on a vision, half fascinated, half horrified, of an act of mechanical copulation, similar to that which brought down the curtain in R.U.R. (1923), the play by the brothers Capek in which the word 'robot' first made its appearance. 10 "Allow steel and steel, meeting, to meet steel and steel" Barker writes, and that "allow" conveys the extent to which in 1932 he was prepared to contemplate the arrival of the sort of science-based Utopia envisaged in the writing of H. G. Wells at the time.

The source of this conflict is not difficult to trace: Murry had written a note of introduction to Michael Roberts who had advised Barker to visit the Parton Street bookshop of David Archer "from which the Twentieth Century was intermittently issued". 11 Twentieth Century was produced for the Promethean Society whose ruling ideology, as the first issue makes clear, was part inspired by Wells's writing. 12 Forty years later Barker was to see the Society's distinctive brand of idealism as the product of "the vision of Herbert Gordon Wells united with that of Arnold of Rugby". 13 Though later to repudiate both influences, in 1932 he was close enough to the first to feel that Blake's detestation of encroaching industrialization was one-sided. The tension running through the Octologue of Emotions seems to originate in a conflict between the Promethean ideal of progress and that distrust of intellectual restraint which Murry saw as typical of middle Blake, the Blake of The Marriage
Murry's William Blake appeared at a period when recent scholarly activity had made possible a more thorough view of the poet. As his Introduction makes clear, Murry was especially indebted to the work of two men. Geoffrey Keynes, after years of painstaking research into Blake's text, had, in his Nonesuch Centenary Edition of 1927, provided a consistent, reliable text based on original sources in which the poetry and prose could be examined in one volume.14 In the same year Max Plowman had brought out a critical Introduction to the Study of Blake which, drawing on Keynes's versions, had laid the groundplan of a critical reading based on the notion of a gradually unfolding moral vision.15

Taking his cue from Plowman, Murry's view of Blake is developmental. Finding his bearings from Plowman's insistence on the progressive emergence of a concept of self-denial, Murry moves on by two further stages. Firstly by an analysis of the early poems he shows how Blake, in reaction against the scientific and ecclesiastical orthodoxies of his time, developed a partial view of human freedom he was later to outgrow. Secondly, by a patient exegesis of the Prophetic Books, over which Plowman had merely glossed, he demonstrates how Blake transcended his early hostility to law and reason to encompass a vision of Self-Annihilation in which both instinct and reason, both Orc and Urizen, are subsumed. There is no fundamental readjustment of Plowman's theory, but rather an extrapolation more precise in its interpretation of allegorical detail, and more exacting in its time-scale.
In particular, Murry is inclined to delay the emergence of a fully fledged philosophy of self-annihilation until the reconciliation of Los and Urizen described in the closing books of *The Four Zoas*. In this moment of mutual recognition he is inclined to see a culmination of Blake's moral progress which puts the vision behind these passages on a par with that finally expressed in *Milton* and *Jerusalem*. Hence Blake's enlightenment is seen to proceed through four stages: a carefree and derivative naïveté (*the Poetical Sketches*); a realization of mystical and visionary power (*There is No Natural Religion*); an angry reaction against libidinal restraint (*The Marriage of Heaven and Hell; The Songs of Experience*), and a final awareness that only through genuine selflessness can the contraries of law and instinct be reconciled (*The Prophetic Books*).

Murry's account therefore delays the arrival of moral maturity in Blake to a later stage than Plowman, who had tended to stress rather the distance in moral vision travelled between the *Songs of Innocence* and *Experience*. "Experience" Plowman had taken as identical with the adolescent's discovery that his desires need an object, and his bitterness on finding that the world does not accommodate them. For Murry, on the other hand, the disenchantment of the *Songs of Experience* is merely preliminary to the greater illumination consequent on the realization that man's idealism thwarts itself, and that the self which reacts in tetchy protest against social ills is as much of a barrier to self-fulfilment as the injustices against which it fulminates:

The man who has believed, naively and instinctively that beauty in human form is by its nature immune from the bitterness of untimely death; or that justice, because it is justice, cannot be long delayed from establishing itself on earth; and to whom experience has brought despair, does not, cannot, while he is in that condition, know that the anguished longing of his heart for perfection is an ideal of selfhood.
By stressing Blake's onward progress from the *Songs of Experience* Murry added a fresh dimension to the study of Blake and opened the way to a fresh understanding of the later, more difficult works.

There is, however, one point at which Murry is forced to do violence to his own chronology. In seeking to explain to himself the visionary idealism of *There Is No Natural Religion* of 1788 he has recourse to the terminology of the much later *Jerusalem*. Commenting on Blake's statement that "I can stare a knot in a piece of wood until I am frightened of it", he comments, "by attaining a capacity to see in all things the 'infinite', man becomes God." He further explains himself by saying that the gift of mystical possession enables a man to step out of his Selfhood into his Identity, a word which, as he concedes, makes its appearance only in the later Prophetic Books. He needs this act of chronological importation, however, in order to enable himself to ascribe to Blake a certain unity of mystical experience. "Once a mystic always a mystic" says Murry, concluding that Blake's ability to discern the absolute in the everyday was a permanent feature of his consciousness.

It is this very feature of Blake which attracted Barker in the lyrics which he wrote while still under the impact of Murry's book. From *Poems* (1935), for instance, we find a piece entitled "The Crystal":

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With burning fervour
I am forever
Turning in my hand
The Crystal, this moment
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Whose spatial glitter
Travelling erratically
Forward/
Touches with permanent
Disturbance the pavements
The faked walls the crevices
of futurity.

Sooner than darken
This crystal miracle
With a hand's
Vagary
/One would dissever
This wrist this hand,
Or remove the eyelid
To see the end.  

Interestingly this is one of the four lyrics chosen for inclusion in the Oxford Book of Modern Verse of 1936 by W. B. Yeats, who had himself edited Blake. In Yeats's Introduction to the Oxford Book Yeats states "I would, if I could, have dealt at length with George Barker."  

The closeness of the mode of insight visualized in this poem to that of the 'Auguries of Innocence' featured in both his own edition and that he part-edited with Ellis, may have contributed to his sense of a turning of the poetic tide, which made Barker's poem a fitting final entry in the Book. 'The Crystal' is an evocation of a Blakean "moment", that instantaneous flash of visionary perception in which the individual sees through mundane sensual experience to Eternity. The moment is a recurrent motif in Blake's thought, one in which Murry sees a certain
consistency of teaching.

Though Murry had introduced the idea of the "moment" in connection with There Is No Natural Religion, it is to the 'Auguries of Innocence' that the closest affinity in Barker's poem lies:

To see a World In a Grain of Sand,
And a Heaven in a Wild Flower,
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand,
And Eternity in an hour. 19

The 'Auguries' are from the document known as the Pickering Manuscript which John Sampson, the first editor to be true to the holograph, believed to date from around 1804, during the Felpham period. Sampson, in his edition of the Poems in 1905,20 was the first to print the Pickering poems as a discrete group, though they had individually attracted the attention of a number of editors including Yeats himself who, forced by the temporary loss of the manuscript to rely on versions from the Aldine edition, had scattered the contents among a number of miscellaneous pieces from different periods under the general heading of 'Ideas of Good and Evil' (the title of a later series of essays on Blake and others). The discovery of a certain unity of conception among the Pickering poems has affected the way in which they have been read in this century: Keynes, adopting Sampson's dates and spelling, groups them in the Centenary Edition under the title 'Poems Written about 1803'. Barker owned, as he still does, a copy of the Keynes edition. 'The Crystal' links the theme of the 'Auguries' to 'The Crystal Cabinet' to which it owes its title and to 'The Mental Traveller' from which it takes its conception of time. Sampson, quoting
parallel passages from Milton and Jerusalem, takes the Crystal Cabinet to be a repository of Rahab or moral law; Barker has taken the opposing view that it is the receptacle of the imagination. It is an interpretation more closely in tune with the rest of the Pickering poems read with an eye to Murry's contention of a unity of mystical experience uniting the earlier poems with the later:

Another England there I saw,
Another London with its Tower,
Another England and other Hills,
And another pleasant Surrey bower.22

The place names carry us forward to Jerusalem and the portals of the city Golgonooza which Murry saw as an emblem of the redemptive power of art. Barker seems to have adopted the translucence of the Crystal, changed its form from a cabinet to a goblet (or possibly a fortune teller's ball), placing it, like the Grain of Sand from the Auguries in the palm of the observer, and then taken the fragile instant of its contemplation as a manifestation of one of the States which, in 'The Mental Traveller' are seen as existing in an immutable sphere beyond the vagaries of experience.
Barker now states that no poem meant more to him during the thirties than did 'The Mental Traveller'. It was a personal discovery, since both Plowman and Murry ignore it. There are a number of aspects of it which may have attracted him: the simple ballad-like structure; the elusiveness of the allegory, compared by Yeats and Ellis to "a sun-myth and a story of the Incarnation". Above all, however, it is the cyclic plan of human experience, the suggestion of phases of Generation and Regeneration (to quote the title of one of Murry's chapters), the sense of destruction followed by healing growth, that Barker seems to have taken to himself. It was a scheme which enabled him to see beyond the passing minute to some grander plan, to reconcile the immediacy of felt experience to the "futility" of which his poem on the Crystal speaks. Blake himself, in his 'Vision of the Last Judgement' from the 1810 Manuscript book had explained the theory of time which seems to underly the poem. Speaking of the three States symbolized by the twenty-seven 'Heavens' of Jerusalem, he had explained:

These states exist now. Man passes on, but states remain for ever. He passes through them like a traveller, who may well suppose that the places he has passed through exist no more; as a man may suppose that the states he has passed through exist no more. Everything is eternal.

The Mental Traveller passes from infancy to youth to extreme old age and back again: he can return because each state remains waiting for him. In his journey he alternately feeds off others, and is himself fed on: the condition of his growth is the withering of others. In particular the act of sex is portrayed as a means by which one lover thrives at
the expense of a partner. Beginning as a babe the Traveller is nursed by a "woman old" who rejuvenates herself at the fount of his youth, leaving him as a tired old man. After years wandering in the desert he mates with a young maiden who returns him to his state of infancy while herself dwindling to an ageing hag. Finally he is again cornered by a "Woman Old", and the whole process repeats itself.

The circularity of fortune, the ruthlessness of the sexual appetite, the capacity for self restoration are all aspects of the poem of which Barker avails himself during the poetry of this decade. In 'The Crystal', however, it is the States themselves that interest him in their ability to reconcile the passing hour with an ultimate all-informing perspective. The Crystal itself exists in a temporary state of perfection produced partly by its transparency, and partly by the momentary lucidity of the observer. To retain this sense of lucidity demands a quality of alertness which inattention may ruin, for, in the words of 'The Mental Traveller':

the Eye altering alters all;
The Senses roll themselves in fear,
And the flat Earth becomes a Ball.24

In Barker's poem the steadying eye holds the Crystal in its fragile glance: rather than destroy that moment of taut attention, he must be prepared to forgo the experience (dissever/This wrist/this hand) or else reassure himself of its ultimate import by consulting the Eternity to which it ultimately refers (remove the eyelid/To see the end). It is this balance in the poem between an ultimate perspective and the fleeting instant which enshrines it, this tendency to see one through the
other, which Barker seems to have found so meaningful in the Pickering Manuscript poems, and which Yeats, picking up the Blakean echoes, would have warmed to.

Interestingly, there is some evidence that Yeats himself saw the Pickering poems in the same light. In his own edition these all fall under the general heading 'Ideas of Good and Evil' a phrase which he re-used in 1903 as the title of a collection of essays, three of which concern Blake.25 Here he is interested in connections between Blake the poet and Blake the engraver. Throughout he is at special pains to point out the love of detail which radiates from Blake's practice and theory, his hatred of abstract outline and of the fussy redundancy of Reynolds. This love of the exact he suggests is of a kind with his philosophical belief in particularity, his rejection of allegory, his preference for the object seen, the Symbol, as opposed to the generalization. It is the side of Blake's personality which rejoiced in the very minuteness of the "grain of sand", and it is a side which seems to find a sympathetic response in Barker's work of the 'thirties, when he was most under the sway of Blake's verse. Throughout the poetry of the middle to late decade, through from 1935 to the outbreak of war, one notices a love in Barker's work of place names, precise cultural references, mythological data, numbers, everything that is which gives a semblance of exactitude without of necessity tethering the text to one place or time. This is especially noticeable in 'Vision of England '38' with its highlighted use of English place-names recalling the Blake of Jerusalem. Moreover these details are seldom offered up merely to heighten atmosphere, or, as in Auden, to enforce a sense of the here and now, but are rather lit up from within, surcharged with the sort of energy that gives out onto the absolute. In other words, in the true Blakean sense, they are Symbols. This kind of double perspective is central to the method of those poems of the late 'thirties which catch
the reader up in the sweep of an imaginative political geography, unrolling a canvass which verges on both documentary and vision.

In the previous chapter we mentioned '5 Stanzas on the 5 Pointed Star', Barker's political allegory printed in the Left Review in 1937. Though quoted in full in Tolley's study of the 'thirties, it has not been collected elsewhere, and is worth repeating here:

North is nothing where the axle point abuts
Haunted by Amundsen and the Gothic figures of grief
Which wail and chase in the winds, and these are whom
Cold has killed not here but in black Hell
The Dowlais or the Derbyshire fell starved, here
Having the ice at their gut-pipes, having died, dwell.

South is the shark in the seas and the flowery reef,
Plenitude of proud food and extravagance of habits,
Here in duck suits the managers float in gloom
Obediently observing the obvious Maugham verb
Like marionettes in Mandalay hitched to work from here:
South it sooses in the scents of the lotus herb.

West is where the wanderers go with double fear.
First fear is failure in the American money gluts.
Second is fear of the American Aphrodite, from
The foam of the war welter risen; she is no wife,
She like inverted volcano swallows me whole,
I fear to disappear in the glory hole.
East is tundra and steppes echoing thunder from
The terrible engines manufacturing the future like glass.
East is two hundred million daubing the Shelley dome,
East is militant for man and has guns of years,
East is sunrise where the Russo-Japanese sun
Toils in the double fury remaining one.

Fifth is the hand's fingers than can squeeze grief
Like sponge from heart or hunger from the guts
With gifts of love of labour for all or any.
Fifth is vertical, meaning mountains here
Or the heavenly valleys as our home.
Not that it matters, for both are the same. 26

Though the '5 Pointed Star' is clearly connected with the medieval
pentacle discussed in the last chapter, the fusion of Blakean and political echoes may
have inspired Barker. Tolley's own comment stops just short of an attribution of Blakean
example, though it steers very close to his remarks elsewhere on the
influence of Blake on poets of the 'thirties, including Barker; "In
conception, the poem is original, in that it attempts to combine a
controlled visionary symbolism with a presentation of the politico-
economic situation as it was." 27 There could be no more accurate
pointer than this to the influence of that phase of Blake's career when,
having dropped the political candour of The French Revolution he went
on to symbolize the tensions of his own time in the figures of America
and the Song of Los, the transitional Blake that lies between the early
lyrics and the last Prophetic Books. The case can, I think, be driven
harder. The five-fold universe of Barker's poem seems to have behind
it a glimmering of the Four Zoas which, in an illustration to the second
book of Milton, are etched around the circumference of the Mundane
Shell, and then described in the text:

Four universes round the Universe of Los remain Chaotic,
Four intersecting Globes, & the Egg form'd World of Los
In midst, stretching from Zenith to Nadir in midst of Chaos.
One of these Ruin'd Universes is to the North, named Urthona:
One to the South, this was the glorious World of Urizen:
One to the East, of Luvah: One to the West, of Tharmas.
But when Luvah assumed the World of Urizen in the South
All fell towards the Centre sinking downward in dire Ruin.28

The illustration that accompanies these words is clearly reproduced on page 532 of the Keynes edition of Blake's works which Murry used, and which was Barker's own, still lovingly preserved on the side table of the front room in Itteringham. In it the four intersecting globes of the Zoas meet at a point at the centre of the Egg, the sharp end of which stands up vertically to suggest a fifth compass point immediately beneath Urthona, which is itself marked Due North. From its centre radiate four semi-circular segments enclosed by the walls of adjacent spheres, and a fifth line leading up to a point within Urthona marked as Adam. The segments and the line taken together somewhat resemble a fist of fingers clutching at the heart of the vulnerable universe through which Milton sails to his meeting with Blake in the garden at Felpham, a moment which, as we shall see, also has its parallels in Barker's writing of the period. The imaginative figure of the hand's fingers that can "squeeze grief" is itself repeated in Calamiterror (1937) where "the hand of horror, the claw of bananas" becomes, in a manner typical of the poem, a bizarre surrealist image focusing diffused feelings of private
and public menace. 29

III

The fusion of visionary and political impulses in '5 Stanzas on the 5 Pointed Star' illustrates a mode that became natural to Barker throughout the latter part of the 'thirties. Significantly the purport of these pieces is never to drive the reader outward towards cosmic intimations, but rather to drive him more firmly back to the realities of everyday life. Vision thus sanctions the mundane. The most famous instance of this is indubitably 'Resolution of Dependence', a poem first published in Contemporary Poetry and Prose, organ of the English Surrealist Group, in 1937, which recounts an imaginary meeting with Wordsworth among the crowds on the promenade of a sea-side town. Fixity of context is indeed essential to this piece, which begins by substituting for the cosmic suggestiveness of the opening stanza of Wordsworth's own Leechgatherer poem ('There was a roaring in the wind all night') something much closer to exact social detail ('The Bournemouth Pavilion, or the marvellous gardens, / The Palace of Solace, the Empyrean Cinema'). Throughout the poem contrives to stay close to the Wordsworthian sense, integral to the Lyrical Ballads as a whole, and this lyric in particular, of the uncommon presence abiding in common things.

Wordsworth notices in the passing crowd the lack of flamboyant Romantic excess ('I observe the absence of the erratic, the strange'), yet concludes with the speaker that, in changed circumstances the 'absurd' past of Romantic affectation must be sacrificed to the compelling duty to remain true to the everyday:
It is a declaration well within the spirit of Wordsworth's *Lyrical Ballads* Preface of 1800. For in this poem Barker is apparently interested in weighing the relative merits of two different legacies from the Romantic Revival: the cult of the idiosyncratic, and, on the other hand, the revolutionary impulse, common to both Blake and Wordsworth, to honour the experience and language of common men.

The cause of this double focus is not far to seek. For Barker at the time, 'Vision' had come to seem a mode of understanding by which the individual reconciles himself with the ordinariness of his surroundings. One source of this view was the interpretation of Blake's teaching which he had gleaned from Murry. In the May of 1932, the month in which the two men met, and one month before the appearance of Barker's own review of *New Signatures*, Murry had published in *The Adelphi* a preliminary version of Chapter Five of his book on Blake. In the book it was to bear the title 'The French Revolution'; as an article it was called 'William Blake and Revolution'. Both versions, however, strive to make the same point: that, between his brother Robert's death in 1787 and the outbreak of the Paris rising in 1798, Blake received his first and most important visionary experience, leading to *There Is No Natural Religion* and ultimately, after the political events of the following year, to *The French Revolution* itself. The wording which Murry uses to expound Blake's moment of insight is distinctive, and
strongly suggestive of Barker's meaning in 'Resolution of Dependence' and elsewhere. The experience, he explains, was "natural and common to all men"; principally because

the lucidity of simple knowledge which it leaves behind - the knowledge that things are what they are, and not something else - is manifestly an end of human knowing. It is not final in the sense that we can never know differently. We know that knowledge of a different kind is not knowledge; it is partial and not complete.

This knowledge in its visionary form should occur in the consciousness of all men, but "it does not happen, and there are very good reasons why it does not happen (see Das Kapital passim); the chief being that men have to keep themselves alive." The desire to break the monopoly of mystical knowledge held by the artist is shared by 'Resolution of Dependence' in which an emphasis on immersion in the humdrum combines with a commitment to liberate the socially deprived from cramping economic circumstances.

The final stanza of 'Resolution of Dependence' echoes Murry's conclusion as to the factors constraining visionary growth:

Not you and not him, but all of them.
It is the conspiracy of five hundred million
To keep alive and kick. This is the resolution,
To keep us alive and kicking with strength or joy. 32
Now Murry's ascription to Blake of a momentary recognition of the importance of objective experience is itself close to Plowman's interpretation in his book of the transition from Innocence to Experience, seen as synonymous with the adolescent's recognition of the limitations posed to his personal autonomy by the facts of sexual existence. The passage from an adolescent to a mature mode of knowing, viewed as a belated acceptance of "the facts" is also a common theme in Barker's work at this period. Four months after 'Resolution of Dependence' there appeared in the issue of New Verse for the 28 January 1938, the poem entitled ' Allegory of the Adolescent and the Adult' which we discussed in the last Chapter. In this poem the narrator tries to enliven an unromantic Monday afternoon walk by "looking for a wonder". Like Wordsworth in the early poem he comes "expecting the strange", and contemplates the form his extraordinary vision might take: "shall I capture a creature / A woman for my wife, or find myself a king?" Reaching the crest of a hill, however, he is forced to concede that the conditions of the miracle he seeks are fulfilled by the world which surrounds him:

The world is my wonder, where the wind
Wanders like wind, and where the rock is
Rock. And man and woman flesh on a dream. 33

Here, the self-justifying nature of objective truth is stressed by nominal repetition ("wind/wind"; "rock/rock") and by the phrase "flesh on a dream" which recalls Lawrence's rejection of "sex-in-the-head" and the sexual dream in the pages of Fantasia of the Unconscious to which Murry's Son of Woman had introduced Barker in 1931. Once again, Blake and Lawrence combine to enforce loyalty to the actual.
IV

At this time Barker's growing attraction to the empirical, utilitarian strand in the thinking of the Romantic Revival led him to seek for a typical figure, contemporary to both Wordsworth and Blake, who might distill the virtues of sound practical common sense. He found him in Robert Owen, the Mancunian socialist and factory owner, whose *A New View of Society* (1813) and *Revolution in Mind and Practice* (1849) extended the experience of his equitably organized New Lanark cotton mills into an embracing social programme. Two contributions to periodicals attest to Barker's fascination with Owen, both submitted to small regional publications outside the mainstream of metropolitan literary activity. The first, in the October of 1939, was a poem simply entitled 'To Robert Owen', which appeared in the pages of *Wales*, spearhead of the Celtic literary revival championed by Dylan Thomas and Vernon Watkins. Like 'Resolution of Dependence' it describes a meeting with one of the founding fathers of nineteenth century thought, framed in the form of a vision. It is clearly important for the purposes of this piece, however, that Owen was not a poet:

I wander under the winter tree,
It scatters heavy drops on me,
I lift my left hand and look,
It is the blood of the folk.
I turn, and the tree turns and cries,
I have wept out my eyes.

I feel the burning of that blood
Penetrate my sense of good;
And where the weal shows on my hand
The figure of Robert Owen stands.
I did mine, he says, you
Do what you can do.

I walk near the summer sun,
Among the plethora of plenty,
Calcutta roses suffocating;
I see the many have none,
I see two rise on twenty
I know the way they suffer.

In the plenitude of rot,
Like pearl and like spirit,
I again recognize his spirit,
Rising like a whirlwind at
The summer tree that has too much,
And blows it on the winter branch.34

To praise Owen is to elevate the quality of practical concern, to see it as complementary to, even superior to, vocal agitation. The stress on active participation ("I did mine, he says, you / Do what you can do") is very much in the spirit of the opening months of the war, yet the poem lends the immediate pretext historical depth by associating it with an older tradition of provincial British radicalism with its roots in the
social upheavals of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. It uses emblems from fifteenth century religious poetry - the winter and summer trees - to suggest an even older allegiance to the ageless cause of the "folk", a word which goes beyond William Morris and carries us back to Langland, and, beyond him, to the Anglo-Saxons. It is also a rural and provincial colloquialism which nicely conveys a genuine rootedness deeper than modish political programmes for the alleviation of "the people". The veiled religious associations of the stigmata inflicted by the rain and the winter tree itself identify the piece as a product of that nascent Christian humanism which gave rise, slightly earlier on, to the *Elegy on Spain* (1939). Both the tone of the opening, and the structure of the whole, however, seem to mark it out as a Song of Experience; the meeting with Owen is also strongly reminiscent of the encounter with Blake in *Calamiterror* (1937).

Another periodical with a marked regionalist bias which started up in the immediate pre-war period was *Seven*, which Nicholas Moore had started in Taunton in 1938, and had later moved to Cambridge, where G. S. Fraser joined the editorial team. Barker had helped launch the first issue in the Summer of 1938 with his 'Elegy on Tinned Meat', one of a group of poems he wrote in the late 'thirties (including his 'Epistle to D.T.' and 'Biography of Orpheus-Apollo') in which he proposes to make music out of his own financial deprivation:

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I have a care as heavy as a home on my heart
Wherein I live and sleep and sing and play,
Like the jewelled linnet in its cage of bones.
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For the eighth issue in Spring 1940 he returned to the theme of Robert Owen in the form of a rhetorical 'Sermon on May Day' (See Appendix C) in which he attempts to convince a reluctant gathering of the need to canonize Owen as the saint of compassionate common sense. Here Owen's sanctity is seen to lie less in his ambitious plan that underlay his Manchester cotton mills as in the "simple" but redeeming fact that he got his sums right:

On January 1st, 1800, Saint Robert Owen took over control of the cotton mills at New Lanark in Scotland. An account of the authenticated miracles performed by this prophet would occupy, on the estimate of a human life, about 175,000 years. This figure is obtained by multiplying with their lives the number of persons employed in the cotton mills. Each day and each hour and each minute of this one hundred and seventy five thousand years which Saint Robert Owen controlled with the tips of his fingers transpired to be a miracle. For each moment accelerated the apotheosis of this two thousand five hundred "slaves of mercy" (St. Robert) to normal human persons. Thus in the quarter of a century from 1800 to 1825 we see the spectacle of perhaps the greatest, as it was certainly the most numerical, continuous sequence of miracles which civilised society has witnessed.

The notion of a miracle wrought out of total immersion in the bleak ordinary is familiar from 'Allegory of the Adolescent and the Adult', and those poems which take their cue from the Blakean Vision of 1788. January 1st 1800 was the one thousandth anniversary of Charlemagne's coronation; Owen's Scottish experiment is thus seen to issue in a new millennium. But the vigour of that enterprise is seen to arise less from the longer perspective of history than from a grasp of unglamorous facts and figures:
The first characteristic of St. Robert Owen's system for the metamorphosis of man consists in its mathematical exactitude. This accords with the mind of the Saint in that it expresses extreme simplicity, for we have all observed the obsession which figures exercise over most men with enormously simple minds. His computations of cost, his concern with architectural details, his enumerations of populations etc., seem like the amusement of a child imagining a new country.39

New Country was the title of Michael Roberts's second, more committed anthology of contemporary political verse, published as a sequel to New Signatures in 1933. Barker's territorial metaphor thus comes from the heart of the radical mythology of the thirties, but is again here extended backwards to the period of the early nineteenth century. The emphasis on "exactitude" is in the spirit of Blake's tetchy comment in the margin of his copy of Reynolds' Discourses: "Without Minute Exactness of Execution The Sublime cannot Exist! Grandeur of Ideas is founded on precision of Ideas!" Yet the concession to numbers coincides with the point at which Blake's love of the exact collided with his distrust of empiricism.

In tracing Owen's intellectual pedigree Barker is at pains to list both Empiricist, Enlightenment, and Utilitarian forebears:

He inherited a plethora of precedents: Bacon, Hobbes, Locke, Collins, Coward, Hartley, not to mention those relations of his who sent him presents from overseas, namely Voltaire, Rousseau, Saint Simon, Fourier etc. 40
It would be hard to compile a more comprehensive list of Blake's philosophical enemies, from the last section of *The Everlasting Gospel* "spoke by My Spectre to Voltaire, Bacon etc" to the gauntlet thrown down in the very last book of *Jerusalem*: "Voltaire, Rousseau! you cannot escape my charge that you are Pharisees & Hypocrites." Yet it is to this last phase of Blake's career that the reconciliation between art and science, vision and number can be attributed. Murry, in his study of *Jerusalem* goes to some length to emphasize the inclusiveness of Blake's final vision of the celestial city of which the harbingers of both science and literature are guardians:

Imagination has room for Science, although Science, as such, has no room for Imagination. So it is that in the final vision with which *Jerusalem* ends, Bacon and Newton and Locke, who have hitherto appeared as merely malign manifestation of the False Reason appear equal in glory with Milton and Shakespeare and Chaucer.

Owen's pedigree, which Barker sees as that of the sceptical, reforming Enlightenment intelligence, can therefore be viewed as one element in the complex mental legacy of Romanticism.

V

In speaking of Barker's relationship with a supposed continuing Romantic tradition one has therefore to exercise extreme caution. Martha Fodaski in her study of 1969 posits a fairly one-dimensional equation between the Romantic inheritance and a certain sort of sensibility: "Barker chooses his tradition", she writes, and, later -
A true Romantic, he is rarely concerned with ideas rather than feelings. Reading him can be an exercise in tolerance, a study in romantic and religious reaction to an age of secularism and reason, an education of the sensibility.\textsuperscript{43}

Such a definition is apt to beg as many questions as it answers. Though widely read in the literature of the Romantic revival Barker has taken his bearings fairly consistently from some poets rather than others: Wordsworth rather than Coleridge, Shelley rather than Keats, but above all from Blake. Such a summation of preferences suggests that what he has been interested in above all else has been the internal dialectic within Romanticism between its visionary fervour and its reforming zeal.

In the essay 'A Prologomenon to George Barker' with which we dealt in Chapter One, Patrick Swift centres his view of the poet on a certain Romantic conception of the personality, stressing its Latin derivation (from "per-sonare", to sound through), its theological roots in the writings of St. Augustine, its Catholic conception of poetry as a series of stations towards the Logos, its Baudelairean elaboration as the "Dandy".\textsuperscript{44} Yet in 1982 Barker himself strongly denied that his poetic method has anything whatsoever to do with the projection of the personality, quoting with approval Eliot's belief in the essential impersonality of art. Certainly in the late 'thirties the entire tendency of Barker's thematic content was to reject soliloquy in favour of a dawning social awareness, a commitment to "the facts": a belief for which he had sound Romantic precedents, not least that of Blake.

In his study of the poetry of the 'thirties A. T. Tolley, discussing Blake's influence on the poets of the time, proposes a rough division into two camps. The primary Blakean influence consisted, he suggests, of two different ways of understanding the phenomenon of the "image". On the one hand, there is the view expounded in Louis MacNeice's
Modern Poetry and Empson's Seven Types of Ambiguity of the image as an expressive device, based he says, on a fusion of Imagist and Freudian influences. On the other hand,

A different conception was held by Kathleen Raine, Vernon Watkins, David Gascoyne, and George Barker. They held a more Romantic view of the image as a special mode of insight as well as of expression; or as something akin to Yeats's notion of the image, as giving one access to a collective human memory.⁴⁵

There is, however, more common ground between these schools than would at first appear. Enterprises such as Charles Madge's Mass Observation were founded, as Tolley himself observes, on the idea of the image as object trouvé. Such a notion visualizes the image as active at a number of different levels and directions. In it, the image both looks outwards towards the everyday world from which its selection of data is taken, and inward towards a choice partly conscious, partly subconscious, which is at the same time both personal and archetypal. Mass Observation and the cinematic thinking of men such as Humphrey Jennings (himself interested in Blake) brings together influences from Surrealism and sociology, from confession and documentary.

There is much in the Barker of the late 'thirties which reminds one of such contemporary movements: the images of the women waiting at the pithead, "my winter women of Wandsworth and Walsingham", from Calamiterror; snapshots of action on the Spanish front, an interest in "Mr. Salisbury the proprietor greengrocer, / The magnificently actual unit the human." Moreover Barker had personal connections with the documentary movement, principally through David Gascoyne, a close friend, who both attended the planning sessions for Mass Observation in Madge's house in Blackheath,⁴⁶ and collaborated with Jennings on translations. Barker himself later worked on a script for the Post
It is thus I believe, possible to argue that the emphasis on "facts" in Barker's poetry of the late 'thirties has something in it both of Murry's interpretation of the quintessential Blakean wisdom "that things are what they are", and of the fashionable interest in details and statistics. Again, though Barker's principal understanding of Blake is certainly taken from Murry, there is also an element in it of that insight which led Humphrey Jennings and Jacob Bronowski, meeting in 1943, to see Blake as the "radical poet of the industrial landscape of nineteenth century England", a view strongly expressed in Bronowski's study of Blake of the previous year. In the best of Barker's poetry of the time, the radical Blake and the mystical Blake, Bronowski's and Murry's, come conclusively together. Such a work pre-eminently is *Calamiterror* (1937), a poem which Barker now admits to have been written at a period when he was "obsessed" with Blake. It is also his longest and in some ways most interesting poem of the decade. The rest of this chapter will therefore be devoted to it.

VI

Though not published until 1937 *Calamiterror* was long in the making. Its origins lay in two events in Barker's early life. The first of these is recorded graphically on page 120 of his 1931 journal: (See Appendix H)
Today I lay on a bank of Thames by Sonning oh the sun was shining too goldenly and I so lay that I could see only the milkancream clouds which were tiny and puffing, companion to the sun, was revealed a vision of an angel with a countenance which considered me sweetly; and he was of such a marvellous size, as he came down like a water pouring from a vase that he could gather the biggest trees into his hands like flowers and touch me as I would touch the biggest bird of paradise.

It is a recognizably Blakean moment which, brought forward five years in time, was to feature as the central visionary episode in Calamiterror, where, though the location is still Sonning, the date is brought forward to 1936 and the bird of paradise becomes Blake's "bosom innumerably enpeopled with all birds", one of whom is Barker himself, a Mynah or "minor bird" on the bough.

Meanwhile in 1933, to this "moment" was added an all too human incident which has haunted Barker's imagination and work ever since. While playing with unguarded foils in the basement of his family's Ealing home, Barker had lunged at his brother Kit ("Alfred Gordon") and accidentally dislodged his right eye. The same episode was vividly described forty years later in Poem XXXVII of In Memory of David Archer (1973):

In the evening in the basement my brother and I, as had become our practice, took out foils and after a few flourishes began to fence. He retreated slowly, smiling, up three stone steps. I said:
Ah like a character in an opera and advanced.

He continued to smile. I drove the sword forward and saw very slowly, as one perceives an enormous natural calamity,

the unguarded point of my foil enter his right eye.\(^{51}\)

It is this "calamity" that lies behind the terror of \textit{Calamiterror}. On rushing his brother to hospital, Barker was told that, had the point entered another sixteenth of an inch, Kit's reason would have been permanently impaired. He spent the rest of the night roving around the backstreets of London in a taxi. A few days later his wife Jessica gave birth to a premature stillborn child, and, after officiating at the delivery, the young husband had to dispose of the foetus in the water closet.\(^{52}\) In the aftermath of these two events, Barker can recall sitting in the front room of the tiny house his parents-in-law rented in Fulham in a state of advanced shock, writing the first few lines of what was to become \textit{Calamiterror}.

Some of the difficulty in reading the poem is caused by the fact that in it the images of maiming and miscarriage have been blended in the writing to produce a dense personal mythology. Tolley understandably confuses the incidents by calling the work "a long poem occasioned by the death of his son, Albert Gordon Barker."\(^{53}\) This complication is confounded by the fact that different sections of the poem originated at different times. The dedicatory sonnet and the 'Introductory Stanzas to Book One' are both late work, the former written in September 1936, the latter written some time in 1937, when, according to David Gascoyne diaries, Barker was temporarily resident in Sussex. The opening description of the crowds at the seaside strongly recalls the first few lines of 'Resolution of Dependence'. (Barker has
always felt a strong affinity with the work of Graham Greene, with the opening chapter of whose novel Brighton Rock, published the following year, both passages share a certain bustling imperilled atmosphere.) Books One to Three seem to represent the original kernel of the poem, with its references to the violence of childbirth and the nearness of life and death. Books Four to Ten were commenced after the "Dorset remove" of January 1934. All of the identifiable dates place them late in the period: the opening of the Surrealist Exhibition (VI, 7) on Thursday, 11 June 1936; the destruction by Spanish Republican forces of their own stronghold of Irun after capitulation to the Nationalists (early 1937). The political context is evidently that of the acute social deprivation of the mid-'thirties ("The Derbyshire starvation, the Welsh hell" IV, 2). Against this backdrop of public events Barker catalogues events in his own private diary: visits to the parental home in Ealing; an expedition to his father's home county of Lincolnshire; a visionary encounter with William Blake specified as occurring on "Sunday, 12th April" which, in the period under consideration only fell on that day of the week in 1936, and, shortly before it, a stroll through Richmond Park on Septuagesima Sunday, which in 1936, fell on February 9th. The poem thus looks both inward and outward: inward to the memories of 1933, and outward to the terror of national starvation and the Fascist menace. Calamiterror is an attempt to relate one to the other: hence the conflated title.

The unifying theme is stated in the fifth stanza of the prelude:

Down what escarpments can the man escape
Consigned to proffounds of his mind's abysms?
None till his spirit like the thermometer climbs
Out of his own abdominal abysms.
The phoenix snake from former skin
Leaves in ashes his self dead:
The one always remaining in
Self's skin, remains a shade.

Here the Lawrentian image of the Phoenix arising from the ashes of its own selfhood combines with the phallic snake casting off a self-involved masturbatory sexuality. The connotation of adolescence abandoned is consonant with Plowman's account of the transition in Blake from a state of Innocence to one of Experience:

Physiologically this state occurs when self-sufficiency is no longer possible to the body. At adolescence, the subconscious mind of youth realizes that the independence required of it, as never before, has no physiological basis. The body has acquired powers that have no meaning except in relation to another, and the sense of desire, without an object of desire, drives the body back on itself and creates the dualism within which we call self-consciousness.

The duality in Barker's poem is that between a self increasingly aware of its artistic and sexual powers, and the refractory world of public events, "the facts", towards which it feels a growing obligation. The poem progressively recounts the internal revolution in the private consciousness wrought by the external revolution in public events. It is the "moment" of the poet's dawning consciousness of the Spanish Civil War that corresponds to the "moment" of Blake's great revelation of 1788, associated by Murry with the death of his brother Robert, and the outbreak of the French Rising. In it too the dawning of political consciousness is seen to coincide with the growth of a moral sense. In all of these respects, Calamiterror is a poem about growing up.
First, however, the child must transcend the violence of its origin. The first three books throw together images in a kaleidoscope of stark colours to evoke the destructiveness of the sexual process:

Where are the abandoned abandoned or the buried buried,
As the born are born here and the consigned consigned?
It is here the terror-struck fall and the fallen decay,
It is here the hooded vulture and the walking skeleton
Converse in fatal language, rend each other, blend together,
Here on the lunar rocks the female vulture seizes
The skeleton of love, and the rocking of their interlock
Confuses categories, convulses shape, rocks the rocks.\(^{55}\)

The rapaciousness of in particular female sexuality here has in it a tincture of the ruthlessness of the "Woman Old" to whom the 'Babe' is entrusted in 'The Mental Traveller':

She binds iron thorns around his head,
She pierces both his hands and feet,
She cuts his heart out at his side
To make it feel both cold and heat.\(^{56}\)

Like the victimization of the child in the Blake poem, the process is continuous and self-perpetuating. The violence of the sexual act itself is associated with the "lunar rocks", the moonlit landscape which Lawrence in the Fantasia took as symbolic of the woman's absorption in
the personal, the physical. The tone of the stanza is caught between
the forks of a dialectic: the poet is one with Blake in his awe at the
Energy which is eternal delight, at one also with Lawrence in seeing the
female sexual will at odds with the male creative purpose. Much of the
opening phase of the poem is involved with this conflict, productive of
internecine conflict and death:

Sin is not to act, for the bird waltzes,
The elder ripens, the leaf declines and dies.
The dead bird cannot dance, the dead tree remains
Perpetually the misty November morning
When the last tremor unhooked the last three leaves.
Thus the sin man hangs in a vacuum,
Suspended like a world between pull of opposed forces,
The downward demon pull, the upward angel.

If the waltzing bird suggests the "bird or golden handiwork" which floats
before Yeats's gaze in 'Byzantium', the moral insight behind these lines
is Blakean. The necessity of movement, of change is from Blake, yet
it is the Blake which Yeats approved:

He cried again, again that everything that lives is holy, and that
nothing is unholy except things that do not live: lethargies, and
cruelties, and cruelties, and timidities, and that denial of
imagination which is the root they grow from in old times.
Sin is not to act since inactivity leaves a vacuum in which the moral will grows sour. Nature lies frozen at perpetual late Autumn, and the fertilizing growth without which life is impossible cannot occur. Yet growth will be of necessity growth of sin, of conflict, of derangement. Thus the moral man is caught in a Pauline paradox illuminated as Patrick Swift points out, commenting on the last line of the stanza, by the theology of St. Augustine.58

Book Two prepares the public themes of the later books by associating the male creative purpose the thrust upwards, with the origins of war:

The green dream hung in the male tree is womb.
I saw the summer penis with the green dream
Hung like a gasmask terrible green and fatal.
The engine of the living is the bone,
So from the blood and bone the blood and bone ascend.
Then the heavenly curvetting through heaven,
The bird the butterfly the aeronaut,
The final bone falls like the Indian boy.59

This stanza takes us right back to one of Barker's earliest published poems, 'Ode on a Dead Aeronaut', the beginning of the second stanza of which read, in its initial version printed in The Twentieth Century on 20 October 1932:
The urgency of onerous bursting
Arteries forces them vertically
Forward, and not for war we theorized,
Having reverberated silently along the horizon
long before Louis Bleriot, have they not.60

When Barker collected the Ode in *Thirty Preliminary Poems* the following year he substituted the adverb "recently" for the phrase "for war", and omitted the reference to Bleriot altogether, and yet we can see that in this first draft, as for Auden in *The Orators*, the connection between flight and war is strong. The Ode was printed one year after the famous anti-Fascist flight of Signor de Bosis reported in *The Times* for October 14, 1931; Barker returned to the theme in *Daedalus*, printed in *The Criterion* in 1934. The stanza connects the contemporary urge to fly with the fertilizing power of the penis, and with more obvious manifestations of destructive aggression such as the Green Cross Gas, against whose extended use in a renewed world conflict Wells had warned in *The Shape of Things to Come* (1933).61

From the Wellsian view of war there is a natural transition to the third book in which mindless, petty violence is seen as the province of the pre-pubescent boy, "the boy bud springing from the maternal tree." It is the stage prior to the emergence of the moral consciousness described by Plowman: "The absurd chaos of actual destruction, / This is the clash of wreckage from which the man rises." In the fourth book the poet pleads to the feminine principle, "My winter women of margarine and tears" to deliver him from his negative vision, and to instruct him in pity; "inhabit my world and render it terrible." This is the first book in which contemporary political references appear, a sign of a new openness towards the world. Yet the poet fears the effort is
fruitless: he is too deeply enmeshed in the net of self: "When I descend I shall find nothing there." It is the nightmare of Blake, of whom Plowman wrote,

To be shut up in selfhood was Blake's idea of Hell. As early as 1788 we find him noting in his copy of Laveter's Aphorisms of Man "hell is being shut up in the possession of corporeal desires."\(^{62}\)

The date of course is crucial, the date of the transfiguring vision which Murry saw as the clue to Blake's entire subsequent development. In Book Four of Calamiterror Barker stands where Blake stood after the death of his brother Robert, poised on the brink of a transforming revelation.

The "moment" arrives in the next two books. Characteristically it arrives in the form of a visitation from the great poets. In stanza five he is visited by Milton, and receives a communication from Shelley's friends:

Then the figure of Milton frequented my bedroom.
I remember the disturbance in the ivy leaves outside the window.
The large envelope arrived from Italy containing a letter
Referring to suicide in the Bay of Naples.
I celebrate the first Sunday of Septuagesima
Reclining in Richmond Park watching the deer.
The Italian lady observes from the door of the bedroom,
'It is cold but quiet in here.'\(^{63}\)
The encounter with Milton's shade is in line with the confrontation in the Garden at Felpham in Blake's poem:

Descending down into my Garden, a Human wonder of God
Reaching from heaven to earth, a cloud & Human Form
I beheld Milton with astonishment & in him beheld
The Monstrous Churches of Beulah. 64

Whereas the descent into the Vale of Felpham represented the culmination of Milton, (which is, according to Murry's estimate, the culmination of Blake's whole moral pilgrimage) in Calamiterror the appearance in the garden of Barker's Dorset cottage is made preliminary to the encounter with Blake himself. This is imaginatively consistent for they are in essence aspects of the same experience since, according to Murry, Milton was Blake. But in Book Five Barker is still under the shadow of selfish delusions. Instead of a revelation of sacrifice, the example of the Milton presence merely suggests venal designs: "The shade of Milton instructs me in ambition." The letter from Naples refers to the death-wish under which Barker had languished in Janus and so many of the pieces from Poems (1935). The stanza quoted finds him celebrating the first Sunday of Septuagesima, shortly before his twenty-third birthday in February, the drear time of year he was later to evoke in the poem 'Calendar Thoughts for the Month of the Dead'. 65 It is a barren time of waiting: the lady's comment seems apt - "It is cold but quiet here." The book follows the poet's progress as the year advances. Gradually "vague design takes shape" and the presence of Milton suggests that, as well as a moral design, this includes the "ambition" of writing a long poem. As yet, however, it lacks a focus.
Book Six is the heart of the poem. The first stanza finds the poet wandering around his father's county of Lincolnshire, expecting the onset of the 'Calamiterror', the concluding mystery which is to come, like the "huge peak, black and huge" in Book I of Wordsworth's Prelude, in the form of "the mountain descending upon me." The vision eventually arrives during the visit to the Home Counties, originally mentioned in Barker's Journal of 1931:

It was on Sunday the 12th April I saw
The figure of William Blake bright and huge
Hung over the Thames at Sonning. I had not had this.
Familiar with the spatial mathematic,
Acknowledging the element of matter,
I was acquainted with the make of things,
But not this. I had not acknowledged this.
I had not encountered prototype.66

Plowman had called Blake "the prototype of the individual artist" because his ultimate distinction lay in the unique vision which enabled him to divest himself of every vestige of self seeking.67 It is in this light that Murry chooses to interpret the meeting with Milton, which he gives a significance in the moral scheme of the Prophetic Book that bears his name equivalent to the appearance of Blake here. Indeed such an equation is suggested by Murry himself:

He, Blake, struggling towards Eternity, was Milton, having laid aside his 'election', and in his 'redeemed portion' travelling back into Existence to gather with himself into the unity of Eternity.68
According to Murry Milton had been interpreted by Blake in The Marriage of Heaven and Hell as giving active currency to the myth of Christ as the usurper of Satan’s authority. In Milton he is therefore made by Blake to journey to the centre of the vegetative universe, renounce his blasphemy before Blake and the Emanations. By so doing he recognizes the relativity of his earlier revelation of Eternity as Eternal Delight: now all is subsidiary to the Self Annihilation which is the spirit of the true Christ:

Thus Milton becomes Jesus, and, since Milton is Blake, Blake also becomes Jesus.

By extending the formula we can see that in this episode Barker takes on himself a mantle of Christ-like humility, the garb of his assumed pity. In stanza ten Blake is seen, like Milton, 'bright like ambition', but now it is ambition directed to a source of social concern. Immediately we proceed to images of the contemporary crisis "Mr Baldwin orating", "three women standing photographed weeping in Irun's ruins", "the air like newsboys shrieking." The intenser vision of the outside world is the fruit of the poet's inner "apocalypse", and is in the spirit of Murry's remarks about the relationship between mental and political consciousness, both in his book and in his earlier article 'Blake and Revolution'. "The inward revolution in the individual", he says, "leads straight to the expectation of a revolution in the world of men", a connection impressed upon Blake by the coincidences of his personal biography:

Blake in 1797 or 1788 had had a vision; in 1789 the French Revolution began. It could not but have seemed to him that the Vision was stirring in the limbs of the giant world itself.
In Calamiterror the place of the French Revolution is taken by the Spanish Civil War and the associated international crisis. After a pause of several months working on the poem Barker had taken his preliminary drafts up again in 1936 in the wake of Franco's invasion. For much of 1936 and the later part of 1937 he was, he attests, working on the Elegy on Spain and Calamiterror simultaneously. When looking for a way of bringing the poem to a close, he had the idea of reworking the famous opening lines of the 'Song of Liberty' from The Marriage of Heaven and Hell. Thus, as Fodaski has remarked, the first stanza of the tenth book derives straight from the Blake original:

The English coast shivers and the American meadow faints;
The Rhône and the Rhine run mellowing with promised horror;
The Welsh mountain weeps and the Cumberland fell weeps;
London lies like a huge rot along the Thames, and Rome Roars. O Spain, my golden red, she tears the rot out,
The Franco gangs that furrow in her heart. She how she stands,
Her Madrid middle growing vague with ravage
Labouring to let out liberty, with the rat and the rot at her heart. 69

The political vision transfigures the cosmic dimension also. The sense of life repeatedly destroying itself stated at the beginning of the poem is re-iterated at the end, but now mellowed by a belief in renewal. It is the cyclic pattern, the endless achievement of restoration which informs the philosophy of 'The Mental Traveller':
For there the Babe is born in joy
That was begotten in dire woe;
Just as reap in joy the fruit
Which we in bitter tears did sow.

So, in the eighth book of Calamiterror the very images of natural
growth and decay which at the beginning of the poem suggest incestuous
carnage and disaster, now open out on a more balanced view of
struggle, displacement, growth:

The wave approaching and the wave returning,
The grave broken and the worm militant,
The myrtle blossoms from the twisted pillar,
Love illuminates the scene of horror.
Inevitably to life consigned,
The flame consuming, the by flame consumed,
Eternally eternally bud and blossom
Evolve the particular of doom.

Hence the sense of the resonant particular which is Barker's inheritance
from the Romantic Revival fuses with a sense of doom arising partly
from the political circumstances of the era and partly from Barker's
immersion in the doctrine of Original Sin, fed, as we have already
seen, by his reading of the English medieval poets. If the theme of
such a stanza originates in those influences, however, the very sounds
which Barker uses to convey the oppression of events - the Vowel
sound - which run through the last three lines - betray the existence of an
artistic affinity of a rather different kind which it is now our business to examine.
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CHAPTER FOUR. "WHISPERING SIBILANT FIELDS": GEORGE BARKER AND THE EXAMPLE OF TENNYSON

In 1936 Nelson brought out an edition of the Poems of Tennyson, to which T. S. Eliot was invited to contribute an introduction. The commission was hardly fashionable, nor in the circumstances of the times, was Eliot's essay. For in 1936 Alfred Lord Tennyson was still under a cloud, his former reputation dimmed by the suspicion attaching to all things Victorian in the years after the First World War. Though Harold Nicholson had undertaken to defend him in an influential study of 1926, he had only been able to do so by separating out those aspects of the late Laureate's achievement which he felt to be untypical of the age in which he lived. He had thus set up in the critical mind a distinction between an acceptable and an unacceptable Tennyson (an unVictorian and a Victorian Tennyson) and thus bedevilled any attempt to see the nineteenth century poet's work whole and clear.

As a result in 1936 the current climate of opinion as regards the totality of Tennyson's work had hardly changed. It was a mere four years since F. R. Leavis, in the opening pages of New Bearings in English Poetry (1932) had castigated Tennyson as the source of everything in the nineteenth century against which modern poets, including Eliot himself, had been obliged to fight. The verdict thus pronounced was, for many at the time, almost binding, and along with it went a certain simplified understanding of the whole period of the mid-nineteenth century for which Leavis was only partly responsible. Leavis's own words in New Bearings in relation to Tennyson himself are guarded: he is concerned less to come to a true assessment of his merits as a poet than to see him as one who exemplified a tendency and confirmed a downward trend. For many of his readers, however, the verdict "guilty" was felt as a clap of thunder over the heads not merely of the Laureate himself, whose 'Palace of Art' was held by Leavis...
finally to condone the nineteenth century habit of dream-like withdrawal, but the whole procession of nineteenth century poets whom Leavis appeared to see as leading with a fair amount of inevitability to Swinburne, and to the eventual feeblemindedness of the Georgians. Thus Tennyson, Swinburne, Morris, even the early Yeats came under one uncomprehending and damning indictment: "Nineteenth Century poetry we realize was characteristically preoccupied with the creation of a dream world." Though Leavis's "we" here clearly represented the academic plural, it soon became the rallying signal for a whole generation, who were determined to share his belief that Tennyson was the fount of much of the trouble.

Against this barrage of disparagement, Eliot offers a still but confident testimony: "Tennyson is a great poet, for reasons that are perfectly clear." The reasons had much to do with poetic technique, a consideration which many contemporaries, in their enthusiasm for the new-found innovativeness of Hopkins, had scarcely thought to apply to his great contemporary; and partly, as Eliot put it, a matter of "historical situation". The phrase is important, because it relates to Eliot's whole understanding of the significance of a tradition as expounded in 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' and elsewhere. It concerns too his understanding of "change" as pronounced in that essay: the sometimes visible and sometimes invisible deflections of taste and style that move on top of the larger, slower shifts of the historical glacier. Tennyson, asserted Eliot, existed at a moment of change, a point sufficiently clear to us, but challenging to Eliot's contemporary readership who were determined to see the Victorian age as a solid, unmovable phalanx. In such conditions, the arresting metrical experimentation of Maud had almost gone unnoticed. Tennyson's verse, though versatile in its use of original and divergent pulses, seemed to lead elsewhere than in the direction of the sort of elasticity which
was increasingly admired in Gerard Manley Hopkins. In Hopkins the change had been violent, so violent that until 1918 Robert Bridges, Hopkins's literary executor, had felt his poetry too challenging to unleash on the public. In Tennyson the change is slighter, but equally momentous: though less superficially dramatic, it offered possibilities almost as exciting. Eliot's defence of Tennyson's quieter innovation, therefore, may be read as a challenge to contemporary ideas of literary progress through revolution, and as a defence of the distinctive, if not earth-shattering changes which a truly individual voice can make to the unfolding of a meaningful tradition.

The substance of Eliot's essay may be read as a defence of a particular kind of poem: the longer poem whose essence is not narrative. The initial contrast is between two works of the younger Tennyson: Maud, which attempts to tell a story in quasi-dramatic style, and In Memoriam which seeks to evoke a mood while debating certain nagging questions of religious faith and doubt. For Eliot, Maud fails whereas In Memoriam triumphantly succeeds precisely because Tennyson, who was not always apprized of the nature of his own gifts, possessed no talent for narrative. Thus Maud falls between two stools: it is neither drama nor good fresh lyric. On the other hand "it is, in my opinion, in In Memoriam that Tennyson finds full expression." Its excellence, as Eliot perceives it, is of variety within uniformity: the remarkable range of feeling and pulse that Tennyson manages to infuse into the simple quatrain, a point which he illustrates by a quotation of lyric number VII. The point Eliot is making here is a double one. The surface of
the writing is limpid and flows enviably. At the same time genuine profundities surge beneath: "Tennyson's surface, his technical accomplishment, is intimate with his depths". And the depths themselves have little contact with the sort of reassuring religious consolation which many Victorians, (including the monarch herself) found in the work. They have, rather, something to do with the kind of tension between faith and belief which Eliot was apt to find in authors which he suspected, in whatever manner and to whatever degree, of mirroring his own feelings.

Thus In Memoriam comes to be seen as one of the masterpieces thrown up in the mid-nineteenth century by a Christian civilization suddenly brought face to face with the untenability of much that it had previously taken for granted. For Eliot, part of the poem's greatness resides in the fact that its reaction to this crisis is "honest":

In Memoriam can, I think, justly be called a religious poem, but for another reason than that which made it seem religious to his contemporaries. It is not religious because of the quality of its faith, but because of the quality of its doubt. Its faith is a poor thing, but its doubt is a very intense experience. In Memoriam is a poem of despair, but of despair of a religious kind. And to qualify its despair with the adjective 'religious' is to elevate it above most of its derivatives. For The City of Dreadful Night, and A Shropshire Lad and the poems of Thomas Hardy, are small work in comparison with In Memoriam; it is greater than they and comprehends them.

We will come to the connection with the poems of A. E. Housman in the next chapter. Our concern here is to stress Eliot's conviction that In Memoriam is the supreme poem of religious doubt, one that manifests a different relation to the crumbling facade of the Christian creeds than does the work of Baudelaire, whose defiant posture of rejection, so redolent of troublesome conviction, was maintained to the end, where
Tennyson's whittled away into complaisant conformity. The contrast with Baudelaire is important, not only for the consistency of Eliot's thought since his introduction to the Isherwood translation of the journals six years previously, but for the immediate future of Tennyson criticism. Eleven years later we find W. H. Auden, in another influential introduction to Tennyson's work, restating this very analogy, significantly enough at a time when he too was about to write another introduction to the Isherwood translation. For Eliot himself, the point was clearly of some significance, a fact which, when compiling the Selected Prose in 1953, John Hayward implicitly recognized by printing the In Memoriam essay immediately before the piece on Baudelaire.6

There is another aspect of Tennyson's work, however, which impresses Eliot in this essay: his sheer technical accomplishment. Pre-eminently this is seen to be a matter of the sensitivity of his ear (a point which Auden also repeats).7 But Eliot is even more specific than this: for him the delicacy of Tennyson's aural accomplishment lies supremely in his skill in the deployment of vowels:

In ending we must go back to the beginning and remember that In Memoriam would not be a great poem, or Tennyson a great poet, without the technical accomplishment. Tennyson is the great master of metric as well as melancholia; I do not think that any poet in English has ever had a finer ear for vowel sound.

It is in this perhaps finally that Tennyson's definitive claim to the respect of posterity really lies for "the genius the technical power, persisted to the end, but the spirit surrendered." By thus distinguishing between the permanence of Tennyson's lyrical gift and the passing attraction of his themes, Eliot drew the critical contours along different lines from Nicholson, whose division of the poet's life into periods had merely camouflaged the abiding nature of his true appeal.
When reprinted in *Essays Ancient and Modern* in the same year as its appearance at the head of the Nelson Classics edition of Tennyson's work, there are many reasons why this essay should have caught the attention of the twenty three year old Barker, whose second volume of poetry Eliot had published in the previous year. To begin with Barker, who four years previously had reviewed F. R. Leavis's *New Bearings in English Poetry* for Middleton Murry, would have been only too conscious both of the slough of despond into which Tennyson's work had fallen, and of the nature of Leavis's attack in his first chapter. The conflict of loyalties thus engendered may well have been considerable. Despite his critical remarks on both Leavis and Eliot in that review, Barker was at the time, as his contemporary essays show, very keen to see himself as in the vanguard of poetic progress; he was also, in spite of his best intentions, as susceptible to the prejudices of the time as most. Yet for many years he had harboured an admiration for Tennyson which drew on many of the considerations on which Eliot's essay touched. To see how much pertinence Eliot's essay must have had for him in 1936 it will be necessary to return once again to the very beginning of Barker's writing life.

II

Ever since, in very early adolescence, George Barker had decided that the writing of verse was likely to be of importance to him, he had kept a series of journals, work books and commonplace books, one of which survives. Dating according to a note on the inside front cover from 1931, it consists of 157 pages held within black covers with red corners and binding (See Appendix H). Much of its contents represent
jottings from books which the eighteen year old Barker was reading at the time: Laura Riding and Robert Graves's *A Survey of Modernist Verse* (1926); Blake's marginalia (apparently from the Keynes edition); and an unspecified study of the life and work of Beethoven. There are also memoranda towards a work in progress including a tentative contents page, and musings concerning the direction in which Barker feels that he wants his own work to go. Much of these have to do with various questions of technique, especially the sort of aural effects to which he feels that his poetry most lends itself. For example, on page 121 we have a single observation which runs:

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Vowels are beautiful for a longer time than consonants: often the vowel lasts 20 times as long as a consonant.
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The consonants, however, are not neglected. Page 66 has a phonetic table showing the consonants in four groups, thus:

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B, P, W, V  - labial
Z, C, F, M, S  - sibilant
D, L, R, T  - sibilant [sic]
G, K, C, Q  - hand sound
M, N.
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Precisely why the values of sounds should have been important to the young poet is demonstrated quite clearly by a fuller note on page 74. This runs:
Since alliteration and repetition have been as near exhaustion as they can be, I think that I shall not back anything on them. I prefer the rhyming of vowels, or consonants, and to place greater stress than others do on prepositions, conjunctions, and other parts of speech which are generally either ignored or stuffed in to make the necessary syllables.

As we have already seen in Chapter Two alliteration was subsequently to assume more importance for Barker than in 1931 he was prepared to grant it. The note clearly dates from a period some time before Barker had consolidated his reading of Middle English verse. Moreover, the reference to the strategic significance in the writer's eyes of neglected parts of speech has later consequences which we will examine in Chapter Seven. What is noteworthy at present, however, is the concentration on "first" vowels, and "second" consonants as elements in the aural texture upon which it is possible to "rhyme".

It is thus not surprising that four years later in Poems (1935) we find Barker very obviously experimenting with the sort of permutations that can be made between vowels and consonants both within and across lines. In Chapter Two I quoted the whole of the elegy 'Luctus in Morte Infantis', which concludes:

O in summer he came with roses
And with them rose
Over the rose trees, and over
The mountains and the roseate clouds, never

With next summer or after
To visit with them, and laughter,
The gardens, nor to know
From whom he was called to go.
The opening two lines of the first of these stanzas rhyme on a pun. The binding vowel - a long 'o' - is then taken up and rolled through the rest of the stanza as an aural expression of grief (an effect which we will meet forty years later in *At Thurgarton Church* of 1968)\(^\text{11}\) Then the aural palette changes slightly and we are given over in the next stanza to shorter 'e' sounds heard in "Summer", "After" (a half rhyme with the foregoing); "them" and "gardens". Thus this whole portion of the poem is built round a vowel contrast which appears to sing of a moaning bereavement barely held in check by the necessities of self control.

The pun and many of the assonantal effects are repeated in "He Comes Among":

He comes among
The summer throngs of the young
Rose, and in his long
Hands flowers, fingers, carries;
Dreamed of like aviaries
In which many phoenices sing,
Promising touch soon
In summer, never come:

Or, the scar\& falls
Of unearthly streams, calls
And recalls the call,
Tempting in echoes the aspatial
Glooms of the empty
Heart, till the senses, need inebriate,
Turning and burning through slow leaves of vague
Urge, shall, until age. 12

The piece is unusual both for its concentrated syntax and for a number of acoustic effects: the sibilant 's' sounds produced mainly by the insistent (and in the cases of "phoenices" quite arresting) plurals; the alliteration on "flowers, fingers", the internal rhyming of "calls / And recalls the call." The poem may very reasonably be read as a study in aural interconnection, an attempt to create a sort of honeycomb of related passages of sound. The point is made more clearly by the proofs for the 1935 volume, now held in the Brotherton Collection at Leeds University (See Appendix D). Line two originally read "The summer rush of the young" before Barker, wishing to heighten the assonance within the line, changed it. Similarly, "aspatial" in line twelve was originally simply "spatial"; by adding the extra syllable Barker not only heightened the sense of a disorientated "heart", but also reinforced the tight, nervous vowel sounds essential to this stanza.

Time and time again in this volume, the controlling principle seems to be an inbuilt contrast between open round vowels expressive either of lamentation or opulence and narrower vowels, often 'e' or 'i', conveying a countervailing constriction. The clearest instance is 'Venerable All Hills', the last two stanzas of which read:

Again formidable winter strikes the winds
Crystalline immobile, all still.
Walking abroad, each one observes the sight
Of his confederate transfixed distance,
His eye's flight fixed in icy course.

Against the interminable grieving of the sea
I raise my voice, silence the miserable
Breakers, while upon my inward winter break
Incipient gaieties of the impending spring, sending
Messengers in the budding of these lines,
Defeating the sea's funereal roll
With a tongue's sunbeam, with a hand's summer rondeur.13

In the absence of a definable metrical scheme, this is a poem which organizes itself almost totally through an observation of quantity. Through it run three principal sounds: the tight, pinched 'i' associated with the clenched reaction the speaker feels towards the deprivations of winter: the round, generous 'o' expressive of the 'budding' of lines which protest against such constriction, and the sharp 'e' sounds connected with the 'grieving of the sea'. It is the last of these components which carries us closest to the Tennyson of 'Break, Break'14 and of the lines of personal 'anguish' from 'Tears, Idle Tears' which Eliot was to quote in his essay in support of his admiration for Tennyson's 'ear for vowel sound':

Dear as remembered kisses after death,
And sweet as those by hopeless fancy feigned
On lips that are for others; deep as love
Deep as first love, and wild with all regret.15
It is in the very first piece from *Poems* (1935), 'The Amazons' (so unfortunately dropped from *Collected Poems*), however, that Barker comes closest to authentic Tennysonian influence. Not excepting 'Daedalus', already examined in Chapter One, this is probably the strongest piece in the book, the one in which Barker's feeling for sound combines with an evocation of mood which is at one and the same time personal and historically pertinent. In theme it consists of a macabre reverie summoning up the presence of weird bloodless female creatures who lure the besotted speaker towards the prospect of his own death. The 'Amazons' appear to be associated with the one-breasted woman of Greek mythology, though their name also suggests South America, an association deepened by the portrayal of the speaker as some kind of Great Inca, "Gold man, king", who, late in the poem, is described as lying beneath the terraces of his own city. The exotic landscape both distances and intensifies the sense the reader also has of a gradual enfeeblement of the private and public will connected with events (Western Europe's impotence before the new Fascist menace, for example) apparent in the period at which the poem was written. The King is evidently committed to some kind of active principle. He has, however, been enslaved by the Amazons in much the same way as Tennyson's Lotus Eaters are entrapped by the indolently attractive inhabitants of the island. The King initially resists; it is thus no coincidence that, of all the personae in nineteenth century English poetry, it is of Tennyson's Ulysses that he finally reminds us. There are therefore many strands from the early Tennyson of which the poem reminds us, strands both thematic, and, as we shall see, acoustic.

At the very beginning, however, it is specifically of the mood of Tennyson's *Poems* (1943) of which we are reminded:
Pallid the mirages, the palaces
Appearing brilliant on the mountain tops, pale
The whispering sibilant fields and pale
The phantasmal countenances female
Haunting our progress: in all climactic places
Appear the brilliant the distraught and pallid faces. 17

The similarity to early Tennyson is partly one of attitude - repose in a frozen trance which is at once delightful and debilitating - and partly one of sound. Especially prominent are the insistent s's to which Barker calls our attention in the epithet 'sibilant' and, in the following stanza, the long vowel 'o' of which Barker has always been fond and of which, as we shall see, he makes sophisticated use in his later poetry. There is an interest in onomatopoeia as a register less of physical than of mental states, and a willingness to let the verbal flow lull the reader into a condition in which imaginative empathy is a premiss of critical assessment. Barker, however, does not abandon us in this position, for by stanza eight the affinity has shifted from 'The Lotus Eaters' to 'Ulysses' and its "pendant" 'Tithonus': 18

Queen Masters! Lying easy under the hills
Of my home, concealed beneath the sun,
- Gold man, king - I sense like one
Lost in an alien land how your presence fills
Whole atmospheres like thunders, and on
My shoulders your compulsion falls. 19
There are no strict echoes here, still less borrowed mannerisms, but rather a grandeur in the evocation of personal subjugation which puts one in mind of Tiresias or Tithonus in their various states of spiritual bondage. The underlying feeling is of anguish, but the anguish is not vaunted. As David Daiches remarked in a series of flattering comments on this poem when it reappeared in the American Selected Poems in 1942, "Barker... fascinates, but it is the fascination of hearing a man compelled to utter memorably what he is reluctant to admit". In 'The Amazons' Barker had produced a poem at once utterly of its time in its intuition of impending disaster, and utterly unlike any of his contemporaries in its manipulation of poetic language. One reason for this was undoubtedly Barker's individual rapport with the nineteenth century, and more especially with Tennyson, the very tradition which his fellow writers of the period had been united in rejecting.

Though 'The Amazons' is among the most impressive pieces from Poems (1935), its practice is not vindicated by Barker's critical writing of the period. Though Barker felt close to the Tennysonian example, he was at the time far too uncertain of his own direction and far too respectful of fashionable taste to articulate such influences. There were, besides, serious theoretical problems to be overcome. In the atmosphere of public mistrust then prevailing the problem for a poet like Barker who genuinely admired what he took to be Tennyson's strengths was to absorb his essence without being taken over by any of his various manners. In order to achieve this Barker had to sort out Tennyson's strengths from his weaknesses, a task impossible without a sound basis for critical judgement. Herein lay the dilemma, for in the mid-'thirties there was as yet no reliable tradition of Tennyson criticism on which to draw. T. S. Eliot's essay on In Memoriam, which first appeared the year after the 1935 volume, was the first visible sign of a change in the climate of opinion. It was an essay in many ways tailor-made to
Barker's own requirements. Here at last was a candid recognition of the critical problem ("he has been rewarded with the despite of an age that succeeds his own in shallowness"), a basis for a meaningful distinction between Tennyson's "merits" and "demerits", and an account of his virtues which goes some way to install a precedent for Barker's practice. Not only did Eliot recognize in Tennyson a "metrical accomplishment" of a kind very different from Hopkins's, but he also highlighted in it the one element that brought him closest to Barker: his sensitivity to vowel sounds, and alertness to quantity. In so doing Eliot tackled head-on a major limitation in contemporary thinking about the problem of versification, since the enthusiasm for Sprung Rhythm as a foundation of vers libre had merely tended to heighten attention on quality and stress as components of metrical practice. From the very first, as we have seen, Barker had been attracted to effects based on quantity: Eliot's essay would have given him confidence in the validity of the preferences expressed in his 1931 notebook. Eliot's essay was also useful for another reason. For a member of the generation fatally attracted to the theatrical revue, Barker had little interest in narrative as a component of structure. Poetry such as that contained in 'The Amazons' moves from mood to mood rather than from place to place, or person to person. Very germane, then, was Eliot's account of one of Tennyson's limitations:

...for narrative Tennyson had no gift at all. For a static poem, and a moving poem, on the same subject, you have only to compare his 'Ulysses' with the condensed and intensely exciting narrative of that hero in the XXVI Canto of Dante's Inferno. Dante is telling a story. Tennyson is only stating an elegiac mood.
Useful as Eliot's essay may have been in underpinning Barker's own technique, it was helpless to change the general climate of opinion, for by 1936 Eliot's reputation was already that of a conservative. What was needed was a convincing account of Tennyson's attractions from someone recognizably in the modern camp, and who better than W. H. Auden, emphatically the leader of opinion amongst the young and apparently committed. Auden's Introduction and Selection to Tennyson was published in London the year after the war, but had already appeared in 1944 in New York, where he and Barker met. It burst upon a public as yet insufficiently aware of Auden's own change of heart in religion and politics, and had therefore perhaps more influence upon members of his generation than its critical acumen warranted. Its chief advantage was its care with contemporary shibboleths, since it sought to separate any appreciation of Tennyson from the aspects of Victorian life and thought still regarded as unacceptable. By adopting Harold Nicholson's classification of periods in the poet's life, it succeeded in separating the early and middle Tennyson from the work of "the third period, the Victorian period". There was thus seen to be a Victorian and a non-Victorian Tennyson, and to admire his skill became possible without endorsing Victorianism per se. The separation was, however, achieved at some cost: while respecting Eliot's earlier concession to his procedures, it became necessary to regard those elements in his thinking most characteristic of the preoccupations of his age as proof of intellectual deficiency.

The Tennyson thus salvaged, intellectually deficient but mellifluously gifted, prey to recurrent patterns of melancholia, was a haunted individual of interest to the psychoanalyst, though ultimately perhaps unreachable by him ("No other poetry is easier, and less
illuminating to analyze). Not surprisingly, he is seen to have much in common with Baudelaire, an analogy which Auden takes up from Eliot and extends. For Auden, the connection had perhaps a particular significance: three years later he was to provide an Introduction to the American edition of his friend Isherwood's translation of the journals, thus once again following in Eliot's footsteps. There are also other reasons perhaps why Auden should have felt close to Baudelaire at this juncture in his life: in transition as he was between a species of radical dissent and an orthodox Episcopalianism, the via media of positive blasphemy apparently represented a compromise with conventional acceptance of a different kind from Tennyson's. The analogy too provided a way of breaking away from the fustian image of Tennyson - a gaunt eminence grise with stick and cloak and flying hair - and of seeing through this mask of flamboyant conformity to a set of mental attitudes more amenable to members of Auden's own generation.

In the meantime, however, there is a stumbling block to overcome: Tennyson's apparent lack of intelligence. Thus, adopting another compliment from Eliot, Auden undermines it with a daunting side-blow:

He had the finest ear, perhaps, of any English poet; he was undoubtedly the stupidest; there was little about melancholy that he didn't know; there was little else that he did.

For a readership encouraged in the 'thirties to see difficulty as a prerequisite of distinguished work, such an accusation could not but prove troublesome. Auden seems to anticipate this, but saves the day by insisting that the Laureate's strength lay elsewhere. Thus, though his selection includes some of the poems of ratiocination, notably 'The Two Voices' the implication seems to be that the merit lies less in its energy of thought than in the evocation of private suffering that the
reader senses beneath it. This suffering, as the Introduction insists, is purely personal, and the existential speculations are hence a mere cover for disturbances of a subjective kind:

Two questions: Who am I? Why do I exist? and a panic fear of their remaining unanswered - doubt is much too intellectual and tame a term for such a vertigo of anxiety - seem to have obsessed him all his life. 29

The distinction thus drawn between the thought of Tennyson, which is seen as being a blanket over something much more interesting, and the feelings of Tennyson, which account for the greatness of his verse, became the guiding principle of Auden's selection. Consistently it is the lyrical Tennyson who wins through. Thus Auden adopts Eliot's earlier estimate of the songs in The Princess as being salvageable from the wreck of a Medley inimical to modern ears, and gives his readers a whole set of these little jewels as examples, apparently, of what Tennyson can do when he ceases to aim for a coherence of consecutive thought of which he was incapable.

By the end of the war then the critical consensus over Tennyson's status had been crucially affected by both Eliot's and Auden's essays. Already, by 1940, Barker had begun to register the change. Speaking to his university students in Japan that year, he characterizes Tennyson in terms which seem strongly to recall the wording of Eliot's Introduction:

Tennyson, who appears to be returning to that general favour from which the Georgian poets and critics relegated him, is remarkable for a verbal accomplishment second only to Alexander Pope's: In Memoriam, in particular, shows, like 'Lycidas', what the gifted word-worker can perform with little or no emotional material. (Appendix E).

We will return to Barker's evolving view of the emotional network of In Memoriam toward the close of this chapter. Meanwhile, the publication of Auden's essay, with its specific set of accusations and complements, threw down a gauntlet which it became necessary for any admirer of
Tennyson to take up. One of the first to do so was Barker who, now back in England after an American sojourn during which he and Auden had met, sprang to Tennyson's defence in an essay of his own entitled 'The Face Behind the Poem', written the year after the appearance of Auden's book in England, and subsequently published in *Encounter* in 1956 before its adoption as the Introduction to the New American Library Edition of *The Idylls of the King* (1962). It is a strongly argued piece which very much takes over where Auden had left off. Behind it lies the whole history of fashionable disparagement of Tennyson and the Victorian sensibility to which Auden and Barker's generation had been so prone. It starts by taking for granted one contention which Auden had borrowed from Eliot and another which he had added: that Tennyson sounds superbly, but that he is on the surface at least banal. To contest the second of these propositions, or at least to rethink its implications, Barker has to hand two invaluable pieces of ammunition. The first is the paradox, widely ignored by critics in the 'thirties, of Hopkins's profound admiration of Tennyson as expressed in his letters to Canon Dixon and elsewhere. It is with a quotation from one of the letters to Dixon that Barker begins:

His opinions too are not original, often not independent even, and the sink into vulgarity: not only 'Locksley Hall' but 'Maud' is an ungentlemanly row and 'Aylmer's Field' is an ungentlemanly row and *The Princess* is an ungentlemanly row... But for all this he is a glorious poet and all that he does is chryselephantine.

While the source of this quotation is of infinite use to one mindful of contemporary idolatries, torn out of context Hopkins's remarks constitute a decidedly two-edged weapon, appearing as they do to reinforce the distinction between style and content which was fast becoming a commonplace of Tennyson criticism. In order to help him
redress this imbalance, Barker falls back on a second piece of supporting
evidence, an analysis of 'Tears Idle Tears', the lyric from part IV of
The Princess, which Auden had extracted for inclusion in his
selection, and which Cleanth. Brookes had discussed memorably in The
Well Wrought Urn published in 1947, the year before Barker's essay.

A comparison between Brookes's and Barker's methods proves
instructive. Brookes had concentrated on seeming contradictions within
the text: between the "idleness" of the tears and the "depth" of the
singer's despair, between the "remoteness" of "the days that are no
more" and the "wildness" later attributed to the memory of them.
Barker, on the other hand, seems concerned to displace Brookes's notion
of ambiguity - with its basis in the theories of I. A. Richards and
William Empson - and to replace it with a notion of ambivalence
founded on a tension between the words on the page and the implied
expression on the face of the poet as he articulated them. Thus, after
quoting the first stanza of the song, Barker continues:

It is almost possible to watch such lines manoeuvering their
emphasis like the lacunae of Lamia. When Tennyson is accused,
as he has been, of silliness, of intellectual provinciality, of
vulgarity of mind, what is happening, I think, is that his accusers
are looking at the poems as though they were presenting a case.
But Tennyson's poems never simply present a case, for even when
these poems do present a case, it is by no means this
presentation which matters most. What matters most is the
expression on the face of the figure that makes this presentation,
the never quite visible, but never invisible, presence of the poet
himself.

When he reprinted this article in his collected Essays in 1970 Barker
added to the phrase about presenting a case the rider "or even a
portmanteau", as if to emphasize that Tennyson's meaning could not
be exhausted even by employing a model of ambiguity, a portmanteau
being a case which opens in two directions. Before such a poem as 'Tears, Idle Tears' therefore the Empsonian school of analysis is seen to be quite helpless:

Tennyson's poems, unlike those of say, Ben Jonson, transcend their own achievements and their own intentions in such a way as to render a purely semantic criticism of them quite specious.

Of Jonson Eliot had said:

The immediate appeal of Jonson is to the mind; his emotional tone is not in the single verse, but in the design of the whole.36

Tennyson's appeal by contrast, Barker seems to be claiming, is to something nearer the intuition, since nothing in his structure, either small or large scale, can satisfactorily account for it. What is needed for a reading of Tennyson's poems seems to be something approaching a close personal rapport with the person who wrote them, or rather, to come closer to Barker's own analogy, with the state of mind in which this person discovered them. It is important to be as exact as one can here as to the core of Barker's meaning, for it has strong implications for his understanding of what is normally known as inspiration. To return to the terminology of our discussion of the essay Poetry and Reality in Chapter One, it has to do with the way in which the objectivity of the poem as object trouvé impinges upon the willing, but by no means pre-conditioning, subjectivity of the poet.37 There is in it therefore nothing of the Intentionalist Fallacy, a manner of approach which Barker's phrasing seems explicitly intended to disown:
This notion has nothing to do with any speculative autobiographical correspondences between the poem and the poet: what I seek to describe is the permanence of that moment when the poet, perceiving the possible poem for the first time, modifies his approach to it in terms that strive to anticipate the poem's nature. I suggest that in the apocryphal street where poets pick up poems, there are laws which govern the behaviour of both. The poet is not entitled to accost one poem as if it were another; nor can he know what kind of poem he meets until he has met it. But he must behave as though he had in fact foreseen its nature, for this prognostication operates, in retrospect, as though it had actually had a hand in the evolution of the poem's nature. And this moment of what one might call categorical recognition is the moment immortalized ever afterwards in the expression on the face of the poet as it presides - as it must preside - over the poem. It is, finally, the act of imaginative domination which precipitates the poem's identity.38

This essay of 1948 occurs as the first of the titled items in the selected Essays of 1970, where 'Poetry and Reality' of 1937, for example, is the twelfth. There is therefore some sense in regarding the theory central to it, and enshrined in this paragraph, as definitive for Barker's view of the poet's relationship to his work. It thus needs looking at carefully, for it marks the point at which for Barker the critical problem of Tennyson becomes the problem of reading any poet.

IV

Central to Barker's theory in 'The Face Behind the Poem' is the idea of the mask. "It would be excusable to assume from his behaviour that every word carried by Tennyson contained State secrets", he says, but that "excusable" betrays the superficiality of any such impression.
There is a Tennysonian poetry in which the mask almost fits and the impression is apparently convincing. Despite this, the late Idylls of the King "hints at its own falsity." Once again, the phraseology here is exacting: a "hint" is something which we may either choose to ignore or else simply not notice. It is thus that the officially acceptable work which Tennyson wrote while Laureate was able to pass muster among those who only looked for consoling, patriotic truths. In 'The Two Voices', on the other hand, the subterfuge is less successful since the very writing "acknowledges that it has removed its innermost mask." And of what does this subterfuge consist? Following Auden, Barker is inclined to suggest that the disguise is none other than the pretence to high thought, the guise of intellectual concern which covers the personal pain. It is a point which Barker, again somewhat typically for his generation, reinforces by a contrast with Hopkins, whose seriousness of subject matter and theological insight are undoubted, but whose misgivings as to the validity of poetry as a vehicle of religious expression produces a kind of undertone of existential sadness. For Tennyson, the disparities of tone arise not from any doubt as to the validity of writing poetry, but rather from the fact that when he pretends to be indulging in consecutive thought he is in fact doing something quite different: giving vent to a torrent of purely personal perplexity.

Of such disparity there is no better instance than 'The Two Voices', to which therefore Barker devotes much of this section of his essay. The reason is not hard to see: 'The Two Voices' is the pre-eminent Tennyson poem in which the poet appears to be "presenting a case", or rather two cases: the case for doubt and the case for belief. It is the work by Tennyson which comes closest to those medieval debates whose influence on Barker we discussed in Chapter Two. It is also one poem in which he is quite prepared to be simple. The
simplicity, however, like a limpid stream, simply reveals the depths swirling below. It shows the reader that the surface thought merely lies on top of the undercurrent of passion. The thought content has the effect of giving the poem intellectual respectability; the mainspring of its energy, however, coils elsewhere:

As I see it, the speculative intelligence is to the poem what the camouflage is to some species of animal: a function to make one thing look like another. The function of speculative intelligence in a poem is to make that poem look like a rational and comprehensible statement. But the poem is not this, or not merely this, because if it were it would in no way differ from the comprehensible statements of prose.

Thus for Tennyson (as perhaps for Eliot too, in a different kind of way), the intelligence is itself a form of mask, donned to hide the extremity of the poet's feeling.

The idea of the mask was clearly of importance to Barker in the late 'forties. In re-reading 'The Face Behind the Poem', one is reminded that it was written a year after the First Part of The True Confession of George Barker, commenced, as its opening stanza reminds us, on Barker's thirty-fourth birthday, 26 February 1947. Here Barker adopts a series of disguises, prominent among which are the shades of François Villon (in whose ballade stanza the poem is couched), Charles Baudelaire (whose technique of blasphemy we have already seen as important for Barker), and Lord Byron (whose vein of insolent humour in Don Juan has much to do with Barker's own tone of carefully calculated facetiousness). Throughout the Confession genuine recollection fuses so effectively with fake memories, boasting, mock regret, and half-serious theological speculation as to render the "truth" of the confession completely inscrutable:
What's the point of a confession
If you have nothing to confess?
I follow the perjuring profession
- O poet, lying to impress! -
But the beautiful lie in a beautiful dress
Is the least heinous of my transgressions:
When a new one's added, 'O who was it?'
Sigh the skeletons in my closet.42

It is a cynical mixture of modes of which Tennyson would have been quite incapable; and the method and masks of The True Confession are quite unlike the method and mask of, for example, 'The Two Voices'. Yet the two poems do have this in common, that, while appearing to mean what they say, they are in fact all the time saying something quite different, and that this difference has to be detected less from the words on the page (the objects of "semantic analysis") than from the human expression (in one case tongue-in-cheek, in the other, flinching but upright) which hovers over them. In Barker's own words the real spirit of the poem can only be ascertained from the face behind it.

If in Barker's case the expression on that face is often mocking, in Tennyson it is usually deadly serious, with a seriousness, however, which shifts its ground even as we look at it. It is thus that, earlier in the essay, Barker can speak of the lines of 'Tears, Idle Tears' "manoeuvring their emphases like the lacunae of Lamia." The supreme example of this sort of intractable seriousness is In Memoriam, which, like 'The Two Voices' uses great simplicity of means to convey deep feeling but without, however, dressing the writer's sorrow in the weeds of a consecutive argument. Like 'The Two Voices', however, 'In Memoriam'
deals with deep philosophical issues; like the earlier Tennyson of 'The Lotus Eaters' and 'Tithon', nevertheless, it is also a poem of atmosphere. Its grief is deep and undeniable, but its content sometimes repels by its obviousness. It is to this last criticism, with its foundation in Auden's earlier misgivings, that Barker feels a need principally to address himself:

Verlaine said of him: "When he should have been broken hearted he had reminiscences." But what In Memoriam lucidly and veritably attests is this: that when one is broken-hearted, one does in fact have reminiscences. It may not be honourable, it may not be intelligent, it may not be French; but it is what Tennyson knew more than Verlaine. What is it that we recollect in tranquillity? Verlaine's remark is as irrelevant to In Memoriam as Samuel Johnson's strictures are to 'Lycidas'. For Tennyson is not less prepared to be obvious in the services of the poem than Whitman was prepared to be vulgar or John Milton academic or Wystan Auden a boy scout or Yeats a Voronoff gland.43

While Whitman, Milton, Auden and Yeats adopted for the reader's benefit a whole wardrobe of worldly and unworldly disguises, Tennyson's superior cunning lay in this: that he adopted the least obvious disguise of all, the guise of the obvious, all the more convincing because its seeming authenticity deflected suspicion. When one wishes to say something complicated, to show the reader genuinely complex feelings, no method, Barker implies, is more effective than that of outright simplicity. It is a method well known to the readers of Housman, whose unpretentious mask has often led to a similar sort of dismissal:

A glance at the melancholy postman trudging down a damp lane with a neat packet of letters under his arm unmistakably declares that Housman has merely a few letters of condolence to deliver.44
We will deal with the affinities between Barker's reading of Tennyson and his reading of Housman at greater length in the next chapter. Meanwhile, however, we must look further into his relationship with In Memoriam.

Throughout much of Barker's career Tennyson has served both as an inspiration and as a formal model. There are aspects of his structure which strongly appeal to him, and more especially what one might term his notion of implicit form. When interviewed in 1982 he answered the question "Do you think that a form is something that you discover in the process of writing a poem?" with the remark -

It was Alfred Tennyson who said that a poem's got to have a shape like an apple rind thrown on the floor. The example's marvellous. Years ago I used to talk to my students in America telling them that poems must have a shape, but I always used some example like a loaf of bread or a house. I never got hold of this lovely image of an apple peel thrown on the floor, which is perfect both for its accidentality and its inevitability. It is thus little wonder that for Barker the example of Tennyson meant so much. Since the early 'thirties he has been preoccupied with questions of form, experimenting with received modes such as the sonnet, the sestina and the ballade, moving with some dexterity from free verse to regular stanzaic organization in search of a perfect complement to his meaning. Like Tennyson he is fascinated by both the long and the very short line. And like Tennyson too he has striven to reconcile the qualitative requirements of English metre with an attention
to quantity and vowel sound which has usually been thought the prerogative of the classical, and more particularly the Latin poets.

There is one genre in which Barker has always been especially interested which brings all of these formal preoccupations together: the Elegy. Barker has been writing elegies for fifty years. Thirty Preliminary Poems began with a piece entitled 'Elegiac Stanzas' and one extended item in his recently published work Anno Domini, a memorial to several dead friends, is again entitled simply 'Elegy'.

Again, when asked about this long-standing fascination with a less than fashionable form, Barker replied:

The idea of the elegy to me is almost Roman, that is Romantic in the true sense. The elegies of the Roman poets still break my liver, and, though I never learned Latin, I still have enough of an ear to hear how beautiful are even the rhythmical processes, the noises in Latin elegiac verse.

A close study of Barker's practice of the elegiac form during the 'thirties and 'forties reveals some informative constants. During the build-up to the Second World War, Barker wrote a whole series of elegies around the fate of Europe. In these we see the Elegy, which Barker began by employing as a vehicle for philosophical meditation on the fact of death, and has since used as a means of expressing private bereavement, converted into an instrument of political comment. In re-reading these pieces, it is, however, the "noises" and more especially the vowel sounds which strike one:

I see a scene with a smother of snow over Love.
I know Spring will arise and later the swallow return:
I know, but my torso stands bogged in a load of time,
Like Love lying under the smother of our death and our
Dread. How soon shall the Spring bird arise and the
Summer bells hum with the murmur of our name?

Soon, soon,

Soon the green room goes blue with the last autumn.52

Here premonitions of political disaster, concentrated on the image of
the poet's torso standing bogged down in the mires of circumstance, as
the armies of the allies stood in 1917 bogged down in the mud of
Passchendaele (evoked in the previous stanza), fuses with a sense of
ultimate hope focused on the image of burgeoning Spring. The fusion
between these two extremes of feeling is achieved almost entirely by
the reiteration of open vowel sounds, and more particularly the long,
mourning 'o'.

The logical outcome of such a development was, Barker now
believes, the Sacred and Secular Elegies published in America in
1942:53

In the 1940s I wrote a series called the Sacred and Secular
Elegies which was published in America before it appeared over
here. That was when I tried to get it out of my system, and to
invent if possible a line that was slightly longer than the classical
English line, to try to get a touch of the Virgilian into English,
which better men than me have tried to do.54

Turning to the third of the 'Sacred Elegies' it is easy to see what
Barker had in mind:
Marooned on the islands of pride, lonely
And mad on the pyramids of achievement,
Disillusioned in the cathedrals of doxology,
The sad man senses his continual bereavement:
God has just died, and now there is only
Us.  

Though eventually published in America, these lines were most probably written in Japan, a country which supplied much of Barker's poetry of the time with its island imagery. Here, however, Barker's own personal isolation on what in his 'Pacific Sonnets' he called "These islands hung in the fringe of Asia" becomes a symbol for the isolation of Western man, estranged from the religious system which alone can give his achievement meaning. The sense of cultural bereavement thus caused is once again conveyed by a concentration on open vowels, especially 'o' and 'u'. But Barker has a problem. The long line has its uses, and in the best of such poetry evokes marvellously the sense of historical momentousness which Barker is evidently trying to distill. At other moments, however, it drags its feet, and tends to clog the movement of the poet with a restraint that only sometimes arises naturally from the subject matter.

The problem at this stage in Barker's career was therefore to find a way of conveying the grandeur of grief within a structure which was at the same time nimble enough to accommodate subtle shifts of mood. For this very reason he was increasingly drawn to In Memoriam with its limpid surface suggesting turbulent depths. Again, when asked "Is In Memoriam the supreme English elegy?" Barker replied:
I think that there is absolutely no question about that. To me it's one of the most beautiful poems ever written by anybody. And what's more, written without the Virgilian line, in a stanza which on the face of it you'd say couldn't possibly evoke the depths that it does. But in these little tiny lines are embedded images which are absolutely miraculous: "And like a guilty thing I creep".58

The image to which Barker here draws our attention is extracted from the very lyric VII which in his essay of 1936 Eliot had taken as demonstrating the remarkable range of feeling which Tennyson managed to infuse into the little quatrain:

\begin{verbatim}
Behold me, for I cannot sleep,
And like a guilty thing I creep
At earliest morning to the door.59
\end{verbatim}

The pun on "morning / mourning" embedded in the last line is a favourite of Barker's found in poems as diverse and widely spaced in time as 'Daedalus' of 1934 and Anno Domini of 1982.60 There is, as we shall see, a possible source for it in Housman's Last Poems (1922); the elegiac connotations are, however, probably clearer in the Tennyson where the sense of personal bereavement blends, as in so much of Barker's later elegiac work, with a marked sense of the insecurity of religious consolation.

Considering Barker's religious background, it is not surprising that the existential anguish which lies behind so much of In Memoriam should strike a receptive chord. Much of his work for the last thirty years has been concerned with what Anno Domini calls "the huge masonry of / collapsing belief." It is not a theme with which many of his
contemporaries are likely to have helped him, being either, like Auden in his later years, more or less convinced converts, or more probably either agnostic or indifferent. The crisis of faith is a mid-Victorian theme, even if today it carries different overtones. Tennyson is of much assistance here, all the more so because in him the "masonry", even if tottering, contrives ultimately to stay in position. Even failing belief has a shape, and In Memoriam, which brings together the discursive and the atmospheric Tennyson, is its pattern.

In 1968, after several years trying to write a long poem on this subject, Barker at last succeeded in bringing together the Elegy, in which he has always been interested, with the poem of religious doubt. The resulting work, At Thurgarton Church (1968)\(^6\) draws obviously on Gray. The deeper informing influence, however, is undeniably Tennyson's In Memoriam. It can be discerned in the way in which the poet craves a final consolation he knows to be impossible, in the way too that, in order to give his unease some sense of temporary stillness, he falls back on "tiny little stanzas with great images behind them":

Haunting the December
fields their bitter lives
entreat us to remember
the lost spirit that grieves
over these fields like a scarecrow.

That grieves over all it ever
did, and all, all not
done, that grieves over
its crosspurposed lot:
to know and not to know.\(^6\)
What is remarkable about these two stanzas is the great complexity of meaning and spiritual organization lying beneath the pure simplicity of the surface. The dead spirit regrets both the nullity of its own past life, "and all", the complete futility of human existence. It also regrets its own omissions. The crux of the meaning, however, turns on the word "know" with its suppressed substitute "no". Firstly, it treats the two modes of knowledge, scientific and intuitive: our instinctive self knowledge is hedged around with boundaries which permit us no certainty as regards our ultimate condition. Nevertheless, if the reader substitutes "no" for first one instance and then another he derives two important qualifications: on the one hand, "to assert the futility of mortality and yet not be absolutely certain of it", and, on the other, "to achieve a complete and uncomplicated faith". The two constructions are clearly opposite to one another, and yet both reveal facets of the poet's mind in lines which glow with a kind of ardent agnosticism, held in the long lamenting open vowel which runs through the refrain-like closing lines of each stanza as well as fixing the pun.

Indeed Barker himself sees the long 'o' vowel as essential to the aural cohesion of the whole work, claiming that he has managed to make "fourteen puns" upon it. It is an indication both of the fine tuning of Barker's ear, and of the way in which, in his later as well as in his earliest poetry, assonance assumes dimensions which are both sensual and cognitive. It is also a symptom of his closeness to Tennyson, for only a poet who had absorbed the spirit rather than the letter of In Memoriam would structure an entire poem around vowel sounds in order to evoke at one and the same time his own mental pain and the human voice as it grieves endlessly for lost certainties.

Only a poet who had drunk deep at the spring of In Memoriam too
would take a single biographical moment in which the processes of human compunction are arrested by a baffled groping for "a hand that can be grasped no more", and take that as an emblem of man's cosmic aloneness:

I enter and find I stand  
in a great barn, bleak and bare.  
Like ice the winter ghosts and  
the white walls gleam and flare  
and flame as the sun drops low.  

And I see, then, that slowly  
the December day has gone.  
I stand in the silence, not wholly  
believing I am alone.  
Somehow I cannot go.\textsuperscript{64}

So the poet, not wholly believing, and not holy but still obscurely believing, stands in the nave of a stark Norfolk church missing both God and the congregated presences who once faithfully inhabited it. So too, forgetting to shut the church door after him, he loses consciousness almost of the presence of the reader, and, in an instant of sublime simplicity "acknowledges", as he once said of his great Victorian forebear, that he "has removed his innermost mask."\textsuperscript{65}

There is perhaps only one other English poet since Tennyson for whom the loss of love "that can be grasped no more" has conjured up such an extremity of existential grief, and who also had the courage to express these feelings in poetry of such simple but profound dignity. We must now turn to the poetry of A. E. Housman.
NOTES AND REFERENCES

1 The Poems of Tennyson with an Introduction by T. S. Eliot (London: Nelson Classics, 1936). The Introduction was reprinted as 'In Memoriam' in T. S. Eliot, Essays Ancient and Modern (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1936), pp. 186-203. Subsequently an edited version under the title 'Tennyson's In Memoriam was included in T. S. Eliot, Selected Prose ed. John Hayward (London: Penguin, 1953), pp. 176-85. All further page references will be to Essays Ancient and Modern as the version which Barker is most likely to have seen.


5 Eliot, Essays Ancient and Modern, p. 201.

6 Selected Prose, pp. 176-84 and pp. 185-96.


8 See note 1.


14 The Poems of Tennyson, ed. Christopher Ricks (London: Longman, 1969), p. 602. Subsequent references are to 'Ricks'.

15 Ricks, pp. 785-6.

16 Ricks, pp. 429-38.

17 Poems (1935) p. 11.

18 'Ulysses' in Ricks, pp. 560-66; 'Tithonus' in Ricks, pp. 1112-8. According to Ricks's note, though first published in the Cornhill Magazine in February 1860, 'Tithonus' was originally written in a shorter form as 'Tithon' (Ricks, pp. 566-8) in 1833, a date given by Tennyson himself at the end of the 1860 proofs, then deleted. In origin then, as well as in atmosphere, this poem belongs to the year which produced 'The Lotus Eaters' and 'Ulysses' both of which appeared in Poems (1843).
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19 Poems (1933) p. 12.

20 Ricks, pp. 568-74. According to Ricks's note, though not published until 1885, 'Turgesius', like Tithonus, was, according to Hallam Tennyson, "partly written at the same time" as Ulysses, i.e. in 1833.


22 Eliot, Essays Ancient and Modern, p. 191.

23 See Note 7.


27 Auden, 1946, p. x.


29 Auden, 1946, p. xi.

reprinting Barker gives the date 1948, this being apparently the year when 'The Face Behind the Poem' was actually written. Subsequent page references will be to Essays.


32 Auden, 1946, p. 244.

33 Cleanth Brooks, A Well Wrought Urn (New York: Reynal & Hitchcock, 1947.)

34 This is the original version of the paragraph in Encounter VI (May, 1956), p. 70.

35 Barker, Essays, p. 18.


37 Barker, Essays, pp. 88-90.

38 Barker Essays, p. 19.


40 Barker, Essays, pp. 22-3.

42 The True Confession, p. 5.

43 Barker, Essays, p. 22.

44 Barker, Essays, p. 21.

45 'A Conversation between Robert Fraser and George Barker', P.N. Review 31 (9, No. 5) p. 47.


47 Cf. 'Sestina at 34' in Collected Poems, pp. 154-5.

48 The True Confession (see Note 40) is written throughout in the stanza of François Villon's Le Grand Testament, which is itself adapted from the ballade form.


50 'Elegy' from George Barker, Anno Domini (London: Faber, 1983).

51 P.N. Review Interview, p. 46.


54 P.N. Review Interview, p. 46.

55 Collected Poems p. 117.


57 cf. Robert Fraser 'The One That Got Away' in P.N. Review 31 (9, No. 5), p. 42.

58 P.N. Review Interview, p. 46.

59 Ricks, p. 871.

60 For a full analysis of the history of this pun in Barker's work, see Chapter 5.

61 See Note 11.


63 Conversations, 1981.

64 Poems of Places and People, p. 11.

65 Barker, Essays, p. 19.
On the evening of 22 October 1936 the poet and English exponent of Surrealism David Gascoyne went to the Old Vic in London to see a production of The Country "life by Sir William Wycherly. The comment which he jotted down in his journal upon his return has much to tell us about the popular literary taste of the period as observed by a member of the rising generation and an intimate of George Barker:

The vogue for Restoration Comedy with all its paraphernalia of cuckoldry and whoremasters must be seen as symptomatic of "the times" as both the recent Ibsen season and the Tchekov revivals (the Russian bourgeoisie in decay - yearnings, doubts, disintegration) such as this year's Seagull, the boom in Housman's poetry.  

1936 was the year of Housman's death, of A. S. F. Gow's A. E. Housman, A Sketch and of the posthumous publication of More Poems. The "boom" which Gascoyne mentions was therefore not perhaps surprising, but Housman's popularity with a wide reading public had deep roots. Following the long awaited appearance in 1922 of Last Poems the Grant Richards edition of A Shropshire Lad (1887) was continually reprinted through the late 'twenties and the 'thirties, culminating in the publication of the first two volumes under a single cover in 1937 and the first Collected Poems in 1939. There was also a spate of biographical, and, on the poet's death, memorial studies. By 1936, the year in which Gascoyne saw fit to comment on the vogue, Housman's distinctive melancholia had so instilled itself into the national mood as to give rise to two swinging parodies; Terence Beersay's (pseud.) A Shropshire Lag and Stephen Robertson's A Shropshire Racket.
The sudden surge in Housman's popularity in the late 'thirties was nevertheless a remarkable phenomenon which calls for some explanation. It may well be true, as Gascoyne suggests, that the social and political insecurity of the time had much to do with it. In the context of a build up to a possible war the masculine stoicism which on one level Housman could be read as projecting would indeed have made much sense. For a popular middle class audience such as Housman's lyrics won for themselves at the time, the recruiting poems in A Shropshire Lad, for example, might well have served the turn of a sentimental substitute for action. Self-sacrifice being simultaneously craved and dreaded, a poetic posture which seemed to maintain an eloquent balance between world weariness and a paradoxical eagerness to fight would have found a ready market. If this is the case, Gascoyne was right in suggesting that the lyrics of Housman were publicly acceptable for much the same reasons as contemporary productions of Tchekov; through them an audience could watch a world sinking without getting its feet wet.

While popular with the general public, Housman's poetry both appealed to, and disturbed the intelligentsia. The reasons are not difficult to trace. Where the modernist etiquette of the time stressed complexity and contemporaneity, Housman's language was old-fashioned in its decorum and to the casual eye almost absurdly simple. Yet, when read with an intelligent eye to the emotional content, his poems revealed ever-receding depths. In fact, these two facets of his work intensified one another: the clearer the surface, the easier it was to see
the complexity that lay below, and the complexity made the relative clarity of surface expression all the more remarkable. When More Poems appeared shortly after Housman's death, Jacob Bronowski, the scientist and literary critic, co-founder and editor with William Empson of the Cambridge magazine Experiment, reviewed the book for The Criterion in terms which anticipated his later discussion of Housman's achievement in Poet's Defence (1939):6

Housman's pathos lies in the to-and-fro of two sadnesses, which cannot be held together. One is the sadness of the man of the world. The other is the sadness of losing the world. The first sadness makes him wish to die. The second sadness makes him wish to live.

No doubt all men feel one of these wishes at one time, and the other at another time. But Housman's poetry is wholly spent in these two wishes, in wishing to hold them together at the same time.7

It was this seeming emotional inconsistency which simultaneously teased and delighted the analytical intelligence of those at the time who appreciated both precision and ambivalence. Prominent among these was William Empson, Bronowski's Cambridge friend and co-editor of Experiment. Though refraining from drawing examples from Housman's work in Seven Types of Ambiguity (1930), in the year following its publication Empson found himself teaching the lyrics of A Shropshire Lad to the students of his English class at the Bunrika Daigaku University in Tokyo, Japan where he was newly installed as Professor. This was the time of the Sino-Japanese War when young Japanese men were themselves eligible for conscription, and the lyric which Empson chose for analysis was 'It nods and curteys and recovers' ("The Nettle Poem"). Empson's account of his class's reaction, related twenty years later in The Structure of Complex Words (1951), is very instructive
both about the way that Housman's work could appear to those who did not share his coded assumptions, and of the reaction to this disparity by a highly articulate member of the 'thirties school of critical analysis and poet:

... They were liable to be conscripted to fight in Manchuria, indeed a man from the class had already been drafted and killed in Shanghai, and they wrote down pretty consistently "We think Housman is quite right. We will do no good to anyone being killed as soldiers, but we will be admired, and anyway we are better dead." To do the old gentleman justice, I think that he would have been rather shocked by these bits of schoolwork. So I think that Housman is about as pure a case as you can get of a poet using untruths to excite attitudes.¹

Empson's comments turn on a literal reading of the call to self-sacrifice in Housman's recruiting poems by those whose absorption of it was both endorsed by their own culturally determined inclinations and unchecked by any rapport with the countervailing irony which undercuts it. In order to explain this phenomenon he goes back to the theory of 'attitude' expounded by his Cambridge tutor I. A. Richards in The Principles of Literary Criticism (1922) where, after defining attitudes as "imaginal and incipient tendencies to action"¹⁰, Richards continues:

The difference between understanding (a work of art) and failing to do so is, in most cases, a difference between being able to make the required responses in an imaginal or incipient degree, adjusting them to one another at that stage, and being unable to produce them except overtly and at their fullest development.

Superficially Richards's last clause here would seem to cover the case of Empson's Japanese students who, by this token, can be seen as having failed to understand the poem presented to them. In reality, Empson
The objection I want to make is that this account is liable to be misunderstood so as to shortcircuit the process. It seems to me that the attitude recommended by the nettle-poem, if we regard its pseudo-statements as a series of stimuli imposed upon the organism of the reader is quite clearly an undesirable one... On this theory the poem is very bad, whereas it seems to me that an adequate theory ought to be able to admit of its merits. It seems to be enough to say that the experience ought to be "imaginative" in that we imagine some other person in this frame of mind; we are not simply worked on ourselves as objects of the psychological experiment. But as soon as you admit this, a good deal more thinking has to go on in the background, and a good deal more logical consistency.

Here Empson seems to be advocating a theory of partial empathy according to which the presumed speaker in any poem, and more especially one by Housman, is to be viewed as a character in a dramatic monologue with whose spiritual conflicts we are expected to sympathize without letting our moral equilibrium be disturbed. This is perhaps close to a theory of catharsis according to which an audience can sway to the death-throes of a Sophoclean or Shakespearean protagonist (or, to employ Gascoyne's example, the fate of the doomed Russian bourgeoisie in The Cherry Orchard) and then emerge in the night air ready for a good dinner. Indeed, it is this analogy which Richards himself seems to have had in mind when commenting, in connection with his theory of attitude:

... the description or the theatrical presentation of a murder has a different effect upon us from that which would be produced by most actual murders if they took place before us.
It is this necessary distancing from the human connotations of any work of art of which Empson's Japanese students, according to his account, were incapable. Responding to the suicidal implications of the statements in the poetry literally construed, they reacted with an alacrity and forthrightness which, though it may have vindicated Housman's insight, did scant justice to the response which, considered as works of imaginative literature, his work seems to require.

Eight years later, George Barker, then twenty six, was also appointed to a Japanese Chair of English Literature, at the Imperial Tohoku University, Sendai. Like Empson he too evidently felt that the comparative straightforwardness of Housman's vocabulary made him an ideal poet to teach to students whose command of written English was less than perfect. When, however, he attempted to teach them the lyric 'The Chestnut casts its flambeaux' from Last Poems (1922), he found that they came to grief over the metaphor in the very first line:

When, many years ago, I was teaching in Japan, I had occasion to learn the curious fact that the Japanese intelligence does not encompass the faculty of metaphor.

... It happened that I was speaking to the students of the Imperial University of Tokyo about Housman's verses 'The Chestnut casts its flambeaux', when, after considerable silence, one student, more thorough-minded than the rest, rose to his feet and said: "The line is meaningless. Chestnut trees cannot throw torches away. They do not possess torches." I said very slowly: "The chestnut flower is like a torch. It resembles a torch." The student, who was an honourable person, looked at me closely and replied, "Mr. Barker, either the chestnut tree has torches or it does not have torches. Which is it?"
though the incidents described by Empson and Barker both centre around the issue of literalness of interpretation, it might be thought that the problem is different in each case, the Empson anecdote concerning the question of comprehension of Housman's whole meaning within a poem, while the Barker's story concentrates more narrowly on the construction of one of his metaphors. In reality, however, their accounts are intimately related, since Empson, as we have already seen, regards "attitude" as a kind of metaphor for action, and Barker's theory of metaphor encompasses the whole function of any poem. In the essay 'Poetry and Reality' published two years before his departure for Japan Barker is quite insistent upon this point. Analysing this essay in Chapter One, we saw how Barker seemingly endorses Richards's theory of the pseudo-statement while attempting to contest it. Poetry, he contends; operates in an area of truth distinct from the scientific. Moreover, this area is identical with the domain of metaphor, a point which he reinforces by a discussion of the Tennyson song 'Tears, Idle Tears' with which he was to deal at greater length in 'The Face Behind the Poem' ten years later. In 1937, however, he is concerned with the song as an instance of what he calls 'metaphorical migration':

The 'happy Autumn fields' lose their actual nature and become instead a negative representation of the 'days that are no more': and this is the process of the metaphor. The vision of the poet, contemplating the actual world, enhances it by 'metaphorical migration', into a poem. Two states of reality do not concur in the poem. One state, the inherent, governs the observations which the poet makes of any higher or lower reality.15

Thus metaphor is the means by which objective, literal reality is transformed into the stuff of the imagination. It is a theory which has considerable relevance to Barker's later account of his attempt to teach
In Japan, Housman is *par excellence* the poet in which statements mean something other than their objective construction would seem to suggest. In dealing critically with Housman's work, therefore, the reader has a special problem, a problem which becomes most acute when trying to introduce his poetry to those of another cultural background, as in the 'thirties both Barker and Empson discovered.

For Barker in particular the problem of interpreting Housman seems to be related to the problem of reading Tennyson. In both, the image and metaphor are seen to play special roles, and in each the role of the metaphor is connected with the function of the Mask. We have already seen how in 'The Face Behind the Poem' Barker ascribes one kind of masquerade to Tennyson. In another essay 'On the Image' written in the very same year, he extends this idea to cover the whole realm of figurative representation:

'Everything profound loves the mask.' The image exercises its profundity in proportion to the number of masks it wears to conceal, and at the same time to characterize, the profundities in which it exists.  

Here Nietzsche's classic statement about the function of the mask in dramatic art is adapted to the use of poetry, and more particularly the sort of poetry which hides its proper significance behind many veils of meaning. Of this species of verse there are few instances more intriguing than the work of Housman, whose true purport so often seems to evade the clasp of the analytical 'semantic' intelligence. For Housman wears not one but many masks. It will be seen, for example, that Bronowski's statement in his review of 1937 about Housman's 'two sadnesses' is easily reducible to a statement about masks, for, looked at from one angle, Housman is seen to be wearing the tragic mask of 'the man of the world' and from another, an alternative tragic mask.
expressing a 'sadness of losing the world'. Put another way, all of
Housman's poetry can be seen to consist of a set of elaborate
metaphors, since his exhortation to heroic self-sacrifice is clearly as
metaphorical as is his pastoral convention and as, too, his despair at
the inevitability of death. Today it might be possible to say that each
is in reality a metaphor for the homosexual condition, a fact which
before the publication of De Amicitia in 1967, many may have
suspected, but few knew for certain. For readers of Barker's
generation, however, the mystery of Housman's verse was compounded
by the mystery of his personality, and in the attempt to disentangle it
the probing of the analytical intelligence proved an unusually blunt
instrument, an admission in which Empson and Barker for once share the
same ground.

II

On his arrival at the Imperial Tohoku University in Sendai in the
winter 1939, George Barker was expected to deliver an Inaugural
Lecture as Professor of English Literature to be followed by a course of
lectures on the English poets. Though the complete text of these
lectures has not survived, we do have three foolscap leaves in Barker's
hand containing a verbatim text of the first two sections of his
Inaugural with part of the third, and a longer typescript containing a
synopsis of the fourteen lectures on English poetry from Chaucer to
Swinburne given during the early months of 1940. (See Appendix E)

In 1939, it will be realized, Barker had very little formal teaching
experience. Not himself a graduate, he had earned a precarious living
by his pen since 1934, and was thus new, not merely to Japan, but to-
the university setting and even to the structure of an hierarchical institution. He had been invited to take up the Chair because he was a practising poet, and it was as a poet that he intended to speak. But he needed a formal model on which to base his lectures, since he did not, like practically all of the poets of the generation immediately preceding his, possess the experience of sitting in on lectures as a student. Nevertheless he did have at his disposal the example of two men whom he greatly admired, both of them poets, and both of whom had published the texts of public lectures six years previously in 1933. The first of these was T. S. Eliot, the influence of whose The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism, originally the Charles Eliot Norton lectures at Harvard,\(^{19}\) we have already examined, and the second A. E. Housman, whose The Name and the Nature of Poetry, delivered in Cambridge as the Leslie Stephen Memorial Lecture on 9th May 1933 had been published by the Cambridge University Press later the same year.\(^{20}\)

Barker begins his Inaugural Lecture by paying tribute to Ralph Hodgson, the Chair's previous occupant. He then passes on to a modest disclaimer of his abilities as critic which is very close to Housman's waiving of any pretence to critical authority at the beginning of 'The Name and the Nature of Poetry'. There is one crucial difference, however. Where Housman had protested that the robes of literary critic sat uneasily on shoulders which were more used to the burdens of classical scholarship, Barker is concerned to situate himself as a professional poet who has mistakenly wandered into the groves of academe. This leads him straight into his next theme, which is evidently to be a dominant motif in his lecture: the unintellectual nature of the appeal of poetry. This too is a major strand in Housman's text. Just how close the passages come to one another can be seen by laying them side by side. Here is Housman discussing the rarity in the
eighteenth century of that quality "which moves and touches us in a special and recognizable way" which he took to be the essence of poetry as opposed to verse:

Meaning is of the intellect, poetry is not. If it were, the eighteenth century would have been able to write it better. As matters actually stand, who are the English poets of that age in whom pre-eminently one can hear and recognize the true poetic accent emerging clearly from the contemporary dialect? These four: Collins, Christopher Smart, Cowper and Blake. And what other characteristics have they in common? They were mad. Remember Plato; He who without the Muses' madness in his soul comes knocking at the door of poetry and thinks that art will make him anything fit to be called a poet, finds that the poetry which he indites in his sober senses is beaten hollow by the poetry of madmen.

That the intellect is not the fount of poetry, that it may actually hinder its production, and that it cannot even be trusted to recognize poetry when it is produced, is best seen in the case of Smart. Neither the prize founded in this University by the Rev. Thomas Seaton nor the successive contemplation of five several attributes of the Supreme Being could incite him to good poetry when he was sane. The only poem by which he is remembered, a poem which came to its own in the kinder climate of the nineteenth century and has inspired one of the best poems of the twentieth, was written, if not, as tradition says, in actual confinement, at any rate very soon after his release; and then the eighteenth century, the age of sanity and intelligence, collected his poetical works, it excluded this piece as "bearing melancholy proofs of the recent estrangement of his mind." 21

Here, for comparison, is Barker:
I can begin my lecture from this point, namely the element of the transcendental or the rationally incomprehensible in poetry. When we read a poem that we do not at first understand, it is natural that we should simply say that this poem has no meaning; but this is not true, for what we mean is simply that at a first reading we have not understood it. Nevertheless, although we may not have understood the poem rationally or intellectually yet it is possible that a certain communication of emotion may have taken place. I can think of any number of poems in English which at first sight must strike the reader as meaningless: such poems as Christopher Smart's recently published Rejoice in the Lamb or almost any example from the prophetic books of William Blake. But this overt incomprehensibility does not really signify that these poems have no message, no communication, no fundamental significance. What it means is that this fundamental significance is not intellectual, is not rational; instead both with the Prophetic Books and Rejoice in the Lamb I believe that what the poet is concerned to say in the poem is an imaginative approximation rather than an intellectual statement. By this I mean that the Prophetic Books of Blake can communicate an imaginative meaning to us without our being able to reduce this meaning to a simple and intellectually comprehensible statement. And this is one of the functions of poetry, the communication of matter which prose cannot properly communicate.

A renewed enthusiasm for the work of Christopher Smart had been caused in England on the eve of Barker's departure by the publication, after more than a century and a half of neglect, of Rejoice in the Lamb in an edition by William Stead which on its appearance Barker had reviewed for The New English Weekly in March 1939. (See Appendix E)

Though Housman's comments in all probability refer to A Song to David, which Edmund Blunden had edited in 1924, both he and Barker seem to have the same qualities in mind: the irrational associations, vivid imagery and apocalyptic tone which both lecturers, not unnaturally,
connect with the writing of Blake, which Keynes's centenary edition of 1927 had brought into new prominence, and the effect of whose work on Barker's poetry of the 'thirties we examined in Chapter Three.

There were other reasons why both Housman and Barker should be drawn to Smart's later poetry. Both *A Song to David*, written in all probability shortly after Smart's confinement, and *Jubilate Agno* written during it, are products of a period of severe mental derangement. Neither Housman nor Barker were strangers to sharp bursts of imaginative activity as a result of emotional disturbance, since the major part of the lyrics collection in *A Shropshire Lad* (1896) was written in the six months following the marriage and departure for India of Housman's friend Moses Jackson, and Barker's *Calamiterror*, published two years before his lecture, was inspired in the first instance, as we have already seen, by multiple personal misfortune.

There, however, the resemblance stops, for whereas the style of *Calamiterror*, so ably parodied by Dylan Thomas and John Davenport in *The Death of the King's Canary* in 1940, was high-flown, convoluted and choked by surrealistic images, the Housmanian characteristic, as all acknowledged, was perspicacity.

Thus, though there were sound reasons why in 1939 Barker should have respected Housman's opinions and critical preferences, the admiration he had for his poetry was near to an attraction of opposites. "Clarity", says a recent critic, "meant to Housman the poet what accuracy meant to Housman the scholar", and, though in the first decade of his writing life Barker shewed as we have seen, much interest in popular forms such as the Border Ballad, he had not, as of 1939, succeeded in infusing a corresponding lucidity into his own work. There is some evidence therefore that to the extent that he was drawn to Housman's poetry at the time, it was because it provided him with a possible model for the clarity and directness which he obscurely felt his
own writing to need. A close study of Housman's lyrics would, he felt, enable him to investigate ways in which the emotional complexities which he was still concerned to express in his own poetry could be conveyed in language which, far from clouding his meaning, set it off to advantage. That this was, indeed, Barker's turn of thought at the time is confirmed by such papers and personal editions as survive from the period.

III

In the front room of Barker's sixteenth century cottage in Itteringham is preserved a copy of the second impression of the first edition of Housman's Last Poems (1922). Inside the front cover are a set of Japanese hieroglyphs, suggesting that this copy of Housman's second collection of verse was in Barker's possession when he worked in Japan. Further inspection reveals other interesting details. Of the forty-one poems in the collection, sixteen are marked with a cross, these being in order numbers iii, iv, vi, vii, viii, ix, xv, xvi, xvii, xviii, xx, xxi, xxii, xxix, xxxii, xxxiii, xxxvi. Other marginalia and notes gathered at the end of the book strongly suggest that this is a copy marked up for teaching purposes. A note opposite the title page refers us forward to page 53 on which we find lyric xxvii ("The sigh that moves the grasses"). Inside the back cover are three comments which run, from top to bottom:
I think that the poem 'The Gate of Hell' makes clear what I could not do.

Cf. the effect of In Memoriam on these poems.

Slight sensation of monotony from verbs so often at the start of the line.

The observation contained in the last of these notes is reinforced by others within the body of the book. At the foot of page 37, for example, under the poem 'Spring Morning' (number xvi, crossed), we have the abbreviated comment

st verb at the start of the line

Looking up through the text of the poem itself we find a number of words clearly underlined, all but one of these being finite verbs or participles which occur at the beginning of lines. In order of occurrence these are "Flowers" (line 4); "Glitters" (line 8); "Wafts" (line 10); "Raising" (line 14); "gnawn" (at the end of the same line, the one exception to the rule); "Mans" (line 15); "Drinks" (line 16); "Arches" (line 22); and "Rouses" (line 24).

The practice has been repeated at Lyric xxix ('Wake not for the world-heard thunder'), where again all of the verbs at the beginning of lines are underscored, these being "wake" (line 1); "Fear" (line 6); "Stretch" (line 8); "Stir" (line 9); "Call" (line 12); "Screams" (line 14); and "Sleep" (line 16).

Bearing in mind the prominence which these annotations give to the issue of the placing of verbs within the line, it seems wise to deal with this question first. Barker's comment at the end of the book seems to imply a note of criticism, since it suggests that a more even
distribution of verbs might have secured a greater variety of cadence. A glance back at the contents of the volume, however, confirms that Barker's generalization is less than representative, for in the major proportion of the lyrics verbs are not especially common in the position which he specifies. To compare two adjacent lyrics, number xxx ('Sinner's Rue', unmarked) has eleven verbs, and while three of these occur at the end of lines and thus on the rhyme, only one is at the beginning of a line. Out of 49 verbs in the next poem, the long allegorical 'Hell Gate', 14 occur at the start of lines, the rest being evenly distributed along lines or at the end. While this proportion is higher than in xxx, the main reason is, however, perfectly clear: for while the metre of 'Hell Gate' is trochaic and thus attracts grammatically significant parts of speech to the stressed syllable at the beginning of the line, 'Sinner's Rue' is essentially iambic and can thus only accommodate monosyllabic verbs in the normally weak first syllable when an instance of rhythmic counterpoint occurs. Moreover, an analysis of the eighteen lyrics which Barker has marked with a cross demonstrates that, even among the poems to which he paid special attention, the iambic norm prevails. Of the eighteen only four are in trochees together with a fifth (number xxxvi, 'West and away in the wheels of darkness roll') which is in a mixture of dactyls and trochees which also throws a stress on the first syllable of the line. The remaining thirteen are definitely iambic. It is thus not surprising to find that in this group of poems the instance of verbs occurring at the beginning of lines is unusually low. Four (numbers xviii, xxi, xxii and xxvi) have none at all in this position, while a further four have only one apiece. From such a survey the most likely conclusion is that what interested Barker in his reading of these poems was not so much the frequency of thus placing verbs in the text, but the special uses to which Housman puts such placement on the occasions when he does indulge in it.
of the exultant energy of the Spring. The cruel complicity with natural injustice thus suggested is most acutely felt in the lines:

Now the scorned unlucky lad
Rousing from his pillow gnawn

where the boy's stirring from sleep is seen to echo the sexual arousal of his faithless girl as she stirs "from another's side" in the very last line of the poem.

The thrusting impulse of the poem in its celebratory aspect is much helped by the almost callous insistence of the trochaic metre. It is this jaggedness of pulse, so alien to his own prosodic practice during the 'thirties, which Barker seems to find less than acceptable. Despite this, his comment at the bottom of the page, far from objecting to any regretted monotony, may read as a mental note for further application:

st. verb at the beginning of the line

The versatility of Housman's verb placement is confirmed by lyric xxix 'Wake not for the world-heard thunder', where the trochaic pulse reinforces the Reveille's call to arms, only to be undercut immediately by a series of negatives which cancel out the assertive verbs at the beginning of the line: "WAKE not"; "Stir not". The final result of placing such verbs in this way is therefore exactly the opposite of what we might expect it to be, for, far from endorsing the appeal to action, they freeze it in a constraint which ultimately fuses with the immobility of death. A close study of such a poem can only thus have confirmed an impression of the flexibility and sophistication possible within
The clear object lesson to be learned from the use of verbs in such poetry is that the blatant positioning of important words at the beginning of the line need not entail any lack of thematic finesse. For one reared in the modernism's mistrust of the obvious, its avoidance of the rhetorical and straining after oblique effects, such light-fingered subtlety cannot but have been instructive. Here for once was a poet who was most oblique when seemingly most direct, and whose obliquity, moreover, like Tennyson's, was not exhausted by "semantic analysis".

There is one other poem in the collection, not notable for its deployment of verbs, to which Barker's annotations bid us pay attention. On page 53, to which we are directed by a note inside the front cover, we have this:

XXVII

The sigh that heaves the grasses
Whence thou wilt never rise
Is of the air that passes
And knows not if it sighs.

The diamond tears adorning
Thy low mound on the lea,
Those are the tears of morning,
That weep, but not for thee.
Line seven offers us an alternative, and perhaps more convincing, source, for the Barkerian pun on "mourning" which in our last chapter we tentatively attributed to Section VII of In Memoriam. It is a device which has preoccupied Barker for fifty years:

I mourn him. Him I mourn, from morn to morning

("Daedalus", 1934)\(^{26}\)

Temperate is the weather of all other worlds,
But ours is red at morning, as the dawn
Comes glittering with obituaries

("Triumphal Ode MCMXXIX")\(^{27}\)

And so I send
O all my faith, and all my love to tell her
That she will move from mourning into morning.

("To My Mother", 1944)\(^{28}\)

But how can we tell this to the morning.
That, as we groan, comes up over the hill
Of our midnight grief?

("To my Son", 1950)\(^{29}\)
Tenderest of men in the morning before the ravening ghouls
Swept out of his holyrood conscience like lost souls,
In the evening we heard him howling in their chains.

('Funeral Eulogy for Robert Colquhoun, 1966')

I hear only the
hiss of the October
grass in the small morning
wind and the idiot
joy of the
bird nested at
twilight...

('Letter Addressed to the Corpse of Eliot', 1971)

As in so many of the above examples, the pun on "morning" in the Housman lyric is essential to its emotional balance. For our response to this poem depends on an inclination to indulge in the pathetic fallacy, only to have this impulse cruelly stifled by an overriding recognition of nature's indifference to human suffering. The possible pun with "mourning" is essential to this procedure because it opens up the possibility of natural sympathy and thus prepares the ground for the ensuing disillusionment. By introducing us to the availability of the pun and then promptly shutting off its positive implications, Housman has once again shown how a simple device may be used for subtle, thematically integrated purposes.

But it is not only in the shared use of a singular pun that
Housman's affinity with Tennyson lies. One of the notes at the end of Barker's copy of Last Poems alerts us to another relationship: "the effect of In Memoriam on these poems." The similarity is both formal and thematic. Both In Memoriam and Last Poems use simple regular stanzas, in the first case a uniform quatrains, in the second a mixture of quatrains and other modes. Both are remarkable for the lucidity of their vocabulary and their elegant use of rhyme. Both take an elegiac or pessimistic mood as indicative of certain definitive truths about man's condition. There is, however, a deeper affinity based on a shared recognition of the insufficiency of poetry as a vehicle of affirmation in the face of overwhelming philosophical odds. Even Tennyson, sealed off by temperament from the self-structures of Housman's bitter irony, has this modesty, this sense of the flimsiness of his craft against the forces of death and negation:

I cannot love thee as I ought
   For love reflects the thing beloved;
   My words are only words, and moved
Upon the topmost froth of thought.32

So runs my dream: but what am I?
   An infant crying in the night:
   An infant crying for the light,
   But with no language but a cry.33
There is also a sense in which the linguistic simplicity of both poets acts as a kind of aesthetic equivalent to the candid awareness both have of the contingency of themselves and of their art. Their poetry is simple in more than one sense: as well as being on the surface straightforward it also avoids pretentiousness, since pretence of various kinds is precisely what each is trying to see through. The unambitiousness of their stanzaic organization is symptomatic of the fact that each has a faith in his medium which goes only so far.

The feeling of the futility of language and art as vehicles of philosophical truth was something that Barker was to come to share when, twenty seven years after leaving his teaching post in Japan, he sat down to write the short interconnected lyrics which make up the sequence known as The Golden Chains (1968), with which we shall deal in due course.

IV

That both Empson and Barker should have taught Housman while working abroad in the 'thirties is, of course, not surprising. Not only was he a poet in vogue, but he was obvious teaching material for students whose command of spoken and written English was imperfect. Yet the very simplicity of language which makes these poems so attractive to the language teacher is a stumbling-block to the critic, and ultimately to the teacher too who has to contend with the fact that, once the poem's verbal meaning has been absorbed, the attitudes underlying it may remain untouched. The poet does despair, believe himself rejected of God and man; he does see extinction as the only
possible answer. Yet there is an important sense in which he communicates precisely the opposite of these emotions. In addition he is simple and direct, and also very complicated at the same time. These paradoxes are the starting point behind the six informal 'speculations' which Barker published under the title 'Some Notes on Housman' in 1960. 34

The first speculation confronts the question of Housman's famous nihilism which is, Barker argues, a façade:

Housman's nihilism merely pays lip service to itself; he wishes to give the effect of not caring or not believing, but this wish, like so many of the negative operations of the human character, has the obverse tied to its tail. 35

A close reading of a Housman text will always reveal, hiding behind the hopeless mask, a profound reverence for the natural world, a feeling for the most part invisible since directed outwards and observable only after deflection from the objects which it describes. There is, in fact, Barker seems to be suggesting, almost an inverse proportion between explicit sentiment and the depth of actual commitment. Housman is most moved when seemingly most detached. Similarly, his dwelling on the impossibility of a fully reciprocated love merely betrays the intensity with which he longs for it:

This regret for unreciprocated love is what looks like self-pity; it is rather self-contempt for caring too much. 36

There is a clear correlation between this theory of emotional inversion and Barker's intimation, in the Sixth Speculation, as to the origin of Housman's irreligiosity which springs, he suggests, far from real indifference or disbelief, but from the impossibility of reconciling
the divine will with individual human pride. His rejection of orthodox Christian teaching, then, is the end-product of the inner struggles of a nature "haunted by the spectre of a divinity" and unable to wrestle itself free by any other path than overt rejection. There is an honoured precedent for the use of this escape route, the poet Baudelaire, whose influence on Barker's work via Eliot's Preface of 1930 we examined in Chapter One. Significantly, Barker clinches his point by quoting an aphorism from Eliot's essay: "Only those who believe can blaspheme."

It is evident that at this point Barker's theory relates less to poetic technique as such than to a certain trick of the beleaguered human personality. There are moments in his account when in speaking of Housman the poet, as when in an earlier essay speaking of Tennyson, he comes very close to a personal view of the man. Certainly there is a remarkable affinity between his judgement of the attitudes behind the written work, and the diagnosis of personal inhibition to be found in Withers' memoir:

He assumed a shell of callousness, and hid so well beneath it that one might have met him long and familiarly in the beaten path, and never suspected the disguise. His chiselled speech, his stern and rather obdurate physiognomy in repose, his sardonic quips, his biting satire, his easy resort to mockery and scoffing; of such was the outward vestment clothed. And it was a grim conceit. Underneath beat as warm and generous a heart, as willing for self-sacrifice, if the cause were true, as I have ever known.37

Correspondingly, Barker's speculation is inclined to see the poetry like the conversational manner as a camouflage for emotional reality: both implied precisely what they did not mean. Under such conditions, the charge of insincerity hardly applies; it is rather a case, properly understood, of the poet providing meaning in a coded form which the alert reader must disentangle.
The Third Speculation shifts ground slightly: it is concerned less with methods of reconstructing meaning than with the self-sufficiency of Housman's statements considered as philosophical propositions. However distrustful we might be of the face the poetry wears, we are forced to recognize that it is possessed of an explicit point of view from which it cannot successfully be separated. To distance oneself from the fin-de-siecle pessimism of A Shropshire Lad, and to read the text without reference to it, would be to attribute to Housman's verse the kind of timelessness possessed by Dante's Divine Comedy in an age for which its theology meant nothing. Housman's poetry, Barker conceded elsewhere in the same article, is quintessentially Victorian: it possesses, in that sense, the "essential quality of temporal responsibility". Since we are capable of just enough distance to judge it without in any way being able to disregard it, its "overt nihilism" must feature as a major fact in our assessment of its worth. At this juncture Barker's argument seems to have cast itself adrift from his earlier discussion of emotional authenticity, as in estimating the philosophical validity of these poems, he is prepared, at least provisionally, to take their pessimism at face value. To adopt the terminology of 'The Face Behind the Poem', he is looking at Housman's work as if it presents a case. Looked at from this angle, he is able to contrast its cynical tone with the "dythyrambical transcendentalism" of Blake, and to state his conviction that, viewed as an article of faith, Blake's "Whatever is to be believed is an Image of the Truth" is more inclusive and hence philosophically more plausible, that either Keats's "Beauty is Truth, Truth Beauty" or Housman's demeaning attitude to "our proud and angry dust". The reference to Blake takes us back to Middleton Murry's view of him as the English poet with the most developed and inclusive religious vision, a view which enables Barker to set him up as a standard by which other writers stand or fall. It is a standard, however, available only to those
who find themselves able to accept a religious premiss, since Blake's superiority lies, less in its conceptual cogency, than in its closeness to a condition of Christian joy. "Where Housman is in love with the ideas of death and Shropshire, Blake is in love with the ideas of Salvation and Paradise."

It is evident there lies, between the First and the Fourth Speculation, a dialectic between two opposing, but potentially complementary views of Housman's work. On the one hand his poetic statements are seen to represent an enclosed system, a way of looking at the world, which may be assessed for its verity and inclusiveness. On the other, the overt philosophising is seen to be suspect, a translucent cover for a complexity which has taken refuge beneath it. The poet whom Barker admires is the hidden, thwarted lover; the explicit thinker leaves much, humanly and intellectually, to be desired. This judgement in turn seems to imply a wider theory of poetic meaning according to which the truths which any poet finds himself able to express are worthless beside what he leaves unspoken but may, by a sympathetic reader, be seen constantly to imply.

There is some evidence that this is the view which in the 'thirties Barker had taken of his own work. An early substantiation for this is provided by certain self-evaluations jotted down by the poet-protagonist in his first novel *Alanna Autumnal* (1933). In the third part of that book we read of the young man's elusive, growing love for his abandoned sister. In describing the state of his feelings, the brother writes:

LOVE: painfully inexpressible, and then I erase this, seeing that the loveliness of love in this lies, that it cannot be expressed, and, remaining within, causes weird pain, somewhat like the pain of existing negatively and creatively being blotted out in sterility, and both, beside my dramatic pain, are lovely. Things expressible
are invariably minor (read, I can express only minor things wearing about them the colouration of inexpressibles").

For the younger Barker, it seems, this may have been the very problem. If the opaque style of his early poems "wearing about them the colouration of inexpressibles" caused him to convey only "minor things" and thus to confine him to a minor status, one possible access to major themes and a major achievement may have lain by way of heightened simplicity of language. It was such a modesty of means leading to undoubted poetic distinction which seems to have attracted him to Housman in the first instance. His 2nd Speculation of 1960 gives us some indication of his opinion of the slenderness of Housman's means:

His use of one style of verse points and demonstrates the immediacy of his aspirations. If he did not have to write all these poems in one way, then he was a much less resourceful writer than, from other evidence in the poems (such as the rigour of their humour) we know him to be.

Thus the meticulous and deliberate choice by Housman of a uniform and unambitious vehicle of expression appears as proof positive, not of his limitations, but of the extreme versatility of one who can work small miracles within miniature forms. In the 'sixties, when Barker wrote his "Notes on Housman", the limitation of palatte to which Housman's achievement seemed to point came to seem more and more attractive at a point at which his own style of writing appeared once again to have reached a cul de sac. In the mid-'sixties when he came to give this problem his undivided attention, his instinct was to turn to models which allowed him ample scope within a small technical compass: the ballad, the example of In Memoriam, and, most eloquently of all, the work of A. E. Housman.
Towards the beginning of 'The Name and the Nature of Poetry', his lecture of 1933, Professor Housman gives a word of advice to young poets. He has been speaking of the distinction between doggerel, verse and poetry proper, and as an example of the second raised to a high pitch has just offered Samuel Daniel's verses "Come, worthy Greek, Ulysses, come, / Possess these shores with me." The ensuing comment runs as follows:

There we are ceasing to gallop with the Callender's horse and beginning to fly with Pegasus. Indeed a promising young poetaster could not do better than lay up that stanza in memory, not necessarily as a pattern set before him, but as a touchstone to keep at his side. Diction and movement alike, it is, perfect. It is made out of the most ordinary words, yet it is pure from the least alloy of prose; and however much nearer heaven the art of poetry mounts, it has never flown on a surer or lighter wing.

It is perfect, I say; and nothing more than perfection can be demanded of anything. 42

Fifty years later, George Barker was asked whether this was the sort of perfection that he was interested in. His reply tells us much about his changing attitude to the example of Housman's poetry:

Housman's been a long-standing love of mine. Of course, I used to get mad at him when I was young, because when one's that age, one gets mad at absolutely everyone. But when I was about thirty I realized that I could no longer resist the advances of this wretched old man, and I've been addicted ever since. The only
kind of notion that I've ever had of any kind of progression in my own writing is the hope that I might have advanced out of the latinate coruscation I used to love towards some kind of simplicity. There was a time when I couldn't call a poem a poem, but it had to be a *Triumphant Ode*. It seemed beautiful to me then. But then I can remember sitting down in York and thinking, 'Now, for heaven's sake, I must try and do something that I've always wanted to do. What is it?' And I realized that I wanted to write one hundred little poems of eight lines that rhymed. I did this, and I saw how terribly, terribly hard it was to do. And I've loved that sort of thing ever since.\(^4^3\)

Barker's statement effectively highlights three stages in his writing career. The first was the period of the middle to late 'thirties when, during the build up to the Second World War he wrote a whole series of heavily laden, formal poems bewailing the fate of Europe such as his *Triumphant Ode MCMXXXIX*.\(^4^4\) The second was the occasion when, not far from his thirtieth birthday, he was invited to lecture in Japan, and found Housman's lyrics such effective teaching material. The third was the academic year 1966-7 when he was appointed Arts Fellow at York University and briefly moved North to take up his post.

There is every sign that the mid-'sixties were a time of renewed self assessment in Barker's writing life. His collection of 1966, *Dreams of a Summer Night* consisted of a set of 'Memorials for Dead Friends' which again tended towards the formal together with a number of loose, rather chatty poems in a conversational manner which, while airing the naturalness of his speaking voice, did nothing to tighten his structures. There were also, however, two pieces in which he appeared to be trying to make amends for this tendency by writing in clear, sharp stanzas: 'The Sisteron', with which the book starts, and the straightforward rendition of 'The Stabat Mater' quoted in Chapter Two.

*The Golden Chains*, written in York, on the other hand, consists
of one hundred and four little quatrains with, as in Housman's, every second line indented. While the rubric is not uniform, the norm is suggested by this:

Beyond the Angel of Blake
   and the Primal Cause
beyond the Fiery Lake
   and all natural laws

there I shall find the babes
   strolling like pigeons
dolled up in Hell's robes
   for Hell's regions.⁴⁵

The juxtaposition of damnation and intimations of renewed innocence is typically Barkerian, but the form represents a new departure. The stanza, it will be seen, alternates between lines of three and two feet, and, while the exact shape of it is of Barker's own devising, the alternation between two line lengths, one slightly shorter than the other, suggests the ballad structure familiar from such poems as 'Sir Patrick Spens'. We examined the influence of the ballad on Barker's early work in Chapter Two. The collection of 1968 is actually named after a phrase from the very ballad which we found Barker alluding to in 'The Neo-Geordies' of 1939.⁴⁶ Two lines of this ballad are in fact cited between the title page of The Golden Chains and the first poem:
The shall be hung in chains of gold
Such chains as there were never any. ⁴⁷

Whereas in 1939, the "chains" were the manacles of political oppression, in 1968, however, they are the bonds of language in which both the poet and the human animal in general are inextricably intertwined. In 1982 Barker spoke of this linguistic constraint as the main theme of the volume:

The whole idea behind that sequence of poems was in fact the subject of language. That's why it's called The Golden Chains because it's ultimately about itself. Thematically it goes all over the place, but ends with a poem about the loon bird in Canada, to express my conviction that, in the end, language amounts to nothing. ⁴⁸

The Golden Chains is the first of a series of volumes written during the 'sixties and 'seventies in which Barker tackles the issue of the fraudulent claims of the intellect, epitomized by the presumption of language. Language is insufficient principally because it is incapable of coping with those very areas of experience which the poet, as opposed to the versifier or prose-writer, characteristically attempts to deal:

When the intellect walks
along those haunted shores
where the golden dolphic walks
and the seashell roars:
let it drop down, drop down
on houseproud knees
for if it walks it drowns
in these great seas.49

Dropping down on houseproud knees can be seen as representing an acceptance of a humble husbandry of modest aesthetic resources, and a refusal to immerse oneself in depths where one might well be lost. By admitting that it can go thus far but no further the mind of the poet is enforcing self-imposed limits inside which it can operate satisfactorily. It is also acknowledging that, beyond this pale, its skill is insufficient. It is a thought which reminds us both of Housman's contention in 'The Name and the Nature of Poetry' that "meaning is of the intellect, poetry is not"50 and of the underlying recognition we earlier sensed in Housman's poems of the inadequacy of verse as a vehicle for ultimate revelation.

In reading these poems one is reminded both of the younger Barker who in reviewing New Bearings in English Poetry in 1932 spoke of Eliot as one who "is concerned with problems which have mistakenly entered this century rather than eternity"51 and older Barker who in his 'Letter Addressed to the Corpse of Eliot' talked of his mentor's recumbent head "once so truly given to the form / and formulation of / a seeming meaning.52 In the later period at least, Barker can speak thus because he is at one with Housman in his belief "that the intellect is not the fount of poetry"53 and thus that any attempt to use poetry as a vehicle of speculation is doomed to failure:
March rain, March rain, descend
on the Mounts of Pride
until we comprehend
that the mist can hide
the peaks and altitudes
of the mind
in the mysteries and moods
of the wind.\textsuperscript{54}

Beyond the proper competence of language lies a land of mystery which is the province of very great poetry or else, as Housman himself suggested, of madness.\textsuperscript{55} Struck anew by his incompetence in these areas, Barker, again "the minor bird on the bough", contents himself with the construction of verse, in which he is confident of his abilities because its domain is the immediate and physical:

Catullus had the way of it
Casual, flirty,
he knew the heart's as soft as shit
and just as dirty.

'Clodia, angel' do you mind?
Your bed's fouler than Monday.
Oughtn't we to rise and find
a clean one? In a laundry?\textsuperscript{56}
There is an earthy cynicism about such lines which reminds one not only of the Latin silver poets which Housman spent his life editing, but of the Yeats of *The Wild Swans at Coole* (1919) who in 'The Scholars' expressed a similar distrust of the disembodied mind:

All shuffle there; all cough in ink;
All wear the carpet with their shoes;
All think what other people think;
All know the man their neighbour knows.

Lord, what would they say
Did their Catullus walk that way? \(^{57}\)

It is not then with any sense of surprise that, in turning to lyric 67 we discover the beginnings of an elegy addressed to the corpse of W. B. Yeats:

Ben Bulben his white head under
old man, old man, lie still
rolls in the sunset and the thunder
old man, old man, lie still

His old bones in the roaring grave
old man, old man, lie still
cry to his old bones as they rave
old man, old man, lie still. \(^{58}\)
Fifteen years later this seed was to blossom into a full-blown elegy to the Irish poet. Meanwhile Barker is happy to register the stillness granted to the insistent demands of the flesh by the grave, where neither verse nor the intellect may follow.

There are many reasons why, in a volume inspired primarily by the example of Housman, Barker should turn aside in deference to Yeats. Like Housman, and like Barker too at this time, the older Yeats was increasingly tired with contemporary taste as a guide to the way he should write, and increasingly determined to go his own way regardless of the dictates of fashion. In his interview of 1982 Barker ascribed just this sort of contempt for topical pressure to Housman. Asked "Does there come a time in the history of a literary tradition when you have to try and break the mould?" he replied:

I think that's absolutely the case, and this is taking a very different view of the historical responsibility of the writer than that held by those men, of whom I've known several, who seem to believe that there's an evolving sophistication of English verse. I remember your namesake George Fraser once writing that Housman had put back English versification by twenty-five years. Now that remark was made to Housman while he was alive, and his reply was "Thank God. I'd have put it back fifty years if I could."
And I am utterly on his side.59

When these remarks were published it was exactly fifty years but two months since Housman delivered the lecture 'The Name and the Nature of Poetry' in Cambridge. It was also exactly half a century bar two years since, in 1935, W. B. Yeats wrote to George Barker requesting his permission to include four of his recent poems at the end of *The Oxford Book of English Verse* as an indication of what the future might hold. It is to that letter of Yeats's and its later consequences that I would now like to turn.
NOTES AND REFERENCES


6 Jacob Bronowski, Poet’s Defence (Cambridge University Press, 1939).


10 Richards, p. 111.

12 Richards, p. 110.

13 According to Barker (National Sound Archive, 1982), he was a successor of William Empson to the Japanese chair which rotated around the various universities. For an account of the method of recruitment to the Japanese professorship, see Peter Quennell, The Marble Foot, An Autobiography 1905-1938 (London: Collins, 1976), p. 170:

At this point... an angel of deliverance neatly disguised as an itinerant Japanese professor, had already arrived in London. The university he represented, the Tokyo Bunrika Daigaku University, had commissioned him to seek a candidate for its newly founded Chair of English Literature and Language, preferably a modern poet, and he had decided that the well-known Poetry Bookshop, which Harold Monroe managed opposite the British Museum, might be a proper place to start his quest.


I sat one morning on the can
That served us for a lavatory
Composing some laudatory
Verses on the state of man:

My wife called from the kitchen dresser:
'There's someone here from Japan.
He wants you out there. As Professor.
Oh, yes. The War just began.'


15 George Barker, 'Poetry and Reality' in Essays, p. 82.

For a recent critical and biographical study which takes account of the revelations in the personal papers released twenty five years after Housman's death see Richard Percival Graves, A. E. Housman: The Scholar Poet (Oxford University Press, 1979).

A. E. Housman's De Amicitia, deposited with the British Museum Department of Manuscripts by Laurence Housman in May, 1942, and eventually published, with a note by John Carter, in Encounter, 29 (October, 1967), pp. 33-41.


Housman, Selected Prose, p. 133.


Christopher Smart, A Song to David ed. Edmund Blunden (O.U.P., 1924).

Dylan Thomas and John Davenport The Death of the King's Canary (London: Hutchinson, 1976) pp. 2-4, quoted in our next Chapter.


27 *Collected Poems*, p. 76.


29 *Collected Poems*, p. 168.


33 Ricks, p. 909.


35 *Essays*, p. 36.

36 *Essays*, p. 36.

30 Assays, p. 39.

39 Assays, p. 39.


41 Assays, p. 37.

42 Housman, Selected Prose, pp. 170-1.

43 P. N. Review Interview, p. 45.

46 Barker, Collected Poems, pp. 74-77.


46 Seven, No. 7, Christmas, 1939, pp. 2-3.

47 The Golden Chains, p. 7.

48 P. N. Review Interview, p. 45.

49 The Golden Chains, p. 11.

50 Housman, Selected Prose, p. 188.

Poems of Places and People, pp. 31-2.

Housman, Selected Prose, p. 128.

The Golden Chains, p. 12.

Cf. remarks on Collins, Smart, Cowper and Blake in Housman Selected Prose, pp. 187-8. For similar view on Smart, see 'The Finer Frenzy' (Rev. of Rejoice in the Lamb by Christopher Smart). New English Weekly, XIV, No. 25, March 1939, p. 382.

The Golden Chains, p. 31.


The Golden Chains, p. 42.

P. N. Review Interview, p. 46.
In the Winter of 1935 a letter was delivered at a small country cottage in Dorset. The envelope bore the address 'The Butts, Plush, Folly, Piddletrenchide' and was forwarded by the recipient's publishers in Bloomsbury. When opened it revealed a letter headed by the insignia of the Oxford University Press, the contents of which read as follows:

Riversdale,
Willbrook,
Rathfarnham,
Dublin.

Dear Mr. Barker,

The Oxford University Press has asked me to prepare a collection of modern verse. I should be glad to include in it the poems on the attached sheet.

Full acknowledgements would of course be made in the book. Your permissions will, no doubt, cover America.

Yours faithfully,

W. B. Yeats.

I have taken much from your work. I like you better than I like anybody else in the new generation.

George Barker, Esq.,
Messrs Faber & Faber Ltd.,
24 Russell Square,
W.C.1.
The "attached sheet" turned out to bear the titles of four poems from a volume called, with an austerity typical of the period, Poems and published by Faber's earlier in the year. The light blue dust jacket had carried a commendatory blurb in the editorial style of T. S. Eliot:

Those who look for new poets will remember a few poems in The Criterion, The Listener, New Verse, and one or two other periodicals, which could not be classified as paraphrases or imitations of the living poets now generally admired. Some of these poems have been over the signature of George Barker. There are many people who have wanted to see more of George Barker's work so that they might make up their minds about him. This volume gives them the opportunity of committing themselves to an opinion of a poet younger than those whom they have recently been discussing.

I

Prominent among those motivated to "look for new poets" in 1935 was Yeats who was already compiling The Oxford Book of Modern Verse. When published the following year this carried an Introduction which went some way to explaining the nature of its editor's preferences. The concluding pages of the book were devoted to a short but representative selection from the work of "the living poets now generally admired", namely the young men whose astringent verses had featured in Michael Roberts's influential anthology New Signatures of 1932. Yeats's introductory remarks, however, left his readers in little doubt as to his opinion of some of those writers "whom they have recently been discussing": 
Spender has said that the poetry of belief must supercede that of personality, and it is perhaps a belief shared that has created their intensity, their resemblance, but this belief is not political. If I understand aright this difficult art the contemplation of suffering has compelled them to seek beyond the flux something unchanging, inviolate, that country where no ghost haunts, no beloved lures because it has neither past nor future:

This lunar beauty
Has no history
Is complete and early
If beauty later
Bear any feature
It had a lover
And is another.

It is the quotation from Auden's *Poems* (1930), offered up as typical of the school, which sets the seal on Yeats's lack of enthusiasm. For him the poets of the early 'thirties were demolitionists who had sought to clear the terrain of history in order to erect a streamlined palace of glass and steel, a sort of Bauhaus haven. It was the reassuring touch of a human hand, and the fleeting glimpse of ghostly presences that he missed in much contemporary verse, and it was in Barker's four short pieces, with which he ends the book, that he apparently found them.

His selection is strongly biased towards one particular kind of Barker poem. Overlooking the convoluted and slightly Audenesque "Daedalus", which had first caught Eliot's eye, he makes straight for a group of poems remarkable for their wistful fancy: for "The Wraith-friend" and "He Comes Among" (*Poems* 374 and 378) with their
suggestions of a shadowy other self intermittently perceived; for the whimsical soufflé 'The Leaping Laughters' (376) and for 'The Crystal' (377) with its enshrining of a luminous Blakean moment. Grounds for his partiality are not hard to find. Yeats had himself edited Blake, towards whose mystical strain he was, for obvious reasons, attracted; he had himself a marked proclivity towards light, song-like structures. It is the choice of 'The Wraith-friend', imperfect as it is, however, which is the most revealing. Beginning with an echo of Eliot's 'Prufrock', this proceeds to blend others from Nash, Lionel Johnson and Yeats himself. 4

Following forbidden streets
Towards unreal retreats,
Returning, lost again,
Encircling in vain:
No lunar eye, no star
Beckoning from the far
Wastes the trackless feet
Leading their beaten beat
Back on the broad
And multitudinous road.
In what unearthly land
I fugitively stand,
Between what frenzied seas
Gaze, with my burning miseries
Miming the stars?
O angel in me hidden
Rise from the laden
Sorrow of this dark hand!
Companion and wraith-friend
From the rib's narrow prison
Step, in miraculous person!
Touch into these exhausted limbs
The alacrity of the birds
Which over the greatest ranges
 Widely and eagerly range!

Though to wings those dark limbs
Spread, and that deep breast climbs
Eagerly the heights of the skies, or
Of the earliest lark's soar,
Until brushing against cold heaven
Like bluebirds in storms, even
Then that known flesh must fall
Soon, within this prison's wider wall;
Lie with those giant arms, that form,
For there is no upward egress from
This earthly, this unearthly land
Upon whose dust may stand
None, though heavenly high can fly,
But in whose dust all brighter
dust must lie.
One interesting facet of this piece is the comparative closeness of its opening to the mood of the Auden poem which Yeats cites in his Introduction. Both are set amid trackless wastes in which the mind roams in search of familiar landmarks. For Auden, however, the landscape's lack of "any feature" is a source of attraction, since it offers an escape from compromising social pressures; Barker's isolation, on the other hand, is hopefully relieved by the emergence of an alter persona swift with "the alacrity of birds". To some readers it might have seemed that this gesture of reassurance marked a retreat in the face of social reality. For Yeats, however, it was evidence of a fresh development in English poetry which would bring it closer to a style of writing which he recognized. It thus displayed a shift in sensibility at once radical and conservative.

It is this complementary forward and backward movement which is the theme of the tantalizingly short comment on Barker in his Introduction:

I would, if I could, have dealt at some length with George Barker, who, like MacNeice, Auden, Day Lewis, handles the traditional metres with a new freedom - vers libre - lost much of its vogue some five years ago - but has not their social passion, their sense of suffering.6

The formal point is both appropriate and misleading. Like Auden and his followers Barker had learned much from Hopkins's technique of Sprung Rhythm: 'The Wraith-friend', for instance, employs an elastic three stress line. He also possessed, however, an alertness to quantitative procedures which marked him out as unusual. 'He Comes Among', for instance, cultivates assonance in a manner quite unlike anything in Auden. It is this slight conservatism in Barker which seems
to appeal to Yeats more than the "freedom" of his accentual practice, providing as it does a sense of continuity which he missed in so much contemporary verse. By "social passion" he evidently means to imply the ideological fervour which brought the Auden school too close for comfort to that 'intellectual hatred' whose destructive effect he had witnessed in Ireland. The lack of it in Barker prompts no criticism - there is more than enough personal suffering in his verse - but appears rather as proof of an absence of cant to which the Irishman could not but respond.

II

There were sound biographical reasons for the freedom in Barker's work from display of cosmetic commitment. Put simply, he was far too near to the real proletariat to feel free to adopt a revolutionary stance lightly. In the backstreet Chelsea tenement where he spent much of his childhood were two palpable symbols of his family's disadvantaged origins. The first was the loaded pistol which his father, a Lincolnshire farmer's son and former junior army officer, kept under the pillow in his bedroom as a token of pride in the post-war years when he trudged the streets of the capital in search of a job. The second was a framed certificate which proved that Barker's mother, Marion Taafe, was descended from the licensed Pilot of the port of Drogheda. It was Marion Taafe, later immortalized by her son in a famous sonnet as she sat in war-time London, "gin and chicken helpless in her Irish hand", who had transmitted to her children a dogged Catholic faith transplanted from her homeland along with memories of a childhood spent close to the Irish Sea. It was she too who had put
George in the way of the only formal literary instruction he was ever to have, as, half a century later, he recalled:

When I was still at school my mother used to receive visits from a Jesuit attached to the Brompton Oratory by the name of Father O'Roberts. When I was thirteen she told him that I had been writing verses which she then showed to him. He was very taken in by this nonsense, so he arranged for me to go along for two hours on Tuesday and Thursday evening. This went on for about four years, from the time I was thirteen to the time I was about seventeen, and that was where I was really educated. They told me everything to read, but didn't badger me, simply ask me questions. I remember them asking me what I thought about some passage in Newman about the human race being implicated in some huge aboriginal calamity and Father O'Roberts saying, "Can you take this as a serious remark?"

That passage of Newman's, with its built-in imperatives and Augustinian sense of Original Sin might well be said to be the foundation of much of Barker's subsequent thinking, and much of his work to be an answer to it. The inherited chemistry of Catholic guilt, however, took some years to work itself through his blood-stream, and, meanwhile, Ireland, which he had not as yet visited, remained for him a source of mystery wrapped in an enticing theological mist.

Though the Barker children had not set foot in Ireland the two halves of the family corresponded. It was an open verse letter to his cousin Margaret Taaffe, printed in The Listener on 7th July 1937, under the heading 'By the Boyne' which eventually became the 'Poem on Ireland' collected in Lament and Triumph (1940). This is a piece which evokes that peculiar sense of exile experienced only by those who have never visited their mother land. In it there is no grooping after historical fact or political aspiration, but instead a strongly expressed need to establish a personal past upon which to build the greater
abstractions. Barker's imagined Ireland has been fed exclusively by report and gossip; what he now needs is a tactile reality with which to flesh these out:

My mother reminds me that my birth line,
Accompanying undersea cables, carries
From London back to a Drogheda origin.
Being born in England, like miscarriages
In tubes and taxis, means nothing, for my home
Is there by the Boyne, where never I
Have bathed with my cousins in summertime,
Rowed in my grandfather's coracle, or ever
Slept with my head on the afternoon arm
Of Mourne. Not, not once have I made
The pilgrimage along the Drogheda Road
Where, crossed with stone, stands the martyrdom
Of James O'Hanlon, who died at the hand
Of the Black and Sin, the Blood and Tan.¹³

James O'Hanlon is a local rather than a national hero; he is a creature of the poet's mother's memory. The "coracle" belongs to the same pilot of Drogheda whose Certificate hung on the kitchen wall during the poet's childhood: like O'Hanlon, it is part of a private world promoted by hungry phantasy. For, as much as Ireland, Barker here is seeking to explain himself. He is a member of a generation for whom provincial, and preferably Celtic, roots are important; as he wrote in the contemporary 'Epistle to Dylan Thomas': "like the pearl I came from hurt".¹⁴ This sense of exclusion, of a deprivation based on ancestry, is
important to him as something which demands concrete realization.
Myths as such are of little use, since they serve to set an already
remote island at one further remove.

Thus, though the name of Yeats is never mentioned, throughout
this poem the implied contrast is with that great fellow poet who, born
and bred in Ireland, was impelled by the forces of public history to
supplement the immediacy of sight and sound with abstractions and
presences drawn from a moribund past. For Barker, by contrast, born
in England and tired of mental compensation, legends are a luxury he
can ill afford:

From Ireland exiled in the womb, still,
Like the birthmark of the mother's wild
Craving at labour, that stamps the child,
I wore the shape of Ireland on my mind.
I can brush Lake Sligo when I take
The tear from my eye, or when I talk
Hear the foiled tongues of the streams
That cannot convert rocks to their water
Near Mornington. Not mythological dreams
I am haunted by, Ireland as my daughter;
But by the wild obscurity of Leinster, by
The giant shore of the West, greater than heroes:
By the tongue of the Boyne in my ear, and by
My cousin's letters, more than by myths and stories.
Deprived of an Irish childhood, Barker has been obliged to create one from scraps: from his mother's conversation and from family correspondence. In the absence of visual sensations, it is on the ear that he relies to supply a continuity with a verbal tradition which he wishes to claim for his own. He becomes Irish by listening to himself: to be Irish, in his terms, is to be a poet. But to retain some vestige of authenticity, his voice must speak of things handled and felt, or at least of an imaginative life which fastens on the actual. To court myth, on the other hand, is to risk a charge of intellectualising in an empty void.

Thus though in this poem the procession of national heroes is seen on parade, the poet-in-exile himself is "prohibited sentimental pleasure" and "like the sadist" must "revert to the real". Bruised by a national history in which he has taken no part, he must also beware the easy solace of idealization, must see Ireland as she really is, "Europe's sore that will not heal", rather than as her more indulgent sons and daughters often like to think of her. Hence where Yeats saw a land populated by ghosts and emblematic grandees, "the spectres of Collins / Swift and Connolly, MacSwiney Mayor of Cork", Barker is obliged to discover poverty, degradation, dirt, and a rural populace much as they were before the Liberation, "weeping among the seed potatoes."17

III

It is precisely this starkly felt quality of Irish life which Barker seems to have been straining to catch when in the Spring of the following year he was requested by Desmond McCarthy, editor of Life and Letters Today, to review for the journal one of the last plays which
Yeats was to write, The Herne's Egg, which had just been published by Macmillan. Barker's piece begins by identifying in the play three qualities between which he wishes to distinguish: Yeats's "love of Gaelic mythology, his passion for the human passions, and his magnificent manipulation of words." It is the first of these elements, "the rather cumbersome and crepitating machinery of a not too good mythology" that strikes him as the weak link in a drama otherwise characterised by firm realization, bold human outlines and exacting dramatic language. His "Not too good" here is an equivocal phrase susceptible to many interpretations: defective because vague, incoherent or merely inconsistent. It is, however, none of these possible defects which worries Barker, who seems troubled instead by the very aspect of Yeats's mythological thinking which he implicitly condemns in the 'Poem on Ireland': its remoteness from the textures of daily living, its abstractness.

So concerned in fact is the reviewer to set this facet of the play, and the Great Herne as the embodiment of it, apart from the rest of its achievement that he arguably overlooks an important strand in Yeats's plot: the insisted-upon kinship of Attracta, the bird's votaress, to Leda and hence of the bird himself to the divine swan, "brute blood of the air", whose knowledge permeates her. The sonnet 'Leda and the Swan' of fifteen years earlier had closed on a question, and so, some readers might think, does this play. There are thus further subtleties of meaning throughout which Barker, in his impatience to explore the palpitating centre of "the human passions" appears to miss. For instance, The Herne, as he comments, is never observed but "sits just above the wings and guffaws down at the King of Connaught and his rapscallion soldiers". This invisibility is attributed in Barker's review to Yeats's failure to infuse an abstract emblem with imaginative power, but may just as feasibly be viewed as an accurate reflection of the
mental attitudes of Congal and his men, determined as they are to eradicate an alien ideal and restraint regarded by them as unacceptable:

Women thrown into despair
By the winter of their virginity
Take its abominable snow,
As boys take common snow and make
An image of god or bird or beast
To feed their sensuality:
Ovid had a literal mind,
And though he sang it neither knew
What lonely dust dragged down the gold
That crept on Danae's lap, nor knew
What rose against the moony feathers
When Leda lay upon the grass. 20

Again, so intent is Barker to shift the Herne from the centre of the play that he assumes that the usurpation of the bird's matrimonial rights, of which Congal and his companions boast after the banquetting scene, takes place, where Yeats himself had left the matter open. The rationale behind Barker's reading is clear: the Herne represents in his eyes an unearthly loftiness of which he is as suspicious as were Congal's soldiers, who thus come to represent for him a conquest of the real over the speculative which he is keen to vindicate:
The scene in which they violate Attracta to violate the Herne is conspicuously fine: personally I like this most because I understand the soldiers and the priestess - they become actual creations and creatures - whereas the Great Herne, who merely sits and broods and governs, loses his look of immortal authority when he leaves the bogs and shadows of his native place.

This preference for the earthy and human over the rarified and supernatural also affects Barker's view of Yeats's dramatic verse. The Herne's failure to speak becomes proof positive of its impotence. The poetry which Barker quotes with approval, on the other hand, is that contained in the sinnewey, assertive lines given to the defiant Congal in the majesty of his final self-impalement. The whole play thus emerges less as a cohesive work than as a thing of shreds and patches, and the vigour of Congal's concluding statements as a sleight-of-hand whereby Yeats, insufficiently convinced of his own allegorical logic, contrives to undermine the Herne's power and set Congal, the flesh and blood mortal, up in his place. It is a view of the play which reinforces the reviewer's distrust of the stitched mythological costume of Yeats, who is thus confirmed in his admiring but sceptical eyes as "a grand if erratic poet", a position from which the Non-Like Ritual of the drama, surprisingly not noted by Barker, fails to redeem him.

IV

The grandeur was something which Barker had experienced himself on the one occasion on which the two poets met, in the bar of Hennekey's in the Strand with T. S. Eliot, who, throughout the somewhat stiff conversation, eased his own disquiet by chasing single with double gins. However warmly the older man felt about Barker's
poetry, he was clearly too reserved to give his feelings conversational expression, and, on his part, Barker came away with a feeling of magnificence tinged with arrogance. 21

The feeling of remoteness, the sense of thwarted affection, is something which recurs in much of Barker's later writing on Yeats. When, the year after the publication of *The Great Herne*, the patriarch of Irish letters passed away, Barker was moved to express the complexity of his reactions in a poem entitled 'The Death of Yeats', one of a procession of elegies which he wrote in the late 'thirties when he was especially interested by the form. Here, as in much of his writing about Yeats, Barker shows an inclination to begin where the master left off. Thus the very first stanza leads in with the closing line of 'Byzantium', adapted to the needs of formal portraiture:

That dolphin-torn, that gong-tormented face
With the trumpets of Andromeda rose and spoke,
Blaring the pitiful blast and airing hope
So hope and pity flourished. Now the place
Cold is where he was, and the gold face
Shimmers only through the echoes of a poem. 22

Viewed with the respect of a mourner, Yeats's death-mask here fuses with the "golden handiwork" 23 of his living vision. Ordained to articulate the mythological needs of a nation the mask has itself now grown or dwindled into a myth, and thus achieved both perfection and inscrutability. Yeats's physical mortality, then, appears as a final seal set on a deliberately willed process, since the absorption of the artist's identity in the wider personality of the Nation is not something which
the late Senator would have been tempted to disown. Exempt himself from this kind of ideological pressure, and suspicious of the elaborations of national mythology, Barker then allows a note of personal criticism to intrude. Though Yeats's life and work were imbued with purpose, the renaissance of Irish culture which he sought to orchestrate features as a shadow play, even a gesture of hopelessness:

The swan mourns on the long abandoned lake,
And on the verge gather the great Irish ghosts
Whom only he could from their myth awaken
And make a kingdom. The luckless and the lost
Got glory from the shake of his hand as he passed,
The lunar emperor whom Time could not break.24

To speak of myth as a state of suspension from which frozen presences may be roused is to betray a scepticism about the continuity of inherited memory profoundly detrimental to the conception of cultural nationalism which Yeats, amongst others, advanced. The political efficacy of the Irish movement has then to be credited less to its pertinacity and relevance than to the unique magnetism of the man largely instrumental in its inception. The "Irish ghosts" in Barker's elegy are therefore seen to be "great" principally by virtue of their obedience to the summoning inspiration of the one artist capable of enlivening them. Yeats himself thus comes to be viewed, less as the mouthpiece of his time, than as the supreme magister around whom the flood of history swirled in a vain attempt to engulf him. He is a magician whose spells last just as long as his readers find themselves held by his words. With his personal disappearance, history reverts to
its usual pattern, leaving only his poetry to speak for him:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{But now the cloud only shall hear: the ant,} \\
\text{The winter bulb under the ground, and the hidden} \\
\text{Stream be made dumb by his murmur in death,} \\
\text{Lying between the rock and the jealous plant.} \\
\text{No matter how close to the ground I bend, his breath} \\
\text{Is not for me, and all divisions widen.}^{25}
\end{align*}
\]

'Under Ben Bulben', Yeats's own anticipatory self-elegy, had appeared in The Irish Times on February 4th that year and been re-printed in Last Poems the same June.\(^{26}\) This stanza in Barker's elegy may be read as a response to it; certainly the self-supporting stoicism which Yeats advocated in the epitaph to his poem seems to extend here into a veiled indifference towards the deceased himself. "His breath / Is not for me" is ambivalent, implying either personal unworthiness or a disposition to reject. The "divisions" which yawn as communication is frustrated are partly the political wounds which Yeats later tried to heal, and partly the diverging perspectives of Barker and the deceased, whose strenuous metaphysics and mythological enthusiasms he is finally inclined to disown. Ultimately, the poem conveys reverence, but it is an awe bred of incomprehension, and of a recognition that respect is sometimes best expressed by a resolve to admire and then do otherwise.

The parting of the ways which 'The Death of Yeats' appears to signal had roots in the political circumstances of the time. In the mid-'thirties, when the autonomy and independence of the smaller countries was a matter of public concern, Barker was inclined to a conception of Irishness which could accommodate ethnicity as its binding element. In
his contributor's note to the issue of *Life and Letters* in which his review of *The Great Herne* appeared, he announced himself as "of mixed Irish and English parentage", one of the few occasions on which he does so. With the onset of the international crisis, however, and the death-knell of nationalism which it appeared to herald, ethnic considerations had a tendency to give way before questions of a wider moral import. Certainly by 1940, when Barker had escaped from England to a Professorship in Japan, his writing was increasingly turning on a theological axis. In Japan, squatting like a "one man Europe" on an island with which he had no personal connection, it is of the metropolis that he thought with regret, so that the *Pacific Sonnets* of that year speak of a nostalgia for recognizably English pleasures. And, as, finding in this alien land nothing which he can recognize or to which he wishes to lay claim, he reaches out for a symbol of the incomprehensible, it is of Yeats that he thinks, and Yeats's yearning for a fabulous Japan:

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11
By now westward China, and, to the east
The spoiling, coiling, the blue beast toiling sea... 27
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Now that Barker inhabits the Asia of Yeatsian myth, he finds there nothing but an "island colonized by ideograms / Of poverty and moongazing, hate and gardens, / Where the soul is shallower than a bowl of tea / And negative as water." Puzzled by this contradiction, he is deserted not merely by Yeats himself but by the very sustaining idea of Ireland. Hounded by intimations of sexual and political guilt, for him henceforth to be Irish is to be Catholic, and to be Catholic to be largely human. From now on Barker's Irishness will be observed only
in the twists and turns of his thought, his love of aphorism, and passionate waywardness of his logic, and a partiality for lost causes. Meanwhile, Yeats the master has drifted over the horizon, never to return.

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And yet there is a certain descent to be observed even in the later verse. Speaking in 1982 of his conception of form in poetry, Barker had this to say about the practical usefulness of Yeats's example:

Of all modern poets Yeats constructed his work most beautifully. He started by writing it out as prose; then he picked out the words which were going to rhyme, setting those on the right hand side of the page. He then proceeded with the aid of a little toy drum which he beat while he said the words. By this means he'd work out what the rhythm was, and set that down. Then he'd work out the whole poem until finally it went click like a Chinese Box."

The analogy of the Chinese Box occurs in the first paragraph of a letter of September 8th, 1935 from Yeats to Lady Dorothy Wellesley. Returning to her a draft of his Introduction to her Selections from the Poems of D.W., he comments:
Dear Lady Dorothy,

Here is the 'introduction'. Keep it for me as I would like to compare the corrections with those in the other copy. The correction of prose, because it has no fixed laws, is endless, a poem comes right with a click like a closing box.29

It is easy to see why this remark should now prove attractive to Barker. The growing concern with traditional poetic decorum of which we had reason to speak in the last Chapter has involved an increased fascination with the "fixed laws" of prosody which the reigning aesthetic of the inter-war years tended to exclude. The fixity of such laws is, in the eyes of both Barker and Yeats, less a matter of iron discipline than of a careful attention to the textures of perceived sound, and the kind of aural circumspection which we discussed earlier in our Chapter on Tennyson. This process is not a product of inspiration Romantically conceived. The matter of the poem is regarded by both poets as, more often than not, resistant to the writer's effort, yielding its riches slowly. The ground of Yeats's and Barker's agreement, therefore, would seem to lie in their shared belief that each poem has within it a distinct shape which will eventually emerge provided the artist is prepared to wait and respond.

This process of ingestion and applied skill is evidenced clearly in the composition of Barker's most recent poetry. The long religious poem 'Anno Domini', (1933) for example, takes the form of a half-jocular act of supplication addressed to the marooned God of history. Its deployment on the page is unusual consisting as it does of a series of couplets, the second line of each of which is heavily indented. This physical arrangement only occurred to Barker after a period of two months in which he dictated the lines into a tape recorder in the hope of discovering the shape which he knew to be latent within them.
Describing the moment when he happened upon the eventual structure, he returns to Yeats's analogy:

At first I had no idea what I was doing technically, which is why it was so difficult to work out. Sometimes I wondered whether there was any system to it. I was convinced that I had written a poem; at least I thought that I had. And when I eventually came upon it, it was like examining a Chinese Box which suddenly goes snap.30

Thus, though Barker's themes may latterly have wandered far from those of Yeats, in creating work of such scrupulous craftsmanship, he has at least heeded his dying advice:

Irish poets, learn your trade,
Sing whatever is well made,
Scorn the sort now growing up
All out of shape from toe to top.31

When writing these opening lines of the fifth section of "Under Ben Bulben" Yeats may well have had in mind as being "out of shape from toe to top" the school of radical writers concerning whose style of writing he had expressed reservations in his Preface two years earlier. If Yeats saw the immediate future of English poetry as forfeit to anarchic tendencies he feared in Auden and his followers, he had, however, as we have already seen, at least a distant hope that formal sanity would return, a hope which he then reposed in the twenty-three year old George Barker. Nearly half a century later, the custodian of his wishes, now three years younger than the Yeats who looked forward
laying his bones in Drumcliff Churchyard, can turn back and see a certain kinship which, despite the changes and chances of the second half of the Twentieth Century, still doggedly survives. In 'Ben Bulben Revisited', a recent elegy, Barker has expanded the brief quatrain addressed to Yeats with which we closed our last Chapter into a fuller gesture of reconciliation:

The ghosts are gone, the heroes
Lie snoring under the hill.
And the sea-bedded hoydens
That used so to perturb you,
Yes, you and your monkey-gland,
Now sleep and never feel
The hallowing in your hand.
But now the beast is real
Slouching from Nazareth
With death under its elbow
And filthy on its breath
The ordure of Armageddon.

Whatever Barker's earlier misgivings concerning the historical and personal relevance of Yeats's mythological preoccupations the "ghosts" and "hoydens" which in his youthful work he was inclined to dismiss are now seen to give way before a shared nightmare of the Second Coming in which the sectarian divisions of the Ireland of 1919 burgeon into hideous global equivalents. Hence Yeats's fears are proved right at last, with a rightness that springs from a distrust of the roots of human nature with which Barker, as a latterday Catholic, can fully sympathise. Thus the Celtic myths become one with the older Biblical myth of Eden.
squelched, to form a kernel of knowledge in relation to which both poets are as one:

Old man, old dreaming man
Dream us also asleep
And then perhaps we can
Somehow manage to keep
The dream with which we began:
That vision of walking through
The common or garden wood
Until we came home to
The knowledge of evil and good
Wherein like a holy house
We sat down at last
And found ourselves free to choose
An agape, or feast
With the black mystical beast. 33

So, despite the Pascalian vision of hopelessness to which Barker, as theological disciple of Newman, is heir, there is finally a communion of vision where Yeats and Barker, the passionate mystical humanitarian and the Catholic renegade, find themselves drinking at the same table and, fifty years after Hennekey's in the Strand, keeping Eliot not unworthy company. And, as Barker wishes his compatriot a last farewell, it is himself he seems to be addressing:
Sleep on, old man, among
The ruins and the echoes,
The small lies and the great rimes,
The stones and the rocky poems,
For they at least belong
By the Ben Bulben of dreams.
NOTES AND REFERENCES

1 Letter in the possession of Elizabeth Smart, to whom I am indebted for permission to reproduce it.

2 George Barker, Poems (London: Faber, 1935)


For Echo of Lionel Johnson in the second stanza, see 'The Dark Angel' in The Oxford Book, pp. 105-7, especially the lines

    Dark Angel, with thine aching lust
    To rid the world of penitence
    Malicious angel, who still dost
    My soul such sublime violence.

    Because of thee, no thought, no thing
    Abides for me undesecrate:
    Dark Angel, ever on the wing,
    Who never reached me too late.


Lastly, the very end of the poem may have reminded Yeats of Nash's lines
Brightness falls from the air,
Queens have died young and fair
Dust hath closed Helen's eye


6 The Oxford Book, p. xli.


8 Conversations at Itteringham, 1981.


10 P. N. Review interview, p. 44.


15 Collected Poems, p. 97.

16 Collected Poems, p. 98.

17 Collected Poems, p. 98.


20 Yeats, Collected Plays, p. 649.

21 Conversations, 1981.


23 Cf. 'Byzantium' from Yeats, Collected Poems, p. 280.
24 Barker, *Collected Poems*, p. 73.


27 'Pacific Sonnets' IV in *Collected Poems*, p. 108.


Concluding his letter to Dorothy Wellesley of September 8th 1935
in which the famous analogy to a Chinese Box occurs, W. B. Yeats
added a postscript describing his day's activities:

I am tired. I have spent the day reading Ezra Pound for the
Anthology - a single strained attitude instead of passion, the
sexless American professor for all his violence.

I delight in a young poet called George Barker (Faber &
Faber) a lovely subtle mind and a rhythmical invention
comparable to Gerard Hopkins.¹

That Summer Faber had issued two volumes which had caught Yeats's
eye. The first was Pound's A Draft of Cantos XXXI-XLI which on its
appearance Barker had reviewed for The Criterion.² The second was
Barker's own Poems, refreshingly free from the dogmatic opinions and
spurious erudition Yeats found so suspicious in the Cantos.

When the Oxford Book appeared the following year it confined
itself to an early Canto, the seventeenth, whose undulating grace of
movement was close to the limpid lyricism of the earlier volumes.³ It
also stretched a point by including seven pieces by Hopkins, who had
died three years before 1892, the date at which the selection was
supposed to begin. Neither Yeats's implied preference for Barker over
Pound, nor his comparison to Hopkins should perhaps surprise us. For
whereas the appeal of the later cantos was increasingly to the eye and
mind, Barker appealed decisively to the ear. And if in the 'thirties a
model was needed of disciplined aural procedures which made allowances
nonetheless for a desired freedom, it was in the verse of Gerard Manley
Hopkins, little known before Robert Bridges' edition of 1918,⁴ that it
was characteristically found.
Despite the widespread hostility to the Victorian age to which we have already alluded, the poetics of the 'thirties was dominated by the discovery of Hopkins, Bridges' edition of whose work had been re-issued in an amplified version by Charles Williams in 1930.\(^5\) Whereas Bridges' original edition had led to a thin trickle of imitation beginning with Ivor Gurney's poems from the trenches,\(^6\) the Second Edition set off a whole spate of emulation, beginning with Auden's influential volume of 1930. From then on the tell-tale signs are obvious: clipped phraseology, asyndeton, a fondness for arcane but exact words, and a certain stark oracularity of tone. The symptoms were diagnosed in Louis MacNeice's *Modern Poetry* of 1938,\(^7\) a book which in many ways may be regarded as a stylistic manifesto of the period and which also, as we shall see, affected the ways in which Barker came to view modernity of procedure.

Though Barker, as we have already seen, found it possible to admire both Hopkins and the more central Victorians, such broadmindedness was rare in the 'thirties. For the advanced readership of the time Hopkins had suddenly become the one Victorian worth listening to. To elevate him then was by the same token to decry the vices of an age which the new children of l'entre deux guerres had come to despise. F. R. Leavis had set the critical pattern in 1932 when in *New Bearings in English Poetry*,\(^8\) reviewed by Barker for *The Adelphi*,\(^9\) he raised Hopkins to the modernist pantheon alongside Eliot and Pound. Since Leavis had devoted much of his first chapter to a frontal attack on the nineteenth century,\(^10\) to regard Hopkins as a Victorian became difficult. For better or for worse, he had come to be viewed as a modern. This bias was taken straight into the blood-stream of the contemporary literary scene. In 1935, Geoffrey Grigson devoted one of his few special issued of *New Verse* to Hopkins;\(^11\) another was devoted to Auden.\(^12\) To admire Hopkins was to be à la mode; equally de
rigeur was to credit Leavis's shallow dismissal of the other Victorians with its underlying simplification: "Nineteenth century poetry, we realize, was characteristically preoccupied with the creation of a dream-world." Leavis's "we" is, of course, the academic plural, but soon became the rallying-call for a generation who also came to subscribe to two of his accompanying contentions: that Tennyson was the principal source of the Victorian malaise, and that Robert Bridges, who had died in 1930, had perpetuated the problem by failing to release his friend's work earlier.

In reaction to Tennyson, Bridges and the succession they were held to represent, the virtues which Hopkins's defenders discovered in their idol were confusingly diverse. Already by 1926 we find Laura Riding leading Robert Graves into an admiration of Hopkins as a custodian of the singularity of meaning:

We call him a modernist in virtue of his extraordinary strictness in the use of words and the unconventional notation he used in setting them down so that they had to be understood as he meant them or not at all (this is the crux of the whole question of the intelligibility of "difficult" poetry.)

I
Three years later Seven Types of Ambiguity has William Empson seemingly ascribing to Hopkins exactly the opposite tendency, so that an analysis of "Margaret, are you grieving / Over Goldengrove unleaving" is offered as an instance of the fourth kind of ambiguity "when two or more meanings of a statement do not agree among themselves, but combine to make clear a more complicated state of mind in the author." In line nine, for example, the word "know" may be understood in one of three senses depending on the reader's construction of the syntax, (an instance of punning not dissimilar to Barker's very much later playing on the same word in 'At Thurgarton Church').

On one thing Riding and Empson agree: Hopkins is "difficult" and this difficulty is part of his fascination. It was a point taken up by Leavis in New Bearings where it is used typically as ammunition against the later Victorians:

Hopkins is very unlike his contemporary Swinburne. Hopkins is really difficult, and the difficulty is essential. If we deceive ourselves into believing that we are reading easily his purpose would be defeated. If (as Mr. I. A. Richards pointed out in what appears to be the first intelligent critique of Hopkins) we are allowed to slip easily over the page, the extremely complex response called for would not have a chance to develop.

Characteristic of Leavis's line of argument is the way that it elevates Hopkins only to put others down. The target in this case is the Victorian partiality for easy effects, as illustrated by Bridges' nail-biting excuses over Hopkins's eccentricity in his editorial Preface of 1918. After quoting a brief passage from this, Leavis comments:
(Hopkins) aimed to get out of his words as much as possible unhampereby the rules of grammar, syntax, common usage. But to the late Dr. Bridges, as to so many people, these rules were ends in themselves.20

When these remarks appeared in print, the "late" Poet Laureate had been in his grave for two years. For Leavis, as for many of his contemporaries, his passing spelt the end of an age. At last, it was felt, the hideous Victorian façade had been dismantled to make way for an arresting new architecture. Seen in this light Bridges' defensive structures on his Jesuit friend, intended to protect his reputation from an uncomprehending Edwardian public, appeared as a curse from the tomb, the last vicious swipe by a Philistine establishment at a sibling of whom they were unworthy. Arguably an opportunity had been lost, for the "rules" which Bridges preferred to observe were/in his study Milton's Prosody,21 one of the few accounts of metrical procedure written by a poet living in the Twentieth Century which gave due importance to the balance between quantitative and qualitative strains in English verse. As it was, Bridges' "rules" were now taken as indicative of an inflexibility which it became mandatory upon younger writers to slough off. Along with this view went a verdict on the poetry of the early years of the Twentieth Century which was to permeate much subsequent criticism:

Had (Hopkins) received the attention which was his due, the history of English poetry from the nineties onward would have been very different.22
Though Barker's review of *New Bearings in English Poetry* only touches on Leavis's chapter on Hopkins, the book's judgement on Bridges' treatment of his friend's work effectively became his own. Thus five years later in his review of the Bennet edition of *Quia Amore Langueo* discussed in Chapter Two (see Appendix B) he went out of his way to connect the mishandling of the medieval text of that poem in Arthur Quiller-Couch's *The Oxford Book of English Verse* with Bridges' editorial shortcomings in 1918. By doing so he was as much succumbing to current prejudices as expressing his own undoubted faith in the vigour of Hopkins's achievement without the ministrations of an editor.

Though such disparagement of Bridges was widespread in England at the time, there were nevertheless dissenting voices in the wings, above all in America, where a tradition of conservative workmanlike verse survived, centering on Yvor Winters, poet, teacher, and champion of Bridges' writing. When in 1942 one of his former students, Albert Guérard Junior, sprang to the defence of the departed British Laureate in a book entitled *Robert Bridges: A Study of Traditionalism in Poetry* George Barker, then living in New York, was asked to review it for *The Nation*. (See Appendix G)

Guérard's book was, in effect, a defence of what Bridges, in his friendly strictures of Hopkins in 1918, had called "a continuous literary decorum." By a methodical analysis of Bridges' work, and a detailed account of his prosodic system, it aimed to demonstrate how Bridges' sense of a continuing tradition and his recognition of the guiding principles of English poetry, helped to keep his own innovative impulses in check. There were, it claimed, in Bridges' work, elements of
experimentation similar to those in Hopkins; but Bridges, mindful both of his audiences' susceptibilities and the need for moderation, had tempered the desire for novelty with a decent and painstaking restraint.

The references to Hopkins in Guérard serve to suggest that he was an inspired isolationist, but historically a dead-end:

The greatness of Hopkins does not alter the fact that no other poet has been able to make similar use of his medium, a medium which in this wrenched form is perhaps suitable only to the peculiar type of religious excitement which Hopkins enjoyed. For this reason Hopkins's influence as a metrical experimenter has been, on the whole, small.24

In his review, not untypically, Barker commences his treatment of Guérard's argument by exaggerating it. There is no evidence, for example, to show that Guérard shared to the full Winters's extreme view that "Bridges and Hardy must be regarded as the two most impressive writers of poetry in something like two centuries, perhaps since Milton."

Yet it is against this position that Barker launches himself in his opening paragraph:

I can only take it that Dr. Winters reserves to himself a private meaning of the word "impressive" and the phrase "writers of poetry".

In negating Winters' view - and an equally inflated estimate of Bridges' worth by Robert Hillyer - Barker has recourse to a categorical judgement based perhaps on a distinction expressed in Housman's lecture 'The Name and Nature of Poetry': "poetry and poets are better than verses and versifiers".

It is not in the vigour of his rejection of the views of Winters and
Hillyer that the interest in Barker's review lies, however, so much as his defence of literary individuality. Taking up Dr. Guérard's concluding statement that "compared with ... the greatest of poets (Bridges) was narrow, but his evaluation of experience was at every point sound, lucid and complete", Barker comments

I defy even Dr. Tillyard to prove that Milton was sound, lucid and complete. William Shakespeare is unsound, turgid and incomplete.

The slight against Tillyard has a ring familiar to readers of the review of 'Quia Amore Langueo' discussed in Chapter Two. For, like Bridges, Winters and Guérard, Tillyard in 1942 stood in Barker's eyes indicted of the charge of wholesome, and therefore mediocre, common sense. By contrast Barker is aligning himself with those artists who are prepared to take great risks and entail great blemishes in consequence. In defending the poetry of marred greatness, Barker is hoping to hold at bay the conception of greatness through restraint which Guérard had attributed to Bridges, who had (so the implication runs) employed just such a yardstick to censor the more adventurous genius of Hopkins.

After a paragraph criticizing Guérard's view of Housman, Barker addresses himself with full force to the question of Hopkins's influence. Quoting Guérard's minimalization of Hopkins's effect on subsequent writing he continues:

The obvious conclusion is that Dr. Guérard has omitted to read any poetry published since the year 1930. The number of poets who have employed sprung rhythm - which Hopkins never claimed to have "invented" as Dr. Guérard assumes, but only to have restored - might conceivably help him to see that all sorts of extraordinary things have been happening since the death of Bridges.
That 1930 should thus feature as a watershed in English poetry is hardly surprising. 1930 was the year of Ash Wednesday, of Auden's influential second volume, of Empson's Seven Types. It was also the year of Bridges' death and Williams's edition of Hopkins's poems.

While Guérard's book and Barker's review concerned themselves primarily with the question of the merits and demerits of Bridges both as poet and as editor, the correspondence which then sprang up in the columns of The Nation concentrated singlemindedly on the question of Hopkins's influence on contemporary English poetry. (See Appendix G)

In the April 17th issue, Guérard was moved to reply to Barker's review stating the grounds for his opinion that Hopkins's "influence as a metrical experimenter has been, on the whole, small." Examining extracts from a number of contemporary writers including Auden, Day Lewis, MacNeice and Spender, he concludes that their metrical irregularities could satisfactorily be accounted for by variations on the accentual-syllabic convention which Bridges had summarized in Milton's Prosody. The widespread impression to the effect that the poets of the 'thirties had adopted Hopkins's system was due, Guérard contended, to a confusion between Hopkins's metre and the rest of his practice: "Thus \\

In rebutting this point, Barker contented himself in his letter with repeating the definition of Sprung Rhythm given in the 'Author's Preface' which Bridges had placed at the head of his 1918 edition of Hopkins's poetry. By doing so, he was stating his conviction that, in the debate as to the influence of Hopkins on poets of his own generation, the issue of Sprung Rhythm was essential. It is to this
influence, and the place of Sprung Rhythm within it, that we must now turn.

III

Among the pieces from Barker's Poems (1935) which Yeats chose for inclusion in The Oxford Book of Modern Verse, the Hopkins-like inventiveness of ear is perhaps most apparent in 'The Leaping Laughters':

When will men again
   Lift irresistible fists
   Not bend from ends
   But each man lift men
   Nearer again

   Many men mean
   Well: but tall walls
   Impede, their hands bleed and
   They fall, their seed the
   Seed of the fallen

This is a light-hearted anticipation of the political themes from Barker's ensuing two collections. Though thematically quite alien to Hopkins, it abounds in a kind of rhythmic counterpoint not dissimilar to his. A meaningful comparison would be to the movement of short lines in such poems as the frolicksome 'May Magnificat':
MAY is Mary's month, and I
Muse at that and wonder why:
Her feasts follow reason,
Dated due season -

Candlemas, Lady Day;
But the Lady Month, May,
Why fasten that upon her,
With a feasting in her honour?

Characteristic of the Hopkins's poem is a fast-flowing stanza in which sprung lines of four stresses are alternated with shorter lines of two feet. The syntax is fluid enough to straddle the lines in such a way as to cause the reader's ear to pause and linger slightly at the end of lines feeling for the beginning of the next phrase, a tendency illustrated most clearly at the turn of the second line of the second stanza, where Hopkins evidently wishes us to slow down to absorb the significance of the following question. Barker's stanzas, less regular, nevertheless also counterpose lines of different lengths, in this case those of three and two feet. Like Hopkins he is adept at causing the ear to break in its progress, especially at the end of the first line of the second stanza where, used to the pattern established in the first verse, it fumbles for a strong stressed syllable at the end of the line only to come down with added emphasis on "Well" at the beginning of the next. It is the sort of effect found in Hopkins in his more playful moments, as in the brief lines from 'Binsey Poplars'
Not spared, not one
That dandled a sandled
Shadow that swam or sank

where the word "shadow" falls with much the same delayed force.

It has seldom been Barker's practice to mark metrical schemes in his drafts, so that the student of his work has to rely on his own interpretative powers. A rare exception from the late 'thirties reinforces many of the observations made above. For the first issues of the magazine Poetry London, which the Ceylonese impresario Tambimuttu launched in February 1939, Barker wrote a poem called 'The Biography of Orpheus-Apollo', which has never been reprinted. (See Appendix G)

Like other pieces of the period such as 'To Robert Owen', 'Resolution of Dependence', and 'Vision at Minterne Magna' where a meeting with the shade of Spenser is described, this deals with an encounter with the presence of one of the great dead. In the spirit of Dante's encounter with Virgil, Barker happens upon the person of Apollo in Kensington High Street. The version of the opening two stanzas given below is that in a draft now lodged in the Brotherton Collection at Leeds University Library. The stress-marks, rhyme schemes and accentual tally in the far right margin are all Barker's. The full text of the printed version, which differs, is given in Appendix G.

I was walking down Kensington High Street
Recalling the occasion when at Bournemouth
William Wordsworth accosted in the street
Remembering also the time at Minterne Magna
When Edmund my Spenser spoke of Truth -
Generally reflecting coincidence, when stranger
Than my imagination, Orpheus Apollo
Took my arm and said to follow.
Remembering Virgil, who held the key of Hell
Revealing visions to my grand parent, I
Kept at his heel as he led me to Notting Hill
Here where I halted, I saw
Time's capsized rations crashing in his eye
He glanced up. I attended. He said
I am perfectly aware that I ought to be dead
Therefore I bring you here to hear me die.

What is of interest here is the way in which the shadow of a consistent rhyme scheme abacbcdd, and the corresponding shadow of a five stress metrical scheme are set off against substantial variations in each which give the final expression of great informality within an embracing structure. In this poem, as in all of the encounter pieces dating from the years 1937 to 1939, Barker is recounting an anecdote and thus wishes the reader to sense the warmth and urgency of the speaking voice. The tone must then be colloquial, though, in deference to the historical figures whose confidences the poet is privileged to share, a dignity of overall design must also be apparent. In the above stanzas, for example, it is noticeable that the most formal and regular of the lines are those on which early meetings with past artists are recalled. Even here, however, the rhythm is decidedly sprung, so that it is difficult to say whether the underlying norm is iambic, trochaic, spondaic or dactylic. In the terms sketched out in the 'Author's Preface' which Bridges placed at the head of his 1918 edition of Hopkins, there is no "Running Rhythm". It is therefore impossible, as in the case, for example, of 'The Leaping Laughters' to speak of counterpoint, since the elasticity of pulse, especially in the conversational opening, is such that no standard foot is provided against
which to play effects. In contrast to the earlier piece, then, which may be said to be, like approximately half of the pieces from the Hopkins edition of 1918, in a heavily counterparted form of common rhythm, 'The Biography of Orpheus Apollo', along with its companion pieces from the same period, is in Sprung Rhythm proper.

In Chapter Two we quoted a recent remark of Barker's to the effect that, in the early years of his writing life, the example of Middle English verse seemed to offer a kind of freedom from metrical rigour which might enable a younger writer to dispose of the uncomfortable rhetorical strain in the writing of his immediate elders. This was a discovery explicitly connected in Barker's comments with the discovery of Sprung Rhythm "which Hopkins quite deliberately restored.... as an act, not of innovation, but of rehabilitation."

Later, in the recorded version of his interview, Barker returned to the same tack:

There is an important point about Sprung Rhythm. I'm continually amazed by the fact of how few people have actually bothered to read those two pages of Hopkins in which he discusses that subject. There you will find it quite clearly enunciated that the Sprung Rhythm is the rhythm of prose imposed upon verse. He specifies. Here is his example: "30 days hath November, April June and December. All the rest have 31 excepting February alone which has 28". That's an absolutely perfect example of Sprung Rhythm.32

The passage to which he is referring occurs in Barker's letter to Dixon of 5 October 1978 where, in justification of his implementation of Sprung Rhythm in the recently written Wreck of the Deutschland, he refers to the use of a similar system in many "nursery rhymes and popular jingles".33 Hopkins's correspondence was being published bit by bit during the 'thirties, the letters to Dixon appearing in 1935. For
Barker and others of his generation they provided valuable substantiation of the principles of prosody discernible in the poems themselves and enunciated in the Preface.

In the late 'thirties Barker, seeking to avoid the poetical artificiality which he sensed in the verse of his forebears, tried to put these principles into practice in a series of poems, such as 'The Allegory of the Adolescent and the Adult' discussed in Chapters Two and Three, in which the flavour of medieval verse blended with a rhythmical flexibility for which the true precedent was Hopkins. It is the sort of effect which we find in much of the writing, pre-eminently from the years 1937 and 1938, in which the poet seems deliberately to be cancelling out or sliding over stresses so as to produce a flat and almost prose-like texture at the furthest possible remove from the rhetorical. At first hearing the ear is inclined to ascribe the result to metrical slackness. In fact the very opposite is the case, since the effect is most noticeable in those pieces in which Barker is most concerned that the reader should listen alertly. A little known example is the 'Epistle' published in the journal Life and Letters Today in the Spring of 1938 (See Appendix G), the first stanzas of which are a kind of musical prelude to the central description of a Summer afternoon spent close to the Dolomite mountains:

WHEN INSTRUMENTS of music ornament my ear
I hear the silence they decorate like dancers
Delighting the night with bright dresses; when I see
Birds inscribing the sky or boats on the sea,
The element they move on means most to me.
So at human I marvel not but I admire
The zone of death on which he writes fire.
Morning touches mountains with lines of light
Making the mountains swivel, but I know
Mountain is immobile on the turning sphere,
The sphere turns on the immobile year.
So the gay chaos I see has at its rear
Rendering it real, creating light with shade,
The scope of death into which it fades.

These are lines of celebration of created nature close in mood to Hopkins's 'Hungering in Harvest'. Thematically they bring together a number of the concerns of the young Barker. In them the backdrop of silence which lies behind all poetry and all music, the primordial hush examined in our discussion in Chapter Two of Barker's use of the caesura, blends with the state of death or unbeing which in Janus is seen to set life itself in relief. In order that we might appreciate this silence, it is important, as in the later 'Hymn Against St. Cecilia's Day' that we should be able to hear it. To some extent, as in the poem of 1950, this is achieved by the deployment of caesura, notably in lines three, nine and fifteen. For the most part, however, it is effected by a shifting of pulse complicated by fluctuation between lines of four and five stresses with some use of out-rides. The solid norm is given by the lines "Mountain is immobile on the turning sphere / The sphere turns on the immobile year", where Barker wishes to convey the stability which underlies all apparent movement. Otherwise the voice has to feel its way through the lines, testing the strength of the metrical ground under its feet. The first two lines for example seem at first to be reliable tetrameters, but when we come to the end of the third the way forward is blocked by the phrase "when I see", which, assuming that "see" is stressed, may be viewed retrospectively as
introducing a countervailing pentametric pattern. In the context of a first reading of the opening lines, however, they act as an outride causing the ear to halt and establish its bearings. It is at such moments, interrupting the reader's metrical security, that the silence underlying the confident stride of the verse is heard.

Such a poem is not therefore, in the language of Hopkins's Preface, strictly in either Sprung or in Running Rhythm, but, to use Hopkins's own phrase describing the smaller part of his own work "in a mixture of the two". Its distinction lies in playing the formality of classical prosody off against a freedom which is not that of vers libre strictly understood, but of the system which Barker believed to underpin medieval practice and to have been re-introduced into the English tradition by the experimentation of Hopkins.

It will be noted how much of the burden for the proof of this contention falls on the ends of lines, where, in Barker's use, the sharp edges of regular metrical symmetry are occluded either by outrides or by some other suspension of rhythmic expectation. We have already noted in Chapter Five how preoccupied Barker seems to have been towards the end of the decade with the superficial monotony imposed upon Housman's verses by the frequency of verbs at the beginning of the line. There is some additional evidence that, over the same period, his desire to avoid the structured formality of predictable line lengths extended to a concern to muffle where possible the anticipated close of a line, and that this feeling for soft cadences was partly based on the precedent of Hopkins.

A background to this tendency may be found in the delight of many of the poets of the 'thirties in feminine rhyme, half-rhyme, and a technique of rhyming on unstressed syllables. A common method of working such effects was to end consecutive lines with adverbs or else words that rhyme with them. Two examples from MacNeice will suffice:
Severally and do our business severally,
For there's a little bit for everybody. 36

The small householder now comes out warily
Afraid of the barrage of sun that shouts cheerily. 37

A foundation for this kind of off-beat ending may be sought in Hopkins, as in the lines from 'The Loss of the Eurydice':

(i) For did she pride her, freighted fully, on
    Bounden bales or a hoard of bullion?
(ii) She had come from a cruise, training seamen -
    Men, bold boys soon to be men. 38

In Barker the tendency is often even more marked. An early instance is in the poem 'Tuition to Recruits' published in The Twentieth Century in February 1933: (See Appendix G)

You know that everyone must sometime go
Down below
to the grave and slow
perambulation of our onetime foe:
Get your stiletto
bayonet typehammer
Under the opposing
hammering pulse -
One pulse, your pulse
must pulse, if one pulse must go.

And we all know that everyone must sometime go.

Stab upwards and utterly be physically

Destructive, toe to toe fight the foe O

Ravenously contest but remember the best

Or you'll go below before your time.

The whole effect of this poem lies in an opposition between the hard implacable pulse associated with the recruits' complicity in their own death, and the unstructured, unbuttoned rhythms expressive of an alternative freedom. The Twentieth Century was a pacifist platform, and in choosing Barker's poem to begin the poetry supplement of the February issue, designed, as its editors explained, as "an allotment, a laboratory site - at any rate a definite clearing, partitioned off from, but within easy reach of, the ever restless politico-economic... sector" it was clearly intended to illustrate the ways in which poetry, and the individual responses which it instilled, could act as a point of resistance to mindless social conformity. Barker has responded to this challenge by connecting recruitment with death, conveyed by an early instance of his use of the long, lamenting open vowel "o". When he wishes to enlist this vowel as a signal of the encroaching death-wish, he inserts it into strong rhymed syllables: "go", "below", "slow", "foe". When he wishes to insinuate the desired personal evasion he rhymes with it the
unstressed last syllable of "stiletto". More radically, when he wishes to express the supreme idiocy of violence he disorientates the reader by indulging in multiple internal rhymes on adverbs, so that in the phrase "utterly be physically / Destructive" the listener (as opposed to the reader) does not know where one line ends and another begins.

Often this sort of rhymical disorientation is accompanied by a syntactical disorientation equally severe. An example is to be found in the closing lines of the 'He Comes Among', one of the pieces from Poems (1935) which Yeats chose for The Oxford Book. In theme this is related to the Narcissus poems from the same volume, and describes a young Adonis figure, whose appearance is like the delicate fall of "unearthly streams" which

Tempting in echoes the aspatial
Glooms of the empty
Heart, till the senses, need inebriate,
Turning and burning through slow leaves of vague
Urge, shall, until age.

Here the concentration of "need inebriate" is mirrored by the foreshortened close, where one assumes an extension implying that the heart will burn and turn until age strikes. It is the sort of syntactical shorthand one meets in Hopkins's terrible sonnets:
I cast for comfort I can no more get
By groping round my comfortless; than blind
Eyes in their dark can day or thirst can find
Thirst's all-in-all in all a world of wet\textsuperscript{42}

where the mind is obliged to supply the noun "world" to agree with both "comfortless" and "dark" so as to complete the meaning.

It is the sort of grammatical elimination one is used to in Barker's poetry prior to 1950:

The accumulation of year and year like calendar
('Resolution of Dependence', 1937)\textsuperscript{43}

The salamander in his breast is sun
('Calamiterror', 1937)\textsuperscript{44}

The chaos of experience is kaleidoscope,
Whose rotation is the disappearing year,
I grow month older.
('Calamiterror')\textsuperscript{45}

Some principles have become poltergeist there
('Sacred and Secular Elegies')\textsuperscript{46}
We shall deal with these devices at greater length when we come to deal in the next chapter with the poetic etiquette of the 'thirties. Meanwhile, it is important to add that in Barker such instances of period mannerism seem especially associated with his use of conventional forms such as the sonnet in which an established decorum might rather be expected. There are, for instance, several instances in 'The Pacific Sonnets' of 1940:

Between the wall, of China and my heart
O exile is. Remembering the tremendous
Autumnals of nations threatening to end us all. 47

Those whom I may not meet pester me now
Like dogs I lost seem leaping at my breast. 48

The sea-gull, spreadeagled, splayed on the wind,
Seen backwards shrieking, belly facing upward,
Fled backward with a gimlet in its heart. 49

Thus eccentricity of syntax seems to have been one method whereby Barker, attracted to traditional forms but conscious of the dictates of modernism, tried to reconcile innovativeness of poetic language with the restraints of a chosen genre. If he was looking for a model for the individual, arresting uses to which an historic form might be put by a poet conscious both of precedent and of the pressures of private feeling, he would need to have looked little further than the sonnets of Hopkins.
Among the set of sonnets to artists living and dead in News of the World, Barker's collection of 1950, is one addressed 'To Father Gerard Manley Hopkins, S. J.:

Overhead on a wing under heaven, treading
Bright verbs on silence, writing red on hereafter,
He is for ever his feathers of sunset shedding,
Bedding all beautiful in the far harder and softer
Breath of his word, bird in a thrash alighting
All claws for the world that its heart is after,
The wide wonder that, into his talon of writing
Rose up, eyes open, to meet her emasculate master.

Father of further sons who wear your plumage
For the good glory of the word, I speak for
All us who inherit any merit of your image:
O long-faced convert, look down and seek for
Worthiness in one of us, and let him speak
Evangelizing the incomprehensible message.
Both the form and the imagery of this poem serve to connect it with Hopkins's sonnet of 1877 'The Windhover'.\(^5\) In Barker's poem Hopkins has become the Falcon, and Barker the enraptured watcher taking delight in its mastery. It is the sestet of Hopkins's piece, however, which supplies the controlling ideas:

Brute beauty and valour and act, oh, air, pride, plume, here
Buckle! And the fire that breaks from thee then, a billion
Times told lowlier, more dangerous, O my chevalier!

No wonder of it: sheer plod makes plough down sillion
Shine, and blue-bleak embers, ah my dear,
Fall, gall themselves, and gash gold-vermilion.

The bird becomes more beautiful by disciplining its splendour: its essence, or, to use Hopkins's term "instress" is displayed most certainly by rigorous self-control. It is this dialectic between constraint and personal expression, form and content, in Hopkins's poetry which seems to fascinate Barker, and it is in this that, as the opening lines of his sestet make clear, he would follow if he could.

The sonnet of 1950 serves to set Hopkins at the nodal point of a mesh of contrasts. In the original edition the poem was placed opposite the sonnet 'To Charles Baudelaire',\(^5\) suggesting a duality of spiritual discipline: service to religious constraint as opposed to service to the rigours of rebellion. Whereas in the Baudelaire sonnet, analyzed here in Chapter One, Barker makes it quite clear that he regards himself as a companion on the same journey as the French poet with whom he shares "much the same master", in the Hopkins piece the impression is given
of a vicarious identification with a way of life and thought which, no
matter how much he admires it, is finally banned to him. Hopkins' style
is 'emasculate'; in the end his "message" is "incomprehensible" and alien in
its demands upon the willfulness both of the individual and the artist.

The references in the fourth and fifth lines to Hopkins's style,
hard in its exactions on both the language and the reader, while soft in
its tenderness of tone and its chromatic subtlety of effect, highlight the
one aspect of his writing in which Barker might to "wear" the
Jesuit's "plumage". There, however, the affinity stops. For it is not
only as a result of his that Hopkins lies beyond Barker's
reach. In him too the relationship between technique and meaning, and
the kinds of meaning it is intended to convey, are utterly different.
Barker's concluding line speaks of Hopkins's voice "evangelizing the
incomprehensible message", and it is this element of proselytizing in
Hopkins's work, the desire to communicate an intuited and doctrinally
cogent truth, which ultimately divides the two writers. For however
open its confession of subjective states, however tortured in its closing
phase, in its evocation of personal pain, Hopkins's poetry at bottom
wishes to communicate a general truth under the guise of private
feeling. Hopkins's subjectivity is forfeit to his faith: in the last resort,
it is something he must lay at the feet of his God. This notion of art
itself as devotion, and of devotion as ultimately other-directed, may be
seen to mark the point at which Barker's belief in the fundamental
impersonality of poetry, as examined in earlier chapters, is forced to
throw in its hand.

It is this ambivalent attitude to poetry as a vehicle of private
eexpression which is the focus of Barker's remarks on Hopkins in the
essay 'The Face Behind the Poem', written two years before the sonnet.
He is speaking specifically of the Terrible Sonnets:
... the sonnets of Hopkins are dominated by an expression not so recognizably present in these sonnets themselves as in the mask or face that hangs like a cloud over them. It is a cloud not of anguish and not of personal passion but of a kind of ineffable regret. Not the individual regret of a creature for things done or for things not done; but the ineffable regret of the spirit aware that it can liberate itself through the intellect, which is inconclusive, or through theology, which is not viable. Thus these sonnets have two subjects; the ostensible subject of the poet's despair, and the unspoken or masked regret that this despair is not only possible, but unforgivably poetic. The poem hates the poetry.

This then is the great divide. For Barker, as for Tennyson and Housman perhaps also, personal experience is a means to an end. The end is the poem itself, and the means is the agitation of the artist's emotions. This certainly is the relationship between art and life posited in Eliot's 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', and this is the view too which Barker must be seen as having inherited. But for Hopkins the art itself is a means to the glorification of God, and the agitation of feeling an unforgivable personal indulgence.

There are other major differences between Hopkins and his fellow Victorians. In In Memoriam, as in Housman's Last Poems the emotional states evoked are complicated, but the style itself simple. The simplicity acts as a translucent medium like clear water through which the underlying complexity may be viewed. In Hopkins both the meaning and the language are complicated, and the one may not be approached without coming to terms with the other.

This may help us to explain why, though Barker retains a respect for Hopkins's work, its influence on his own has declined since 1945. The young Barker was interested in convoluted effects, which he saw as a register of complicated states of feeling. In Chapter Five, however, we saw how Barker's convictions in this regard changed after the war,
leading him to a series of attempts to simplify his style, guided by the examples of Tennyson and Housman. To the extent that Hopkins has exerted his power on his later writing it has been in a subtle and indirect form which has had to make compromises with his increased lucidity. We will end with a brief look at this recent period, and the presence of Hopkins discernible in it.

The Golden Chains of 1968 marked the end of a line. In these little lyrics Barker had gone as far as he was ever likely to in the direction of simplicity and uncluttered directness. His next book Poems of Places and People of 1971, among his most distinguished for many years, can with fairness be regarded as a transitional volume. Its opening poem and centre piece 'At Thurgarton Church' reaps the benefits of the new simplicity, while drawing on Tennyson and Gray. The rest of the contents, elegies and poems evocative of specific locations, experiment with a number of free verse forms while concentrating predominantly on the short line. One of them, however, an elegy addressed to the Welsh poet, banker and friend Vernon Watkins, seems to point specifically in the direction of increasing relaxation and profuseness of delivery.

With In Memory of David Archer of 1973 we enter a completely different stylistic world, dominated by the insistent conversational voice of the man behind the poet. A typical example is the ironical elegy addressed to a Yorkshire poet who died in January 1966 of heart failure in his mid-thirties:
And so, my poor Higgins, you really believed that you could get away with it all, the Virginia’ham and the small bottle of Irish whisky and the even more risky manoeuvre of filching the purse of that woman whose soul is wood the three-faced Veritas? What Hullish dreams and delusions could ever have whispered so cruelly to you, 'Look, Higgins, no hands!' and then as hesitating you stood there, red-handed, caught alive, on went the flood-lights of Hammersmith Hospital and we saw the black book the perspex mask and the oxygen tube and we knew it was the old cold bed for you.56

The principal critical objection that can be raised against this sort of writing is that expressed by Anthony Thwaite:

The recent work is sometimes self-lacerating and self-punishing, sometimes bewildered and humble in a way that is certainly quite different from the jauntily aggressive persona he once donned; the danger is that some of it sounds like prosaic muttering.57

Asked in 1982 why he had made the verse of In Memory of David Archer so colloquial, Barker himself, however, offered this explanation:

It was the result once again of trying to introduce into English verse a tone of voice which is unpoetical. You know how often one gets into a frame of mind where one reads the first line of a poem and you hear this bumpety bump and it's all too boring. It was an effort to get away from that kind of thing and to revert to this thing which so few people seem to appreciate, which Hopkins called Sprung Rhythm.58
These comments bear a remarkable resemblance to the introductory remarks contributed to the Poetry Book Society's Bulletin early in 1976 on the selection of Barker's next collection Dialogues etc. as a Spring Choice. On this occasion Barker was once again moved to talk about ways of avoiding the inexorability of accentual prosody:

In the versification of some of these poems I have tried to avoid the gallumphing or galloping or thumping mechanics of much formal metre by evolving a line in which the emphases have been elided or ironed out as in telegrams. This metrical telegraphese represents an effort to enter the region of rhythms that exist in between classical prosody and common prose, and it differs from Sprung Rhythm in that I have taken the spring out of it. This kind of verse I have tried and am trying to construct out of a conviction that the rhetoric of metre has become almost as meretricious as the rhetoric of grammar.

The term "telegraphese" is not a coinage of Barker's. It appears prominently during the discussion in Louis MacNeice's Modern Poetry A personal Essay (1938) of the style of writing pioneered by Auden in Poems (1930):

Auden's poems, in the volume published in 1930, were written in a sort of telegraphese, the less important words such as articles and conjunctions, even demonstrative and relative pronouns, often being omitted. He was aiming thereby at an economy difficult to attain in English, which is an uninflected language.

The elimination of inessential parts of speech highlighted by MacNeice in his account of Auden's style is very close to a tendency we earlier noted in Barker itself in the 'thirties and which we there felt able to attribute to the influence of Hopkins. It might be more
accurate to say that Hopkins had influenced Auden, who in his turn influenced a whole generation of writers including Barker himself. We will come to the course of this influence in the next chapter. Suffice it to say here that when, in his remarks of 1976, Barker talks of "the rhetoric of grammar" as "meretricious" what he seems to have in mind is the tendency to flowery verbal constructions in some of the poetry of the early twentieth century, a tendency which Auden amongst others had contested in the early 'thirties by a deliberate effort to prune away all that was verbally redundant and showey. The "telegraphese" thus introduced into poetic syntax has its metrical equivalent in the effort made by many at the time, but more especially as we have seen by Barker, to loosen the grasp of conventional metre so as to allow subtler rhythmic effects to emerge. Essentially this was achieved by ironing out stresses, and allowing the verse to find its own pace and gait, as prose does, or alternatively, as does conversation.

A recognition of the continuity between the thinking behind Barker's metrical practice in the late 'thirties and that behind some of his recent books can do much to help us to understand the intentions behind such volumes as In Memory of David Archer, Villa Stellar (1968) and much of Dialogues etc. It cannot, however, provide us with a criterion of success. There are in fact three distinct kinds of writing observable in Dialogues. The first, contained in the dialogues between Gog and Magog themselves, discussed in Chapter Two, is straightforward and ballad-like. In the leanness of its language it seems to be a continuation of the line leading from The Golden Chains through At Thurgarton Church. The second is a chatty form of discourse on topics religious, philosophical or sexual, very close in manner to the conversational verse of In Memory of David Archer. It is this style which presumably Barker has in mind when he talks of taking the "spring" out of Sprung Rhythm: at its least successful, as Thwaite
remarks, it tends towards flatness. The third is a delightfully spirited form of poetic soliloquy alive with counterpoint and leaping cross-rhythms. It is seen at its most attractive in the very first poem, 'The Ring-a-roses tree' which deals with classic Barkerian theme of the redemption of adult depravity by the beguiling innocence of the young.

A reasonable scansion of the first seventeen lines might yield:

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What is it that the child
brings to us in both hands
like a bunch of ever
lasting glories or forget me
not that never fade
or daisy chains that net
us all in a ring-a-roses?

It is, I believe, the hope
nothing can extirpate,
that the heart of a stone
still bleeds, still weeps, still
dances along the shore,
still somehow affirms
the metaphysics of dirt,
still feels within the rock
that locked up its own springs
fountains not yet divined. 63
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Despite the seriousness of the theme, the darting unguent contours of this remind one of nothing so much as 'The Leaping Laughters', one of the poems from the 1935 collection in which Yeats detected the shadow
of Gerard Manley Hopkins. It is another sign of the remarkable consistency of the continuity in Barker's thinking of certain principles of technique which have sustained him through many changes of style and outward manner in a long and varied creative life.
NOTES AND REFERENCES


10 New Bearings, pp. 6-15, passim.

11 New Verse, No. 14, April 1935.

12 New Verse, Nos. 26-17, November, 1937.

13 New Bearings, p. 10.


16 Empson, p. 179.


18 New Bearings, pp. 164-5.

19 Bridges, pp. v-xi.

20 New Bearings, p. 162.

22 New Bearings, p. 159.


25 See Note 19.


28 The Poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins, p. 78.


30 Barker, Collected Poems, pp. 94-6.


32 "A Conversation between Robert Fraser and George Barker, P. N. Review, 31 (9, No. 5), p. 46."

30 Barker, Collected Poems, p. 160.

35 Bridges, p. v.


38 The Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins, p. 72.

39 'Twentieth Century Verse' in The Twentieth Century Iv, No. 24, February 1933, p. 16.


41 Barker, Collected Poems, p. 23.

42 Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins, p. 102.

43 Barker, Collected Poems, p. 95.

44 Barker, Collected Poems, p. 38.

45 Barker, Collected Poems, p. 47.


51 The Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins, p. 69.

52 *News of the World*, p. 41.


56 *In Memory of David Archer*, p. 38.


58 'A Conversation between Robert Fraser and George Barker', p. 46.


*Modern Poetry*, p. 146.


*Dialogues etc.*, p. 11.
In the year 1940 Dylan Thomas and his friend John Davenport sat down "in a room that... Davenport had fixed up as a model of an old-fashioned pub, complete with barrels of beer, while Caitlin danced in a distant summerhouse to the music of a portable gramophone." Their object was to collaborate on a scabrous satire on the contemporary literary world under the title The Death of the King's Canary. So biting was the satire in some places that publication proved quite impossible. When finally published in 1976, however, the book turned out to be a frothy roman à clef describing a plot to assassinate a newly appointed Poet Laureate, one Hilary Byrd, at his country seat of Dymmock Hall in Suffolk. The first chapter of the text describes the haphazard process of selection of the Laureate by the Prime Minister of the time who is obliged to spend the evening of a fraught and busy wartime day in his study at 10 Downing Street poring over volumes by likely candidates pre-selected by his secretary Faraday. The first of these volumes turns out to be by a young poet of lowly birth whose combination of a florid style and underlying educational disadvantage takes the Premier somewhat by surprise:

"He poured the brandy into the rummer and inhaled. Slowly the night received him again, a kind island between the days. People. How he hated people! Almost as much as he liked things. His eye fell on the pile of brightly wrappered poets, and he sighed. Ah well, perhaps it might not be so ghastly a task, after all: he did not read much English poetry later than Pope, although he admired Tennyson's ear. These people might be interesting.

On top of the books lay a page in Faraday's neat script. 'Albert Ponting, born Balham, 1910. Ed. privately. Did Chemistry course at Polytechnic. Must read, but suggest unsuitable.'
The Prime Minister picked up a volume called *Claustrophosexannal*. The title was puzzling. He opened the book and began to read.

**LAMENTABLE ODE**

*by Albert Ponting*

I, I, my own gauze phantom am,
My head frothing under my arm,
The buttocks of Venus for my huge davenport.
I orgillous turn, burn, churn,
As his rubbery bosom curds my perspiring arm -
The gust of my ghost, I mean -
And he wears no woman-sick, puce, and oriflammed a brow
that, yes, yes, my hair screamed aloud
Louder than death's orchestra or sirocco.
The urge of the purge of the womb of the worm
I renege in the flail-like failing of
The detumescent sun.
This my crepuscular palimpsest is:
I am so greatly him that lazarhouses and such
Lascivious lodges of the unloved
Peel like pomegranates at my nasal touch
And Balham faints in a scalecophidian void.
To him who broods in the nests of my arches,
Fallen of Charing Cross's, like a big bumbling bird,
Before the metropolitan horde
Funicling darkly lairward
I lay the most holy gifts of my spilt flesh:
Far beyond comprehension of golden asinine error
I raise to the mirror the maggots and lumps of my terror.

He glanced again at his secretary's notes, and raised his eyebrows. He had once been Minister of Education, and was still keenly interested in all educational questions. 'Privately' sounded fishy, but the Polytechnic, with its reputation for accuracy - empirical tests were a favourite with the Prime Minister - might have spared him this shock. What on earth was a davenport? He walked over
to the shelves; and discovered that in English it was an escritoire and in American a settee. It did not seem to clear up the line. He had never been in Balham, and the poem was not enlightening. He glanced through the rest of the book, his eye sliding distastefully from adjective to adjective; but the humourless self-absorption and the faulty syntax of the writer soon defeated him. He drank, poured again, and reached for another book.²

In his introduction to the edition of 1976 Constantine Fitzgibbon states that "Dylan Thomas maintained that Daveport wrote most of the verse parodies. This may well be untrue, for if Dylan were not proud of them, he would have given their authorship to John. Others have said that their ill is far beyond what were Davenport's capacities."³ In the case of this, the first parody in the book, there is an additional reason for ascribing the authorship to Thomas. The text of Ponting's poem contains an elaborate in-joke on Davenport's name, probably an additional prank played by Thomas at the expense of his co-author.

But if the real author of the 'Lamentable Ode' remains less than certain, the putative author is much easier to identify. Albert is, like George, a Royal Christian name of German provenance, and Pontings and Barkers were neighbouring Department Stores on Kensington High Street. The title *Claustrosexannal* is both a spoof on *Calamiterror* which had appeared three years previously⁴ and a comment on what was interpreted as Barker's sexual retardation and possible bisexuality. Several stylistic elements are also familiar, and may even be traced to particular poems. Thus, the "gauze phantom" of the first line seems to refer to both 'The Wraith-Friend'⁵ and to the shadowy self of the Narcissus poems,⁶ and the poet's head "frothing under my arm" to the second and third lines of the dedicatory sonnet to *Calamiterror* where the poet sees his own hand "hanging at the bend of my arm like a leech member."⁷ There is also considerable play with internal and half-rhymes, and with latinisms over which, as in much early Barker, the
writer seems to have slim control. The diffused and ambiguous sexuality recalls many passages from 'Documents of a Death' in Janus, while the convoluted syntax and the obsession with an airman-like "big bumbling bird" represent habits picked up by Barker from his contemporaries.

When Ponting himself appears at the beginning of Chapter Two, he is revealed in typical pose gazing at himself in the mirror and picking facile images out of the air. For the rest of the book he devotes his time to dropping earnest and surprisingly prim remarks about the goings-on among the well-born guests at the Great House while himself conducting a squalid below-stairs intrigue with a Chamber Maid. It is an unflattering, slightly acid, but ultimately affectionate portrait.

Apart from its historical interest, the figure of Ponting as portrayed in this novella provides us with an illuminating study of the way that the twenty-seven year old George Barker appeared to a Welsh poet, almost his exact contemporary, whose name at the time was often linked with his. It is also an indication of the way that his early style struck those who had been subjected to the same cultural conditions. In their parody Thomas and Davenport pick out a number of features both personal to Barker and symptomatic of avant-garde tendencies of the time. It is thus a useful starting point both for a discussion of Barker's writing of the 'thirties, and the way that it relates to a literary atmosphere which he experienced in common with other writers who either, like Thomas, were almost exactly of his generation or, like Auden, himself satirized in Death and the King's Canary as Wyndham Snowden, were a few years older.
It seems best to begin with some stylistic features. In his chapter 'Auden and the Audenesque' from Reading the Thirties, Bernard Bergonzi has called our attention to the prominence of the definite article in the writing of the time, linked usually to lists of nominal phrases and used so as to fix a sense of time and place, to outline a definite context in all its particularity. He connects this with the classifying, pigeon-holing aspect of Auden's intelligence, with popular preoccupations about science, and with later modes of realism such as the move towards documentary film-making and Charles Madge's 'Mass Observation'. His examples are taken mainly from Auden himself, whom he takes to be the fountainhead, and also from Graham Greene, whose fictional descriptive method is pervaded by relevant instances.

There are two extensions that it might be possible to make to this general theory. The first is that, although Auden may have diffused the habit, he is not perhaps as obviously the primary source as Bergonzi makes him out to be: there are, for example, few examples of the repetitive use of this device in the 1930 volume. Secondly there is one fairly clear influence which he neglects, namely, the translation into English by T. S. Eliot in 1930 of Saint-John Perse's poem Anabase.

Saint-John Perse has a characteristic feel for the detail and texture of a society's communal life, the tackle and trim of a civilization, which comes across faithfully in Eliot's rendition and which, one feels, must have had a quite crucial effect, couched as it so often is in precisely that enumeration of phrases decked by the definite article which Bergonzi notes elsewhere:
'the husbandman, and the young noble horses; the healer with needles, and the saltier; the toll-gatherer, the smith; vendors of sugar, of cinammon of white metal drinking cups and of lanthorns..... and the man of no trade: the man with the falcon, the man with the flute, the man with the bees... 15

Whatever the source, it remains true that this sort of listing, panoramic effect is a noticeable motif throughout the verse of the 'thirties. It is also true, though not as yet remarked on, that the practice is at least as common in Barker as in other poets of the period, and possibly more so. The interesting question is the extent to which Barker's use of it corresponds to the procedure of other writers, and to what extent it is shaped by personal susceptibilities.

The most obvious instance occurs in the first three introductory stanzas to Book I of Calamiterroc (1937):

The gay paraders of the esplanade,
The diamond harlequins, the acrobats,
The gloriously lost in summer glades,
The wanderers through the acropolis,
The ones who seek the times' shade
Reclining by catastrophes,
The figures of the downward grade:
The gay shadows of the shade.

The continental operas, the play
Featuring beautiful beasts and the beast beauty,
The shimmering mannequins of Love's display
Meandering through, glamorous and nude,
Loose at the hip; those whom they displease,
The glancers at the gay boy's beauty;
The mirror-gazer self-betrayed;
Loving shadows in the shade.

The falling cliff that like the melting face
Collapsing through its features, leaves a stare,
The grinning cat; the cataracts that grace
The private gardens like water-scarves; where
The National Trust exhibits its own views;
The shadowing perspectives of Kensington avenues
Sunday in January, when the spires fade:
Outlining the geography of shade.¹⁶

In Auden such a stock-pile of nominal phrases would amount to
what many of his commentators have taken to be an astute selection of
socially relevant detail, but which can also be seen with hindsight to
constitute the adumbration of a highly personal mythological terrain. In
Barker the point seems to be to arrest the year's progress at a
particular point of high summer, and to see the figures thus frozen as
symptomatic of beauty teetering on the brink of decline. The use of
plural rather than singular nouns has the double effect of evoking a wide
social canvas and simultaneously giving the impression of figures caught
in a decorative tableau. The "shade" of the refrain is both the sharp
shadow of the English afternoon sun and the ominous fate overhanging
Europe. Each stanza progresses poignantly from a sense of the blissful
ease of those unconscious of their destiny to a feeling of conscious
tragedy. The "figures of the downward grade" are portrayed as actively
seeking "time's shade": it is they alone who possess the perspicacity or
leisure to work out what is happening to them. The whole passage is
shot through with a highly charged androgynous sexuality typical of Barker at this time. "Loose at the hip" I take to be a reference to a fashionably sexy way of walking; the use of the adjective "gay" in line 6 of stanza two seems to include the modern colloquial usage listed by Partridge as "in use since ca 1930, if not much earlier". All of these features serve to fix the action more effectively in milieu and time than in place, since we are ambiguously at the seaside or in London. There is indeed much the same sense of geographical inclusiveness as that achieved in 'Vision of England '38' discussed in Chapter Two. Moreover the "continental operas" give us a vivid sense that we are supposed to know what is on this season without confining us to a particular work or venue. Altogether, the atmosphere of suffused topicality must have given contemporary readers a rather precise sense of a historical moment caught in a sad gaze of foreknowledge.

These remarks would seem to etch out an oblique relationship between the lines under consideration and those passages in Auden or Day Lewis where documentary interest is uppermost. One can, for instance, extract from Auden and Isherwood's lines "In the hour of the Blue Bird and the Bristol Bomber, his thoughts are appropriate to the years of the Penny Farthing", from The Dog Beneath the Skin, a fairly straightforward sense of the relationship between the individual and the time in which he is living. Auden wishes to impress us with the inconsistency between Victorian and modern modes of thought; he further wishes to stress the importance of one's being true to one's own time. In the stanzas from Calamiterror, on the other hand, there is a sense in which the figures depicted exist both within and outside time, since, although redolent of a period and ultimately accountable to historical destiny, they also seem to exist in a domain of glorious freedom exempt from historical pressure. The "gloriously lost in Summer's shades" seem almost to represent a case of special pleading;
there is a sense in which Barker is recognizing their right to stand outside processes which will ultimately undermine them. There is a clear connection between the poise thus achieved and the thematic content of the rest of the poem, concerned as it is with the belated recognition of the artistic conscience as determined by, and accountable to, the world of public events the poet had tended earlier to ignore. Calamiterror is the most prominent of those poems of the late 'thirties in which Barker bids farewell to his earlier narcissistic self-absorption and strives to come to terms with the exigencies of place and time. There is thus a certain appropriateness in beginning the work with a portrait of contemporary England which registers both the forgetfulness of the self-absorbed and the gathering gloom which will force them to an acceptance of themselves as socially responsible beings.

There is a similar mental and grammatical movement at the very end of the 'Pacific Sonnets' when Barker is bidding farewell both to Japan, where he had been teaching, and to England, his beleaguered homeland, on his departure for America:

Goodbye the stone angels and plush chairs,
The solicitor's plates worn to anonymity,
The parks where the duke's deer wander, the spring
A national resurrection, the lawyers, the liars:
Goodbye equally my kind and consanguinity. 20

All kinds of conflicting feelings surface in this passage in which Barker is trying to distill his response to a native country to which he may possibly not return. The plush chairs and worn solicitor's plates suggest cosiness, provincial respectability, possibly boredom and
senescence. On the other hand, the "national resurrection" is an annual event which presumably includes the occupants of the chairs, and even the angels. The lawyers must be inclusive of the solicitors already mentioned, and are in any case either contrasted with the liars or identified with them. In the first case one has a vision of a racily alive and healthily subversive society held in check by a restraint which is pallid but necessary. In the second, made more likely by the alliteration, one has a sense of respectable connivance in wholesale public deception. The duke's deer in the park suggests aristocratic elegance, the Pastoral tradition, possibly even Shakespeare, and, with him, the whole procession of English letters. One's reaction to all of these must depend to some extent on whether or not the duke is listed among the liars. The apposition of the very last line is either in contrast to the foregoing or inclusive of it: Barker is either recognizing his bloodbrotherhood with his more privileged countrymen, or else setting himself apart from the aristocracy and upper middle classes as a member of a more deprived group to which he also extends his felicitations. A choice between these depends on a reading of the word "equally" which seems tailor-made to suit both interpretations as well as injecting a certain amount of political irony.

The connection between this passage and the opening stanzas of Calamiterror consists, I suggest, in precisely this sense of ambiguous belonging. Barker is physically removed from England, a country which had failed to supply him with an adequate livelihood. While recognizing the corruption and feebleness that had led her straight into the hands of war, he is nevertheless forced at this crucial point to recognize ties of allegiance to his homeland, and thus to acknowledge himself as the creature of particular historical circumstances. The network of nominal phrases, with their subtle inter-relationships, record the moment of identification, while paradoxically conveying the poet's
desire to be free of claims which might encumber him.

A further analysis of Barker's deployment of contemporary literary mannerisms serve to confirm some of these conclusions. In his discussion of stylistic features common in poetry of the 'thirties Bergonzi does not limit his analysis to the heightened use of the definite article, but also mentions its opposite, the omission either of the definite or the indefinite article. He admits, however, that this is a feature of the style of the very early 'thirties which tends to fade out as the decade progresses. It seems in Auden's case to have been a special feature of Poems (1930) and, within that, of the charade 'Paid On Both Sides'. It was, nevertheless, eagerly taken up by his associates, and more especially by Stephen Spender, whose volume Poems Barker reviewed approvingly in an issue of The Twentieth Century in February 1933. (See Appendix H) A section from the Auden charade is quoted by Louis MacNeice in his book Modern Poetry of 1938 as evidence of the new style and as preparation for the theory of the "telegraphese" outlined in our last Chapter, where we were able to connect it with the influence of Hopkins.

But MacNeice does not, like Bergonzi, confine himself to the omission of article, choosing instead to concentrate on asyndeton, or the omission of the conjunction. Bergonzi's observation can then be seen as but a special case of a general tendency to omit the grammatically inessential parts of speech such as tend to fall on unaccented syllables. This can in turn be viewed as one aspect of an attempt, mentioned with approval by MacNeice in the same chapter, to undermine the iambic trot of English so fatal to a young poet trying to achieve a fresh-sounding voice.

The coinage of the term "telegraphese" seems particularly apt to the poetic atmosphere of the early years of the 'thirties. The peculiar concentration of the telegram derives from a ruthless editing out of all but the bare essentials, an exercise which involves eliminating not
merely parts of speech, but also whole phrases and clauses, provided an attentive reader, affected by the subject matter, can be expected to fill in the rest. Thus he may be invited to do partly due to his involvement in the matter in hand, and partly due to his empathy with the writer's style and purpose. In many telegrams the suppressed urgency of tone is arguably the result of an implied sub-text, which might read: 'This matter is so pressing that there is no time to communicate it in full, and, besides, in times such as these, one has to make do with the equipment at hand, which is faulty. Besides, reader, you come from the same background as myself; you remember the countless conversations we have had with one another, and I therefore expect you to supply all that I have been forced to leave out.'

The relevance of such implications to the writing of the Auden school does not have to be exaggerated: both the suggestion of time running out, and casual assumption of talking to someone of the same background are very germane to the work of the university educated poets associated with his name.

On the other hand, there is much in such a socially exclusive form of shorthand to which Barker in particular might be expected to object. He was, as we shall shortly see, very conscious of not belonging to the public school coterie, and often suspicious of the more extreme versions of political commitment available at the time. There are many signs, however, that this desire to set himself apart from the poets of a slightly older generation did not occur to him in an acute form until the years of social awareness around 1937 and 1938: before then he was only too keen to latch onto any notions concerning poetic modernism and its trappings that might be in the air. Evidence for this fact is plentiful in his review of New Signatures for the Adelphi as well as articles such as 'Poetry and Contemporary Inertia', contributed to the self-consciously modern The Twentieth Century. (See Appendix H) It is thus hardly
surprising to find many instances of the telegraphic style in his poems early in the decade. Already in Octologue of Emotion (1932) we have lines such as these (See Appendix C):

(Experiment in beauty: Magnet's
Magnetic field, mesmeric radius: over this hesitate
Hairpins and filings in order,
Like exhausted stars.)

This reads, not perhaps so much like a telegram as a set of jottings from a scientist's notebook, reminding the writer that, as well as getting his experiment right, he must take time off to appreciate the elegance of the result. And from the very next year, in 'A Sequence of Ten Sonnets' from Thirty Preliminary Poems (1933) we have this:

But mouths by being must speak, perform
Hortatively what the body afterwards in nude
Wide air will do, feeding the mind with quick
Monosyllabic maxims, our hot body arms. 23

A polemical background to these lines can be found in a paragraph from 'Poetry and Contemporary Inertia' published the previous December:
It seems to me that this decisive movement into the future could more concordantly be accomplished by the passionate exhortation of poetry... if it were possible that a majority of individuals in each country could be purely educated in the national or international ideals, and efforts which must be expended to attain these ideals... the movement into the future could be practically accelerated.

At this stage of his career, it appears, Barker was concerned to interpret the poet as a seer, as the potential spearhead of a mass movement. It is not a notion that we would associate with the Barker of later years, but its entertainment here is evidence of the extent to which, at the age of twenty, he was prepared to go along with the more extravagant claims of contemporary idealism.

Much of this political enthusiasm works itself into the lines earlier quoted from Thirty Preliminary Poems. Significantly also the views expressed on the relation between poetry and its public, views so evocative of the period in which the lines were written, are conveyed through a stylistic contraction itself very much of the period. Thus the "mouths" are the exhorting voices of the poets, the urgency of whose coded message is condensed in the last two lines, which expanded would read: "feeding the (public) mind with quick (rapidly delivered and acted upon) maxims, and our hot (urgent) bodies with useful limbs and the weapons with which to accost the future."

In Thirty Preliminary Poems such distillation of implied meaning often leads to challenging results. The first of the 'Sequence of Ten Sonnets', for example, considers the prospect of the "unburied body cruciform", the body of Christ before its eventual interment. The sestet opens with a Biblical cry of desertion which leads into a modern technological image:
(Father, why has Thou forsaken us)

We cannot interrogate, there is no time,
Immediate work's to be done, and done by us,
(We cannot spare the time for this one tune-up):
Crisscross of cables this wicker electric chair
He sits, staring at the telephone pole like a cross.24

An unravelling of the abbreviated syntax of these lines proves a rewarding task. The spirit has left the human engine to its own devices. Predictably the human mechanic, who is also his own instrument, in attempting to service his own inner resources ends by contriving his own hideous means of execution. Notice how the convoluted patterns of thought and expression, typical of the young Barker, work a bizarre magic. The "tune-up" suggests an old car in need of attention which involves wiring it up to a supplementary battery; the mesh of wires thus created becomes at once the emblem of the mechanic's personal crucifixion and the power supply for an electric chair, which is itself identical with the body that is both involved in repair work and being repaired. The grammar of the last line leaves it open as to whether the wooden telephone pole with its transverse wires is being compared with a cross, or whether it is the condemned man locked into the electronic executioner of his own invention. In either case, the equation has some cogency: the body is both judge and victim.

This kind of syntactical contraction is intensified in poems of the period in which Barker takes as his theme the act of invention itself. Thus 'Daedalus', in which the aging master-engineer is heard bemoaning the death both of his son and of his own creative principle, begins arrestingly:
Like the enormous liner of his limbs
and fell.

Remain behind, look on
of what was once
What's left in blighted remains.
That imponderable body
smote my desire, now smitten
Mortally. 25

Such lines are distinctive in their spacing, their concentration, and their sense of blighted heroism. To find a source for some of these attributes we need look no further than the first piece in Spender's Poems of the previous year:

He will watch the hawk with an indifferent eye
    Or pitifully;
Nor on those eagles that so feared him, now
    Will strain his brow;
Weapons men use, stone, sling and strong-thewed bow
    He will not know

This aristocrat, superb of all instinct,
    With death close linked
Had paced the enormous cloud, almost had won
    War on the sun;
Till now, like Icarus mid-ocean-drowned,
    Hands, wings are found. 26
Icarus was, like "the bird, the butterfly, the aeronaut" from Barker's *Calamitizer*, something of a cult figure at the time. In the extract from 'Daedalus' Barker seems to be interested in adopting some of Spender's mannerisms, and taking them one stage further. The syntax here is indeed much like the telegram, since it reads almost like the end product of a process of systematic elimination. The physical arrangement of the words on the page also suggests a technique of progressive deletion in which a number of phrases have been meticulously pasted out. Where Spender, however, merely cancels the grammatically inessential parts of speech, Barker carries on to the point where we are uncertain either of the identity of the speaker or the drift of his meaning.

The combination in Barker's early writing of fashionable stylistic elements with affinities to the work of Auden, Spender and MacNeice, and a nexus of views which would seem to spring from a contemporary political consensus well to the left of centre, immediately raises the problem of the exact relationship of the young Barker to the surrounding literary scene, and more especially to that drift of opinion and technique celebrated by Michael Roberts in the Introduction to *New Signatures*. For to a large extent the tendency in existing criticism has been to treat Barker as if his work lay totally outside this strand in recent English literary history. Samuel Hynes in his study *The Auden Generation: Literature and Politics in the 1930s* has just one passing reference to Barker's *Adelphi* review of 1932. Already in his book *Auden and After* of 1942, Francis Scarffe is discussing him as a member of an entirely new wave associated with the name of Dylan Thomas. The only cultural historian so far to treat Barker as if his writing of the 'thirties related meaningfully to the atmosphere of the time is F. T. Tolley whose account in *Poetry of the Thirties* is, however, both inaccurate and incomprehending. In trying to correct these
impressions it may be helpful to begin with Barker's own account of his literary beginnings, and then to pass on to a consideration of the discursive views he himself advanced at the time.

II

While the essay 'Coming to London' of 1937 touches on the years spent in the capital between the Barker family's move from the poet's birthplace in Essex until his nineteenth year, the major portion of it focuses on a two year period between the Summer of 1932, when Barker was first invited to tea with John Middleton Murry, and the Summer of 1934 when, upon his acceptance onto the Faber list, he moved down to Dorset and thus set a physical distance between himself and the literary metropolis. In these months he met in succession many of the leading literary lights of the time who helped to set in motion a process of mutual introduction which led eventually to Eliot's erie perched at the corner of Russell and Woburn Square. The chain began with Murry, then emerging into his Communist phase, who, responding to an enthusiastic letter from Barker, commissioned from him a review of the recently published New Signatures and thus opened up the possibility of a meeting with its editor, Michael Roberts, Physicist, Mathematician, Poet, Marxist, Critic. In his account of their first conversation Barker gives an impression of Roberts as a combination of intellectual wizard and mountaineer, that other cult figure of a decade dominated by repeated attempts on Everest. Roberts played him a recording of one of the late Beethoven string quartets, and this inspired one of the earlier pieces that later found its way into Thirty Preliminary Poems. Meanwhile he sent him round to Number Four Parton Street, a Georgian
Alleyway leading off Red Lion Square, where he encountered the lean, tortured but generous David Archer, who, though himself no member of the poetic cognoscenti, was politically motivated and very interested in publishing young poets no matter what their persuasion.

Archer's bookshop occupied the ground floor of the building, while upstairs was the meeting place of the recently formed Promethean Society\footnote{32} whose journal \textit{The Twentieth Century} listed Archer himself as its co-ordinating secretary.\footnote{33} Hynes, noting "one might argue that a generation exists when it has such organizations and such journals", describes the Prometheans as "an organization of young radicals that met to discuss politics, 'sexology', philosophy, religion, and art and published its own journal \textit{The Twentieth Century}".\footnote{34} Though he is right about the aims of the journal, Hynes is, however, wrong about the length of its survival which he states as "two years, from March 1931 to May 1933". In fact, as Bloomfield's listings in his bibliography of small magazines in the 'thirties make clear,\footnote{35} it ran until well into 1934, though all of the surviving runs expire in June of the previous year. Its ideological orientation, was, as the launching issue of 1931 makes clear, influenced primarily by two thinkers: H. G. Wells, whose faith in scientifically controlled progress it shared, and Havelock Ellis, whose candour about man's emotional existence was held to provide a sound basis for liberal but responsible sexual attitudes. The combination proved amenable to those who were inclined to libertarian beliefs but whose quarrel with conventional society stopped short of the embrace of outright Marxism.

In the opening remarks in his interview of 1982 Barker makes it quite clear that, although existing at the time within the social ambit of the Promethean group, he felt even at the time detached from their dogmatic convictions.\footnote{36} There are many possible reasons for this. Barker has never taken easily to organized pressure groups of any kind.
One fundamental one, however, is clarified by a poem which he addressed to David Archer after his death in the volume named in honour of his first publisher and life-long friend:

What a bore all those politically affiliated young men at your Parton Street Bookshop were, David, in those unforgettable thirties. They resembled waiters bringing one a sort of cold vichy-

The word Utopia and the ideal Utopia (and although the word is unfashionable the idea is not) have for me always exuded the offensive connotation of The English Public School. It is the triumph of that atrociously vicious misconception, the team spirit. 37

Though this verdict may well have been affected by hindsight, it is certainly true that for the young Barker, fresh from the Regent Street Polytechnic and with an unemployed former army officer for a father, the political pretensions of that generation of upper middle-class English radicals, with their psychological compensations for embarrassing social advantages, appeared both exclusive and offensive. The point is already quite clearly put in the review of Stephen Spender's Poems which Barker wrote for The Twentieth Century in February, 1933 (See Appendix H):
We need a new mature poetry divested of smarmy verbal beauty - oh beatuuuuutiful young comrades - of technical knacks to seduce the peruser, of striving after expression of contemporary impurities, for example Communism, which is nowhere near its maturity today. (The trouble with making beauty about poetising is that the poet never treats a thing as itself, but always, or nearly always, as his projected desires about that thing. Get this if you can into your heads, and let them write about what they want Communism to be, not what they think it is.)

In the pages of *The Twentieth Century* the issue of the relevance of literature to contemporary political thought was hotly debated. The headquarters of the Promethean Society and of Archer's shop, from which the journal emanated, existed right in the middle of a small enclave of radical cultural activity on the Southern fringes of Bloomsbury. Next door, at Number Four, were the offices of the publishing firm of John Wishart (forerunners of Laurence and Wishart) where, in between helping to run the firm and encouraging Nancy Cunard to complete her monumental *Negro*, Edgell Rickword, Communist and poet, persuaded the young George Barker to publish his journal in fictionalized form as the novel *Alanna Autumnal* (1933). Across the street at Number One was Meg's Cafe, sometimes known as the Arts Cafe, where the April, 1933 issue of *The Twentieth Century* advertised "a meeting to discuss the future activities of the sexology group." It was not only the Prometheans, however, who frequented the tables. Here Dylan Thomas could be seen at a table close to T. E. Lawrence; here the seventeen-year-old David Gascoyne, who that year published a novel called *Opening Day* brushed shoulders with Charles
Madge. Meanwhile, according to Barker's essay, "Mr Grigson, like a feline mandarin in the shadows was preparing his first or second issue of blood entitled New Verse."

It was indeed in the second issue of Grigson's journal that Barker's poetry first saw the light of day. When, early in 1933, Grigson announced the inception of the magazine, the contributions received veered so far towards a radical outlook, that the editor was forced to publish a disclaimer of political intent in the very next number. This took the form of a declaration of editorial openness to proficient writing issuing from every quarter, including that of a "reasoned Toryism". Yet the poems which follow in the same issue do very little to reassure the diligent reader of Grigson's earnestness in his intention. The most that Grigson could do to endorse his own declared editorial policy was to follow his printed disclaimer by a short poem by George Barker called 'Coward's Song'. This piece significantly occupies precisely the same place in the second issue as had been taken in the first by Louis MacNeice's 'Turn Again Worthington (A thought for Intending Mystics)'.

The MacNeice poem can be regarded with a fair degree of certainty as a disclaimer of metaphysical speculation. It envisages a day tripper re-entering his city-bound charabanc in sheer relief after a day contemplating the insistently disturbing presence of the ocean as it thunders on to the beach and "exploded its drunken marble / Amid the gull's gaiety". Barker's poem strikes a not dissimilar note, though, unusually for the period, its disclaimer is political:

Tone down the soul,
Plane safely away the storm ploughing mountain summits,
The sum and the whole,
The total sorrow,
Because your soul my man is not a sphere.

Speed through vicissitude
Sensibly streamlined,
Not only speed increased
But lessen friction
Against the inward heart, soft inner engine.

From nineteen pointed celestial star
Roll into dull stone
The soul lying on the seashore,
Even by the ubiquitous sea unnoticed
And ignored.

The image in the final stanza could almost have been taken over from the earlier MacNeice poem. The proposed posture is that of a beach pebble curling up on the shore of history as the waves of circumstance break over it. The "planing away" of rough edges in the first stanza represents an inner collusion to the outer wearing down. The poet recommends a policy of peaceful co-existence with the engine of the "inward heart", whose demands, however, are soft. The poem can even extend Art Deco ideals of streamlined design to the careful poise of a mind whose "sensible" policy of withdrawal combines the virtues of sense with those of sensibility. Salvation is to be found in the avoidance of extreme action: the poet will bide his time, a lowerclass King Log.

The 'thirties, however, was the decade of the Storks. In the context of a period in which political moderation was gradually to
appear to wear the face of appeasement, the wise passiveness of this poem strikes a dissident note. It is a signal that, for certain writers younger than the general run of New Verse contributors, the politics of radical lip service were far from central to their outlook or poetic orientation.

It would thus appear that already by 1933 we have an early sign of a polarization among the poets of the 'thirties, a disparity in outlook which has been largely passed over by those commentators concerned with investigating the leftward drift of the English intelligentsia of the period. It is true that, between the accession of Adolf Hitler to the German chancellorship in January 1933, and the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in July 1936, the solidarity of a certain section of the British intelligentsia behind what may be roughly defined as Soviet-inspired collectivism became more and more manifest. The reasons for this have already been investigated at length by Hynes and do not concern us here. Yet, persuasive as Hynes's scheme may be, the picture was not uniform. It might be truer to say that among young poets at the time there existed a spectrum of opinion extending from explicit commitment to moderation or even disinterestedness. An incisive guide to this range of opinion is the collection of answers received by New Verse in October 1934 to a questionnaire sent by Grigson to twenty correspondents and printed, along with their replies, in the eleventh issue.

The Questionnaire ran as follows:

1. Do you intend your poetry to be useful to yourself or others?
2. Do you think there can now be a use for narrative poetry?
3. Do you wait for a spontaneous impulse before writing a poem; if so, is this impulse verbal or visual?
4. Have you ever been influenced by Freud and how do you regard him?
3. Do you take your stand with any political or politico-economic party or creed?

6. As a poet, what distinguishes you, do you think, from an ordinary man?  

Auden himself neglected to reply, but the answers submitted by some of the younger poets repays attention. Though many of the correspondents indicated their feeling that, in the current world crisis, some sort of measured left-wing stand was desirable, only one gave as his answer to the fifth question "Communism". This was the young Gavin Ewart, notable neither then nor now for the tenacity of his political beliefs. Otherwise, the reaction is guarded, and a number of replies take the opportunity to point out the danger of any artist embracing a concerted ideology wholesale. Question Four draws a slight blank, except in the case of Barker's friend David Gascoyne who, then in his late teens, was already known in advanced circles as a major British exponent of Surrealism. Even Gascoyne, however, feels the need to state his reaction in such a way as to avoid any impression of naive partisanship. His answer to Question 4, which might have been tailor-made for him, reads:

I have never been directly influenced by Freud in my poetry, but I have been indirectly influenced by him through the Surrealists. To give oneself up to any time to writing poems without the control of reason is, I imagine, to have in a way come under the influence of Freud. I no longer find his navel-gazing activity at all satisfying. The Surrealists themselves have a definite justification for writing in this way, but for an English poet with continually growing political convictions, it must become soon impossible.
Barker's own replies make a virtue of their lack of firm commitment to anything beyond the craft of writing itself. They are:

1. In so far as the function of use may accord with the process of spiritual unravelling, I do.
2. I am convinced that an effective and violent narrative poem could at the moment effect more good than 2,000 individual lyrics.
3. I find myself very powerfully conscious of the purely verbal origin of the poem; that the impulse is "spontaneous" I suspect, but cannot verify.
4. Am extremely sceptical of Freud. His influence upon me, if extant, is now mild, and, I think, deleterious: I regard him as a competent but egregious psychologist; and largely a defective thinker.
5. I do not.
6. The way my pen runs.47

A cursory reading of the first answer might lead one to suppose that Barker had been attracted to the potential for "inwardness" in the pronouncement of the Surrealists. However, Answer 4 goes a long way to discount any such conclusion. Despite Barker's admitted fascination with the depths of his own mind, the scientific categorizing approach of the Freudians to the process of self-analysis is clearly not one that attracts him. His rejection of the Freudian scheme would seem to place him on the side of those who find, not merely Freudianism strictly conceived, but also the manifesto of the Surrealists, many of whose insights were derived from Freud, unsatisfactory. For Barker the spirit is the spirit; the mind is the mind. To unravel the spirit is to deal profoundly with the existential reality of the self; a morbid fascination with the quirks of the unconscious mind may co-exist with this (indeed, in Barker's case, as Calamiterror demonstrates, it does); it is not, however, a necessary corollary of it. In speaking of "spiritual unravelling", Barker clearly has in mind something much closer to the
spiritual exercises of the Jesuit Hopkins.

Barker's disclaimer of political commitment in answer to Question 5 is important since it sets him apart from those members of the Auden circle who, at this date, were existing very much under the sway of the communist cause. Barker, however, was not unique in this. His reaction to the straight political enquiry echoes others quoted in the same issue of New Verse by, notably, David Gascoyne, who, despite his "continually growing political convictions" could not bring himself to side with the radical camp, and, significantly too, Dylan Thomas, whose own reply speaks of a certain unease with the heady certainties of the times.

These three poets were very much of an age, and, while it might be unwise to force them into the confines of a concerted movement, their replies do have enough in common for us to consider the possibility of their constituting a new phase in British poetry, distinguishable in some senses both from what went before and what was to follow. In 1934 Barker, Gascoyne and Thomas were names very new to the world of poetry. At the time of the questionnaire their ages varied from twenty one to twenty three. They were all thus a good five years younger than any member of the group associated with Auden. All of them had already given evidence of a certain precocity, and had been encouraged while still in their late teens by Archer, whose Parton Press had brought out slim volumes of their early poetry. To many observers they appeared to represent a similar tendency in English verse, away from the emphatic public stand of the poets then in their late twenties or early thirties. In their very different ways they might each be said to demonstrate a concern with purely private experience, with the essentially personal valuation of experience they had inherited from the post-Romantic poets of the nineteenth century. Significantly too, they were all at this date seemingly torn between poetry and the
autobiographical novella. Barker and Gascoyne had both already published pieces of autobiographical fiction; Thomas’s *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Dog* was to follow in 1940. Socially too, they had much in common. Secondary school educated, lower middle-class, without the advantages of a university degree, they each laid claim to an eclectic frame of reference which was the result, not of directed study, but of compulsive private reading.

If, as of 1934, each of these younger poets could take pride in a sort of dogged political isolationism, events, however, were soon to shake their composure. In January 1936, a Republican Government was elected in Spain, and in July a Fascist backlash led to the opening skirmishes of the Spanish Civil War. January of the following year saw Auden’s Byronesque escapade, of dashing to Valencia in an attempt to make himself useful to the Republican cause, only to return seven weeks later, tight-lipped and embarrassed. At home news of the fighting had a galvanizing effect on British intellectuals of all classes, even those who had no intention of travelling to Spain. Among these was Barker, now resident in Dorset, who like others felt that it was impossible to sit back and ignore the implications of the Spanish War. No more immune than others to the pressures of the hour, he was at last forced to define a political position. It is with his reasoned response to the challenges thus posed to artistic impartiality that we must next concern ourselves.
The Questionnaire of October 1934 was not the only one which Grigson sent out from his editorial offices at Keats Grove, Hampstead. Another, for a special double issue in the Autumn of 1937, concerned the respondents' attitudes to W. H. Auden, whose achievements the issue was intended to celebrate. Barker's reply demonstrates that, devastating as the effect of the Spanish Civil War had been on him, it had done nothing to reconcile him to the upper-class band of Marxist commitment he associated with Auden and his friends:

I like Auden's work because it exhilarates me in a way that height, ozone, love, drink and violent exercise do not. I mean it has the singular effect of poetry on my senses. I dislike aspects of it because behind or through the poetry I discern a clumsy interrogatory finger questioning me about my matriculation certificate, my antecedents and my annual income. I sense also a sort of general conspiratorial wink being made behind my back to a young man who sometimes has the name of Christopher, sometimes Stephen, sometimes Derek and sometimes Wystan. Briefly I criticize its snobbery of clique - which in itself is not much, but which indicates a definitely restricted angle of glance at things.51

Apart from its social exclusiveness, there is another reason, to which he may have found it difficult to confess at the time, why Barker found Auden's stance suspect. In 1982 he felt free to amplify:

I remember at the premiere of [the play] The Ascent of F6 saying to Archer, "This is a Fascist play", and him saying to me "It isn't a Fascist play. It's by Wystan Auden; ergo it can't be."52
In other words, though Auden had a reputation for being radical, his form of political extremism struck Barker at the time to be sufficiently ambivalent in its energy to cut in either direction. What interested Barker, on the other hand, was neither Communism nor Fascism, but a reasoned and sensitive via media which would enable the poet to remain true to his obligation to the individual and to his disinterested devotion to his art.

Barker's first systematic attempt to formulate such a position occurred in the Spring of the next year, 1938, when we find him publishing in the magazine *Purpose* a definitive statement of principle in the shape of an article entitled 'A Note on the Dialectics of Poetry'. (See Appendix H) The point is at issue here is less the 'Dialectic' of Hegel, than *Dialectics*, the *science of thought*. The argument is shrewd and consecutively pursued and goes some way to establish both his increasingly sophisticated grasp of contemporary events, and his modesty as to the real contribution which as a poet he feels that he can make. He starts with a summary of common ground:

There are certain obvious material ends to be achieved, no matter what the system of belief by which we achieve them. Such as, that war is to be extirpated, that some men ought not to starve whilst others surfeit. From such elementary agreement the establishment of material conditions at least adequate to all men ought to follow.

It follows that the poet has a positive duty to convey conditions of indignity and squalor when and where they exist, aided by that special sense of human misery with which he is supposedly endowed:
As much as he may be the crooner in the mansion the poet is the voice of the servile, by which their need can be heard — that is, those needs so profound and so familiar that the sufferers cannot voice them. I do not so much mean that the poet nowadays can write only about the poor. But what I do mean is that the poet cannot now escape the poor without betraying his nature as poet; any more than he can escape the possibility of catastrophe by war without betraying his nature as intelligent.

Then comes the crucial minor premiss of the argument. The foregoing assertion of poetic responsibility must not be taken to imply an endorsement of the programme of any particular party, for “although their particular policies must and do vary, yet the assumptions common to opposed parties are the same.” Parties proceed on the understanding that something specific must and can be done, that mankind must be encouraged in the hope of ultimate justice. The poet, however, must keep to an attitude of patient resignation, while retaining access to a whole range of alternative views:

So far from it being impossible to hold mutually exclusive beliefs, complementary in that they are mutually exclusive, this appears to be the only method by which the human can render tolerable both his immediate circumstances and the circumstance of his inherited insignificance.

Despite the poet’s desired impartiality, the possibility that he may help to heal the world’s ill is in the long run no vain conjecture:

I can compare the kind of gift intellectually exploited by the poet to the kind of gift physically exploited by the acrobat; and the likelihood that the acrobat may some day succeed in improving the physical condition of the human is only more colourful than the likelihood that sooner or later the poet may contribute to the improvement of the human environment.
This attitude at least has a stronger chance of being effective than that of the polemical extremist:

The writing of simple or even subtle propaganda poems would probably have much the same effect as violent acts by over-impetuous communists; they invoke mainly the amusement of the neutral.

In contrast the poet is privileged to employ a unique impartiality:

For this special instinct, which, I think could be described as the angle of the detached and tragic, the attitude of the resigned and neutral, supplies the poet with an absolute negative on which the positive of life can gloriously or ingloriously inscribe itself. It is the condition in which the chameleon prevails. It is the region of the supernaturally Newtonian. It is No Man's Land. What I am trying to say is that the special instinct of the poet is not particularly active but generally passive, like the plane of vision of an elevated spectator, which enables him to observe the parties on both sides of the wall, the width of the wall, and the vulnerable point.

This article goes some way towards invigorating and energising Barker's earlier assertions of impartiality without thereby giving anything away to those who took their cue from what were presumed, probably incorrectly by this time, to be the politics of Auden. It turns neutrality into a luminous, seemingly committed value. It preserves the belief that the poet's main obligation is to his art, yet avoids any suggestion of insularity or indifference. Most convincingly it manages to convey the imaginative enterprise itself as the very means by which empathy with the oppressed, and hence pertinacity of political aim, is achieved.
Not surprisingly war was to dominate the poetic horizon throughout 1939. Many literary periodicals printed issues entirely devoted to growing world tension and the literary reactions felt appropriate to it. Among these was Life and Letters Today which in their October issue printed an editorial comment which drew attention to the supreme duty of the poet as showing some kind of lead. This was followed close upon by Barker's 'Funeral Eulogy on Garcia Lorca', spoken supposedly over the grave of the Spanish poet and playwright who had lost his life three years previously. It is not untypical of Barker to print his thoughts on this matter after some time has elapsed. It enables him to lend the subject a certain philosophical distance.

"But I do not propose to speak about Lorca," he commences, "for he can speak for himself better than I could: but I propose to speak about the poet and war."

The circumstances of Lorca's death had been notably ambiguous, an uncertainty which Barker is not slow to exploit for his own purposes:

Many of us may choose to regard him as a hero who died for the Republican cause, but I would rather regard him as a martyr who died because he had no cause; who, moving across the no-man's-land inhabited mainly by poets and cowards and angels took a bullet from that side which had most guns and most murderers.

Barker clearly saw himself as no "angel" but the mention of "cowards" recalls his earlier 'Coward's Song' with its disavowal of public postures. Above all, however, as in 'The Dialectics of Poetry', the non-territorial domain is seen as belonging to the poet, who is alone fit to reign there. To defend their rights of ownership, poets have been prepared to give their lives or suffer less spectacular professional deaths:
Therefore I take back my suggestion that Lorca did not die for a cause. But the cause for which he died was not one that celebrates its victories in triumphal arches or the conservation of the anonymous soldier's grave; it is the cause that adorns its Dantes with crowns of exile, its Keatsian trumpeters with pulmonary consumption, its airmen with the fate of Daedalus. For this cause Thomas Chatterton took prussic acid and Christopher Smart flagellated himself into a lunatic asylum. With this cause like a foil in my right hand I blinded by brother in the right eye.

The reference to the airman and Daedalus harks back to poems in Barker's own published collections, and that to Christopher Smart alerts us to the publication in that year of Rejoyce in the Lamb. For Barker, aeronaut and poet both demonstrate of heroism, which in the poet's case consisted in his refusal to compromise the sovereign claims of his art.

IV

Though the crisis on the continent forces Barker to reevaluate his beliefs, the end result therefore was decisively to confirm his commitment to his art as a means of reconciling ideological and national differences. It is this which finally separated him from Auden and his group, for whom, at least during the period under consideration, art was a means to an end. Though the difference of opinion on this matter is clear from the discursive statements of Barker as opposed to those of Auden and Spender, nothing illustrates it more clearly than the poems which Auden and Barker, at different stages in the Civil War, wrote on the subject of Spain.

Auden's piece, rushed out soon after his own return from
Barcelona, was entitled simply Spain \textsuperscript{54} and published in pamphlet form by Faber for medical aid. It is a poem very much of the moment, surcharged with the pressure of urgency. Throughout it, the particularizing, detail-spotting tendency, fixed by an accumulation of nominal phrases, noted by Bergonzi, is especially evident. In its attempt to capture the slow, inexorable pressure of history leading up to the immediate event, the opening stanza comes close to Saint-John Perse:

Yesterday all the past. The language of size
Spreading to China along the trade-routes, the diffusion
Of the counting-frame and the cromlech;
Yesterday the shadow-reckoning in the sunny climes.\textsuperscript{55}

The effect of agelessness here is created, partly by the articles themselves, but more vividly by the complete lack of a verb. It is not until we reach the crisis of the preparation for war itself that the pressure of events enforces a concession to the present tense:

And the poor in their fireless lodgings, dropping the sheets
Of the evening paper: 'Our day is our loss, O show us
History the operator, the
Organizer, Time the refreshing river.'\textsuperscript{56}
The only allowance for the past tense is the brief glimpse, in stanza fifteen, of the preliminary preparation for active involvement. This too, however, soon gives way to the present tense. And when, at the very end of the poem, we are granted a limited perspective of the future, it comes as a provisional postscript, a conditional resumption of patterns re-established only by the masterful harnessing of present energies:

Tomorrow the rediscovery of romantic love,
The photographing of ravens; all the fun under Liberty's masterful shadow.
Tomorrow the hour of the pageant-monster and the musician.  

Barker's Elegy on Spain on the other hand, was printed anonymously by the Manchester Contemporary Bookshop, a subsidiary of Archer's, in April 1939, one month after Franco's entry into a starving Madrid brought the war itself effectively to an end. The identity of the author was not disclosed until the poem's re-appearance in the collection Lament and Triumph in 1941. In it the fall of Madrid is not regarded, as it might have been by more politically minded poets, either as the culmination of a great struggle or as a prelude to the international holocaust which is to follow. It exists instead as an interlude almost outside time's regime, a temporary blockage of the health-giving human resources which must be removed before history, seen as a state of creative normality, can continue:
Madrid, like a live eye in the Iberian mask,
Asks help from heaven and receives a bomb:
Doom makes the night her eyelid, but at dawn
Drawn is the screen from the bull's-eye capital.
She gazes at the Junker angels in the sky
Passionately and pitifully. Die
The death of the dog, O Capital City, still
Sirius shall spring up from the kill.  

Spain is a torment that must be endured for the lifeblood to flow again, but the emphasis throughout is less on the long drawn-out agony than on the imminent birth which its pangs must release. In the original edition this sense of exultant energy is emphasized by the staggered line-spacing in Part 1, Stanza Three:

Can the bird cry any other word on the branch
That blanches at the bomb's red wink and roar,
Or the tall daffodil, trodden under the wheel of war,
But spring up again in the Spring
for will not stay under?
Thunder and Mussolini cannot forbid to sing and spring
The bird with a word of determination,
or a blossom of hope,
Heard in a dream, or blooming down Time's slope.  

Moreover, though admittedly climactic, there is nothing exceptional about the events in Spain as portrayed by Barker. The Civil War rather is seen as one of a pattern of episodes which make up the shadow side of history's advance. References to the "Hungerford Hundred" and the "Tolpuddle Martyr" recall Barker's current preoccupation with Robert Owen and nineteenth century radicalism; a sole reference to the Easter Rising reminds us of his Irish ancestry. Beyond these allusions, however, there lies an attempt to set the contemporary crisis in context as part of man's struggle "to be the human brute, not the brute human". The muted implications of Original Sin here reflect the sacrificial imagery of the piece. The original frontispiece carried a reproduction of a moving black-and-white photograph of a dead child with crude label numbered 4-21 tied to its clothing and with the exhibit number 35 superimposed. In the version in the collected edition this picture is replaced by a simple inscription above the introductory two stanzas: "Dedication to the photograph of a child killed in an air-raid on Barcelona". The "rupture of the right eye" in the picture seems to remind Barker of the brother he accidentally half-blinded; in any case the child is viewed partly as a symbol for the innocent victims of aggression, more significantly as a sacrifice which will placate the forces of violence. In the main body of the poem the sacrifice motif is reiterated by the symbol of Spain herself as a bull capsizing in the ring of exhaustion. It has plausibly been claimed that the Elegy could have been written for a victim of either side. True though this is, the remark misses the wider point, for not only is the poem's perspective impartial and hence politically neutral (an impression reinforced by re-reading the 'Funeral Oration for Garcia Lorca' published six months later), it also portrays the events referred to as transcending time, yielding through their sacrificial dimension access to a domain beyond history:
At evening is red the sky over us all.
Shall our fiery funeral not raise tomorrow also?
So shall the order of love from death's disorder,
Broader than Russia arise and bring in the day.
Sleep gives us dreams that the morning dissolves,
But borne on death we reach the bourne of dreams.
Seems blood too bitter a bargain to pay for that day?
Too bitter a bargain, or too far a day?\textsuperscript{64}

The double-meanings here are mostly conveyed by a particularly dense punning technique. The inversion in the first line, for instance, highlights the pun on "red". The sky may be red with blood, but if we look closely we may, like shepherds, read it for portents. The proposed verdict depends on our reading on the pun in the very next line. Either the war may be seen as "razing" tomorrow - casting doubt on the future - or as "raising" unthought-of possibilities. That the hope held out has a more than social dimension is strongly indicated by the next two lines. "Broader than Russia" had clearly both physical and political connotations. In the atmosphere of 1939 it may have meant, among other things, a popular democratic movement wider than the mere machinery of state communism, something closer perhaps to the anarchism of the Barcelona streets in the hey-day of the struggle. Taken together with line three, however, the line has a metaphysical meaning: there is a suggestion of the Housman-like theme of the creative potential of death as a state which both issues in a consoling peace and also paradoxically asserts the value of life. The "order of love" in the third line has, in any case, clear religious reverberations.
Line five allows Barker's most cherished pun in through the back door - though both spellings (mourning/morning) are not employed, the first is possibly included in the second. The commonplace meaning of nightmares disturbing rest is supplemented by the more distinctive concern with death as a welcome, creative finale. This preoccupation with death's curative powers, both sacrificial and restorative, is highlighted again by the multiple punning in line six: we are both "borne" or carried on death, and "born" to death: both succumb to the temporal catastrophe and gather nourishment through a transfusion of mortality. The "borne of dreams", then (which may, correspondingly, itself be 'born of dreams') represents both the Utopia of peace and the bliss of extinction. The stanza leaves the poet ambiguously longing for a general armistice and indulging in the dream, familiar from both The Shropshire Lad and his own Janus, of death the deliverer.

It has been helpful to dwell for some time on the Elegy of Spain because it is a poem which enables us to formulate connections, not so evident elsewhere, between certain of Barker's stylistic and verbal tricks and his vision of time and history, and his thematic concern with transcending these temporal categories to a sphere in which their pressure is relaxed. Furthermore, it enables us to discern a link between his clear desire to shrug off limiting categories of period and temporal conditioning, on the one hand, and, on the other, the independence of judgement which enables him to evade fashionable political postures and to retain a certain impartiality of vision at a period when commitment of one kind or another was, in circles close to his own, all but mandatory. This independence of mind, noticed by C. H. Sisson amongst others⁶⁵ may well be of relevance to his impermeability, since the nineteen fifties at least, to the ebb and flow of poetic fashion.
There is thus, throughout Barker's work of the 'thirties, a tension between, on the one hand, a desire to regard the individual, and the artist in particular, as autonomous and self-regulating, and on the other, a reluctant recognition of pressures and loyalties which bind him to the confines of time and place. It is this conflict, observable in Barker's use of recurrent stylistic elements, which finally sets him apart from a writer like Auden, fascinated by systems, both psychological and sociological, which condition the individual and serve to classify and account for him. This divergence of viewpoint produces a distinctive view of history, best detected in those poems of the late 'thirties when the pressures of history, and the temptation to succumb to them, were felt at their most acute.

Of these pieces the best known, most frequently anthologized, and in some ways most revealing of a need to balance inner and outer tensions, is 'Resolution of Dependence'.

First published in Contemporary Poetry and Prose, the official organ of the English Surrealist Group with which David Gascoyne, a close friend, was associated, this poem belongs to 1937, a year in which the tension between a growing public awareness and a residual resistance to all manner of conformity was uppermost in Barker's mind and work. The text opens on a panorama of British society in Summer time, relaxing at the seaside. According to Gascoyne's diaries, Barker was living in Sussex at the time; there is a similar promenade scene in the passage already analyzed from Calamiterror, published in the very same year. Lines two and three introduce us to a familiar list of spectacles, couched in the Audenesque form with its liberal sprinkling of
definite articles. At line four we have an imagined encounter with one of the patriarchs of Romanticism. Again, this is very much a phenomenon of this stage in Barker's writing: in Calamiterror Blake appears to the poet at Sonning;\textsuperscript{69} in the slightly later 'Vision of England, '38' there is a meeting with Shelley.\textsuperscript{70} It is, however, a Wordsworth seen through the glasses of later Victorian embellishment - the violent eccentricity of the appearance and manner reminding one rather of the famous Lewis Carroll parody\textsuperscript{71} than the historical figure: Wordsworth has become a kind of travesty of his own leechgatherer. Barker here seems to have exaggerated the oddity of the historical Wordsworth in order to make his own loyalty to the period in which he is writing seem drab in comparison. Various period stylistic features in stanza two belong to the activities of Barker the modernist: the substitution of adjective for adverb in line one, the line "the accumulation of year and year like calendar" with its extraordinary deployment of the last word. Despite such mannerisms of style, Wordsworth's comment seems apt: "I observe the absence of the erratic, the strange."

The personal idiosyncracies associated with fully-blown Romanticism are evoked in the last line of stanza three, again in the list-form. The affectations mentioned remind one more of decadent aestheticism than the habits of the early nineteenth century - once again it is a Wordsworth seen with the eyes of late Victorianism. In the next stanza the poet is tempted to provide an account of his own loss of faith in earlier extravagances, introduced by another list of objects, all of which suggest a mixture between phallic over-compensation and childish facetiousness. Instead the poet settles for a summary of his basic dilemma: he wants an "equation" to help him relate his work to the world in which he lives. Wordsworth then registers the pallid appearance of the crowd, observing that this bespeaks a failure of
communication on his part. After the poet's reassurance of his forebears' undying reputation, we pass to a stanza in which the Romantic mode of self-projection is scrutinized: once again the typifying nominal phrases are apparent. Individualistic writing - the "private rebellion, the personal turn" are seen as creative dead-ends, since they lead to a lack of communication between author and reader, a kind of interpretational relativism which ultimately reduces all meaning to subjective impression. It is noticeable that this verdict in the poem is Wordsworth's rather than the speaker's; Wordsworth is noting the inapplicability of his particular mode of poetry to the present age, and inviting the poet to change direction. The poem ends with the poet's commitment to the public good, his determination to lay his art at the service of the people:

The past's absolution is the present's resolution.
The equation is the interdependence of parts.

In part then, this is a poem about the competing merits of self-absorption and commitment. It is also, however, most decidedly a poem about time. Wordsworth carries, like the Mad Hatter, a watch; the poet is perplexed, not, like Alice, with different scales of size, but with different time levels. The poem's imagery pinpoints these concerns: the town clock chimes "like a cat in a well". Wordsworth himself comes from a realm determined by time in its historical dimension, subject to the "accumulation of year and year like calendar". He, however, like Barker himself in a previous phase, has attempted to break free from the conditioning effects of time by practising a resolutely personal craft, hopefully oblivious of the pressures of great events. (This, as we have already seen, is only part of the Romantic
heritage; but it is the one on which, in this poem, Barker chooses to concentrate.) The attempt to break free from time, however, has led to failure, eccentricity, and isolation. The attempt must therefore be made to bury oneself in temporality and, by so doing, risk one's individual integrity.

The poem, in the very detail of its text, bears witness to the pertinency of these arguments, not least in the period features which recall to us Barker's then subjection to fashionable literary modes which were themselves products of historical circumstance. It is one of the ironies available to a longer historical perspective that it is these very period features, rooted as they are in the experimental tradition of the 'thirties, that are in danger of appearing to a present day reader willfully personal and perverse. It has, however, been part of the argument of this chapter to suggest that the early style, of which this poem provides an effective instance, originated in a response to the literary milieu of the decade in which Barker began writing. Having recognized his indebtedness to his age, however, Barker then seems to have turned aside from it in an attempt to develop in his post-war writing a voice independent of artistic vogue. The attempt to do so can be viewed as another move in the continuing dialectic between history and freedom to be found in all of his work.
NOTES AND REFERENCES

1 Dylan Thomas and John Davenport, The Death of the King's Canary with an introd. by Constantine Fitzgibbon (London: Hutchinson, 1976), p. x.

2 Death of the King's Canary, pp. 2-4.

3 Death of the King's Canary, pp. ix-x.

4 George Barker, Calamiterror (London: Faber, 1937).


8 George Barker, Janus (London: Faber, 1935). See especially pp. 28-9, 43-6, 60-64.

9 For contemporary allusions to airmen and flying, see W. H. Auden, 'Journal of an Airman', from The Orators (London: Faber, 1932) pp. 42-82, and Barker's own 'Ode to a Dead Aeronaut' in Thirty Preliminary Poems (London: The Parton Press, 1933). For a discussion of this issue, see also Samuel Hynes, The Auden Generation (London: Faber, 1979), pp. 70-71, 92-3, subsequently referred to as 'Hynes'. Hynes draws our attention to one specific source for the pre-occupation in the account of a fated aerial expedition over Rome by Lauro de Bossis in his open letter 'Story of My Death' in The Times, Wednesday, October 14, 1931, p. 11.
10 Death of the King's Canary, pp. 21-22.

11 Death of the King's Canary, especially pp. 9-11 and p. 75.


13 The trick is used, for instance, with some frequency in both It's a Battlefield (London: Heinemann, 1934) and Brighton Rock (London: Heinemann, 1938).


15 Saint-John Perse, p. 65.


18 George Barker, Lament and Triumph (London: Faber, 1941), pp. 11-22.


23 From Number 5 of ‘Sequence of Ten Sonnets’ in Thirty Preliminary Poems, p. 24.

24 Thirty Preliminary Poems, p. 22.


27 Hynes, p. 82.


32 'A Conversation between Robert Fraser and George Barker' in P. N. Review, 31 (9, No 5), p. 42. Subsequent references to 'P. N. Review Interview'.

33 Twentieth Century, 1, No. 1, September 1931, p. 1.

34 Hynes, p. 83.


36 P. N. Review Interview, p. 42.


39 George Barker, Alanna Autumnal (London: John Wishart, 1933). For an account of its origins, see A Rebel in the Thirties pp. 45-6. Carpenter worked as an assistant in the Parton Street bookshop, where he and Barker met, and his account thus serves as valuable corroboration for Barker's autobiographical essay.

40 The Twentieth Century, 5, No. 26, April, 1933, p. 128.


44 Hynes, passim.

45 New Verse, No. 11, October 1934, p. 2.

46 New Verse, No. 11, October 1934, p. 12.

47 New Verse, No. 11, October 1934, p. 22.


49 George Barker, Alanna Autumnal (London: John Wishart, 1933); David Gascoyne, Opening Day (London: Cobden-Sanderson, 1933); Dylan Thomas, Portrait of the Artist as a Young Dog (London: Dent, 1940).


52 P. N. Review Interview, p. 44.


55 Spain, p. 7.

56 Spain, p. 8.

57 Spain, p. 12.

58 Elegy on Spain (Manchester: The Manchester Contemporary Bookshop, 1939), subsequently referred to as Elegy on Spain (1939).


60 Collected Poems, p. 102.

61 Elegy on Spain (1939), p. 5.

62 For which see especially Barker's 'Sermon on May Day' in Seven ed. Nicholas Moore, 86 Chesterton Road, Cambridge, No. 8 (Spring 1940) pp. 3-6, and 'To Robert Owen' in Wales ed. Keidrych Rhys, Penybont Farm, Llangadock, Carms., No. 10, October 1939, p. 261, both of which are discussed in Chapter Three.


68 Collected Poems, pp. 30-33.

69 Collected Poems, p. 51.

70 Collected Poems, p. 64.

I'll tell thee everything I can:
There's little to relate.
I saw an aged aged man
A-sitting on a gate, etc.

from Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There (1872),

72 Collected Poems, p. 96.
CONCLUSION

In the foregoing study of Barker's work of the 'thirties we seemed to discover a continuing dialectic in the poet's mind between a need to place himself in time and hence to be true to fashionable features which a contemporary aesthetic held out for emulation, and, on the other hand, a countervailing need to retain a rugged independence, to exert an artistic freedom exempt from the pressures of time and place.

A related study of Barker's critical statements serves to suggest that this is a view of poetic responsibility which he is inclined to apply to a number of the writers whom he particularly admires. As a way of illustrating this it may prove instructive to compare two different estimates of the achievement of Housman.

In the fourth of his speculations from his 'Notes on Housman' of 1960 Barker speaks of the question of poetic vogue and of the frequently placed demand that poets in our century should actively demonstrate a concern with their own modernity. The verdict he pronounces on this issue is revealing for one who, twenty-eight years earlier in a review of Michael Roberts's New Signatures, castigated its contributors for not being modern enough:

The demonstrable vulgarity ... of the idea that "modern" poetry should differ in any serious way from the poetry that precedes it - the idea that it is, in any deep sense, unprecedented - well, the undoing of such a notion I take to be one of the best achievements of Housman's poems. All serious poetry ... is poetry of its time - it would lack, if it were not, the simple but essential quality of temporal responsibility - just as all natural poetry aspires to the unnatural condition of an indefinite longevity. A poem is modern ... because it is written now. For one of the conditions which a poem has to fulfil in order to exist as a poem is that it should acknowledge all of the responsibilities of existing in its own time, and not another time. In this sense Housman is perfectly
contemporaneous. His poems are as Victorian as they are, I imagine, "immortal". It is absurd to ask of them that they should be what they have so erroneously been accused of being, namely Georgian.

The question of Housman's historicity is complicated by the fact that, though written for the most part over a five months period in 1895, a portion of his work was held over for publication until a much later period, so that, if the poetry of A Shropshire Lad (1896) was manifestly of its own time, that of Last Poems (1922) was equally obviously not. When Barker first discovered Housman in the 'thirties, the anachronistic feel of the style of Last Poems, the volume to which he was most strongly drawn, was especially evident. One way of avoiding any confusion between the qualities of these late offerings and the Georgian school of writing Barker was determined to reject was to stress, on the one hand, Housman's absolute Victorianness, and, on the other, his independence from simplistic schemes of stylistic progress.

When the period pressures of the pre-war period abated, Barker was able to amplify this mistrust of historical pigeon-holing into an inclusive view of the literary process. Increasingly the twentieth century preoccupation with the up-to-date seemed to be the product of a misunderstanding of the very idea of a tradition. Once again, Housman served as a telling example. In 1982, citing a comment on Housman's style by G. S. Fraser, a leading light of the New Apocalypse Movement with which Barker himself has sometimes been quite incorrectly associated, he was at pains to emphasize this view:

This is taking a very different view of the historical responsibility of the writer than that held by those men, of whom I've known several, who seem to believe that there's an evolving sophistication of English verse. I remember your namesake George Fraser once writing that Housman had put back English versification by twenty-
five years. Now that remark was made to Housman while he was alive, and his reply was "Thank God. I'd have put it back fifty years if I could." And I am utterly on his side, because that is not the evolution of the language; it is the evolution of what a literary critic believes to be the poetical interpretation of things. Look at Hopkins. In the late 1880's he was writing poems of such sophistication that they could have been written in the year 1300, or now, because the whole historical process is almost dialectic. And the responsibility of a writer towards his use of sophisticated language is a matter really of honesty to himself. 

There are clear advantages in such a cyclical or dialectic model of artistic evolution both for the writer who does not wish to be trapped in a narrowly perceived period taste, and for a critic who wishes to render a true account of apparent kinks in the evolutionary chain. A scrupulous attention to precedent, refined by a vivid sense of the way in which all poets are able to clear a space for themselves within the unrelenting march of the generations can both liberate the critic from a linear view of tradition, and enable him to see instead a complex pattern of moments in which the search for authentic expression is perpetually renewed.

It was such a pattern which in 1932 Leavis had disturbed by his determination to trace a straight "line ... running through Tennyson, Swinburne, A Shropshire Lad, and Rupert Brooke." The inclusion of Housman in this graph of decline is sufficient for Barker to discount it. Even for Leavis, there were crucial exceptions. Hopkins, he declared, "is now felt to be a contemporary." If, as Barker's statement of 1982 suggests, this also has remained true for him, it is so in accordance with the much wider sense which in 1919 enabled Eliot to speak of that "historical sense" which "involves a perception, not of the pastness of the past, but of its presence" and, which by the same token, "makes a writer most acutely conscious of his place in time, of his own contemporaneity."
The recognition of such a view forces us to consider the position in the pattern occupied by Barker's work, its own "place in time". In so doing it will be necessary to speak of phases in his achievement, and of a deepening sense of what that achievement implies.

Undeniably Barker's reputation has been conditioned by the very earliest stage of his development, running from Poems (1935) to The Sacred and Secular Elegies (1942). Within that stage we were in our last two chapters able to discern two primary influences: the first emanating from a precursor whose work was then recently unveiled, and the second from a slightly older contemporary whose poetic personality held sway over many at the time: Gerard Manley Hopkins and W. H. Auden. Of the Hopkinesque attributes which proved so irresistible to the poet's of Barker's generation the Italian critic Giorgio Melchiori has this to say:

These formal features have characterized the style of certain artistic periods - the styles that art historians have called (in their chronological succession) Hellenism, Flamboyant Gothic, Mannerism, Rococo. It is what Pater calls in his Marius the Epicurean, Euphuism, widening the terms of reference of a word defining the first phase of Mannerism of the Elizabethan age.8

"Mannerism" is Melchiori's own term, and his book The Tightrope Walkers, Studies of Mannerism in Modern English Literature a defence of its twentieth century application. It is a tendency which he sees exemplified amongst others in Henry James, Dylan Thomas and Christopher Fry. One of the "best illustrations of it", however, is furnished by W. H. Auden whose "ability as a juggler with words and constructions, as an expert in acrobatics with language and form" represents in Melchiori's eyes a perfect instance of the Mannerist approach.9
The concept of Mannerism is clearly problematic because it is both historically volatile, and tending to suggest mere stylistic affectation. Seldom employed in the context of English culture, it carries unmistakeable hall-marks of the Italian art of the High Renaissance from which Melchiori seems to have taken his standard of comparison. Yet in order to see how close such a standard can come to the early writing of George Barker one has only to consider the analogy of the work of such a figure as the madrigalist Carlo Gesualdo, Prince of Venosa (1560-1613), whose music is analyzed in a recent monograph by Glenn Watkins as a poignant expression of the Mannerist aesthetic.10 Tortured by guilt for the murder of his first wife, Gesualdo spent his last years immured within his palace composing a succession of choral works, both sacred and secular, in which an inner spiritual turbulence found a stylistic correlative in an outer distortion of line and of harmonic progression. Of the elements in this work most closely approximating to Watkins's understanding of the Mannerist ideal, the following seem relevant both to Melchiori's interpretation of Hopkinesque, and to the early work of Barker which is indebted to Hopkins:

1. The sacrifice of clarity of meaning to "the quality of stress and strain or the associative expressive ... response";
2. A disruptive surface style characterized by a "juxtaposition of irreconcilable elements";
3. A lack of clearly defined cadence;
4. A textual partiality for oxymoron or exaggerated paradox;
5. A "density of idea" and "complexity of relationship" resulting in a sort of "overload": "Precisely because abundant gesture and allusion is accompanied by compactness of form, the clarity and precision of countless details are ultimately rendered obscure by their very profusion in so tight a space. Yet the fascination resides not only
in the labyrinthine dimension of such a tiny cosmos but also in its flickering iridescence and tentative stability.¹¹

There are indeed phases of Barker's early career when a Mannerist method and ideal would seem to be uppermost in his thinking. An analysis of the 1931 Notebook (Appendix H) will reveal that at this stage, before any of his work had found its way into print, he was already interested in contraction and elaboration, already working towards a system of syntactical emphasis or deletion with the modernist paradigm of Graves's and Ridings' A Survey of Modernist Verse and the example of Hopkins looming large in his thinking. And yet already too these ideals are having to contend with the attraction of Blake. To the young Barker Blake was luminous: "The man not only writes like an angel; he is an angel", and part of that luminosity comes from the very perspicacity of his work. Already difficulty and directness have established themselves as opposite poles, with difficulty temporarily in the ascendant.

The application of a Mannerist analogy to Barker would tend to suggest that, if, as our Introduction suggested, the unravelling of a tradition is comparable to a spiralling movement in which the prevailing style twists outward to a point of extreme preciosity, and then forward to a newly achieved simplicity, then Barker's work belongs to the outward leg of the journey. This is indeed the view suggested by most existing accounts of his work. Martha Fodaski's view of his neo-Romanticism, advanced in her book of 1969,¹² largely depends on such an estimate, as do most popular assessments to this very day.¹³ Yet this thesis will have proposed nothing unless our discussion in successive chapters of Barker's assimilation of a range of influences has not convinced the reader that such a view represents a caricature based on an incomplete reading of his work. We began with an early set of
declarations in which, before the age of twenty, Barker expressed his abhorrence of artificial poetic rhetoric.\textsuperscript{14} We then proceeded to show how the evolution of his personal style has been characterized by a search for stylistic purity, and by a considered reading of those masters of the remote or more recent past who might help him to achieve it. Ultimately it is not the art of the High Renaissance to which Barker feels the most immediate affinity, but the purer art of the Quattrocento and candid grace of the English balladists. If European antecedents are needed for his later practice, it is not in the Mannerism strain in European civilization that they will be found but, on one hand, in Heinrich Heine, whose closeness to the balladists and to Housman interests him,\textsuperscript{15} and, on the other, in Giacomo Leopardi, whose purification of the Italian of his time has also served him admirably as a precedent.\textsuperscript{16}

The change of orientation in Barker's work of the post-war period needs to be accounted for. It would seem paradoxical that the set of circumstances which ultimately led him towards a greater directness of means were identical with that which had early induced him into a mannerist eccentricity: a response to the reigning aesthetic of the 'thirties. It is arguable from our analysis of the Auden generation in the last chapter, that the poetic atmosphere of the time was dominated by two impulses. The first was a desire to escape from the trivial rhetoric of the Georgians, which Leavis had castigated as a dead-end of artistic decadence.\textsuperscript{17} The second was a view of poetry as primarily a process of communication. The first of these tendencies led to the alternative rhetoric of Auden, with its ellipses, its fragmentation of syntax, its disturbance and contradiction of phrase. The second led to a polemical emphasis on the democratization of speech which, however, failed, even amongst its most ardent supporters, to achieve any real stylistic expression.
In Barker's work the encrustations produced by a reaction to the first of these period influences - the search for an alternative rhetoric receded after 1950 to give way to a delayed response to the second, a desire to write more directly and hence to reach beyond the confines of a distinct coterie. At the same time it led to a consideration of several poets to whom he had always been temperamentally attracted, but for whose appeal the dominant aesthetic of the 'thirties had found it difficult to account: Tennyson and Housman. And, as the shadow of the 'thirties lengthened, so his need to place his work in time as part of a strict, unremitting chronological succession came to seem of less and less relevance.

For such a succession could only but disguise the deeper sense in which Barker's response to the past was a condition of his responsibility to the present. It is this notion of the writer's responsibility, which Eliot had memorably expounded, and which Barker slowly and painfully learned to exercise, that this thesis has in part attempted to examine.
NOTES AND REFERENCES


5 New Bearings, p. 192.


7 The Sacred Wood, p. 44.


9 The Tightrope Walkers, p. 10.


14 See especially 'Poetry and Contemporary Inertia' and his review of New Bearings in English Poetry and New Signatures, both of which are discussed in the introduction and reproduced in Appendix H.

15 In Barker's library at Itteringham is an edition of the Lyrics of Heine, translated with a Preface by Hubert Wolfe (London: Bodley Head, 1935), acquired, according to a note on the inside cover, from York Public Library in 1967, when he was working on The Golden Chains. In the Preface, in which Wolfe compares Heine's poem translated as 'I cannot rise beloved' to Housman's nettle poem, Barker has altered the sentence "This is in fact practically a version by Housman of a Heine poem" to read "This is virtually a version of a Housman poem by Heine".

16 The poetry of Leopardi is an established enthusiasm of John Heath-Stubbs, who shared with Barker in a ménage established in Zennor in Cornwall in 1948-9. In Giacomo Leopardi Selected Prose and Poetry edited, translated and introduced by Iris Ongo and John Heath-Stubbs (London: O.U.P., 1966), Heath-Stubbs states that the original versions of his translations were made twenty years previously, that is shortly before the Zennor interlude. Of Leopardi's style he observes "he sought to restore to the Italian of his day a greater purity of diction than was commonly practised." (p. 210) It is notable that the heightened purity of Barker's own style emerges most convincingly in News of the World of 1950 which, as well as two poems entitled 'Zennor' (pp. 30-32), also contains a Memorial Inscription addressed to Leopardi (p. 55).

17 Leavis, pp. 27-74.
APPENDIX A:
BARKER AND ELIOT.

Contents

1. Letter from Anne Ridler to Robert Fraser, 26 May 1983.


4. Projected prose work Imitation of St. John commencing "St. John Patmos of My Heart...." (Japan 1940) in the possession of Elizabeth Smart. Description and extracts.

5. Five drafts of poem 'O Dog, my God, how can I cease to praise?' (Japan, 1940).

Dear Mr Fraser,

I have your letter dated 21st. I don't think I could help you by talking about TSE's attitude to Barker - but it's not that I am unwilling to see you. I wonder whether Barker has kept any of Eliot's letters to him about his work? for these would give you some enlightenment. To put my recollections in a nutshell - Eliot recognized his genius (and used the word, I am sure, in a letter to him), but didn't feel an affinity with the content of his poetry; and, certainly, would have preferred more discipline. 'Always look a word up in the dictionary before you use it', I remember his writing.

I had left the firm before the True Confession was offered, and wasn't sent it for report, so I can't help you there. I am sorry I can't tell you more.

Yours sincerely,

Anne Ridler
Books of the Quarterly, Vol. LI, No. 69, July 1917

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65
THE IMITATION OF SAINT JOHN

Three versions of this incomplete prose work survive among a collection of Barker's early manuscripts in the keeping of Elizabeth Smart, who kindly allowed me to peruse them, and to take the following notes.

The First version consists of six sections typed in double-line spacing on twelve blue foolscap sheets. The second is an amended carbon of the first. The third, clearly a second draft, consists of sixteen white foolscap sheets on which are typed the text of nine sections, commencing with the phrase "In the name of St. John of Patmos". Like the majority of MS in Smart's collection, these drafts would seem to belong to the years 1940-43, but various references in the text would seem to connect them more specifically with the 'Pacific Sonnets' and with the period of Japanese residence from 1939-40 in which these were written.

After glancing at the author's incompetence, having received "almost no instruction in the ordinary subjects of the academic curriculum" to expatiate on such matters as make up the syllabi of public examinations, the third version then turns to the one matter on which he considers himself confident to dilate, carnal knowledge which leads to the discovery of the divine law. The second section is concerned with the loss of moral innocence by the child, who is thus enabled to perceive himself as a product of mankind's sinful history:

I can recall, with some of the maudlin sensuality which perverts derive from titillating children, standing, as a boy of about nine, over the ten year old girl who had splayed herself out on the stone steps behind the tenement in which we lived. And I can see the terrified and delighted blue eyeballs gazing upward in bright crime as she wormed her hips out of her
knickers; and I can feel the sensation of having solved all the
enigmas of being human which ever came over me as I stood and
looked down at the place we go home into so long as the grave is
too big. And with that knowledge of handling all our origins I
felt the death of Beethoven, the death of Samson, the abdication
of Edward VIII and the origin of the established Church of
England all together in my hand as it closed on the sex of vice,
the nub of the womb, the bullseye, the x.

This discovery has Biblical antecedents, "so that I can truly claim
to have been Adam and to have encountered Eve before the advent of
the hair that hopes to conceal our shame but, like seven veils, only
hangs excitement out to our bulls or decorates the phallics with
ivy."

There then follows a narrative description of the author's
first adult sexual experience with his young fiancée in Richmond
Park. At the climax of the act the protagonist is granted a glimpse
of his participation in the ancestry of human evil. It is this
realization which, years afterwards, causes him to confess his guilt
and, in recollection to "remember the gradual breaching of the
hymeneal barrier, the edges coarse like an icehole with its red
board saying Danger, which was the blood that first baptised me in
Adam's sin".

The eighth section digresses to consider the responsibilities
of the poet in war-time. For the writer the personal passion of
suffering gives birth to the impersonal achievement of works of
art:

To the poet the passion is a catastrophe of antithesis -
personal passion brings on, sooner or later, the birth of a
poem, and the impersonal passion of creating a poem brings on,
sooner or later, the birth of doubt. So that here in truth is
the spectacle of a serpent swallowing itself, in the life and
work of a poet: he consumes himself daily in the hope that, when he dies, his skin will lie glistening like a crystal on literature. Once again, therefore, we see that in fact the poet is the apotheosized idiot. For who except poets in the year 1940 would go on writing with both halves of the world colliding like cymbals? But one of us sits under the roof of Canterbury Cathedral, anticipating the bomb through the 'fretted' vault, composing verses about cats that speak .......

With a brief return to the theme of man's sexual culpability the ninth section ends after three sentences. There is no visible evidence of a continuation.
Dog, my God, how can I cease to praise!

Dog, dog at my heart, drag at my heathen

Heart where the swearing smoke of love

Goes up as I give everything to the blaze.

Draga at my fires, dog, drag at my altars

Where Aztec I over my bare love raise

The bleeding assassination I my murder.

Dog, drag at the gifts too much I load

My life as wishing tree too heavy with:

And, dog, youbound the blood down roads

Where peace is, drives the engine of myth

That, dog, so dog's me down my time

Sooner I shall find peace from

Dog, is my shake when I come from water

Sweet water of my days, red, red as danger

Rakeyer and the escape from the diseases of nature

Are the essays entangled the feet of poetry by wise men.

The only ready comprehensive contributions to this theme
0 Dog my God, how can I cease to praise!

Dog, dog at my heart, drag at my heathen

Heart where the swearing smoke of love.

Goes up as I give everything to the blaze.

Drag at my fires, dog, drag at my altars

Where Aztec I over my bare love raise

The bleeding assassination I my murder.

Dog, drag at the gifts too much I load

My life as wishing tree too heavy with:

And, dog, you hound the blood down roads

Where peace is, where the engine of myth
drag.

That, dog, so dogs me down my time

Sooner I shall find peace from

Dog, is my shake when I come from water

Sweet water of my days, red, red as danger
Dog, is my shake when I come from water
The catewets
Sweet-water of my days, as red as red is danger.

O my joy has jaws that seize in fangs the

The gift and hand of love always I sought for

They come to me with kindgome on the shoulder:

Dog, why is my tooth red with their sportulia?

Mourn, dog, mourn over me where I lie

Not dead but spinning on the pinpoint hazard,

The fiftieth angels Bay, Bay in the blizzard

That brings a tear to my snowman's eye

And buries us all in what we most treasured.

Dog, why do we die so often before we die?

Dog, good dog, trick do and make me take
Calmly the consciousness of the crime
simply
Born in the blood, because we are

Your father burns for his father's sake,

Just as a boy will burn in another time

the
Under your bush of sin you planted here.
Dog, dog in my manger, drag at my heathen
Heart where the swearing smoke of love
Goes up as I give everything to the blaze.
Drag at my fires, dog, drag at my altars
Where Aztec I over my tabernacle raise
The daily assassination I my murder.

Dog, drag off the gifts too much I load
My life as wishing tree too heavy with;
And, dog, guide you my stray down roads
Where peace is: be my engine of myth
That, dog, so drag me down my time
Sooner I shall find peace from the blood.

Dog, is my shake when I come from water
The cataract of my days, as red as danger?
O my joy has jaws that seize in fangs
The gift and hand of love always I sought, for.
They come to me with kingdoms on their shoulder.
Dog, why is my tooth red with their
Mourn, dog, mourn over me where I lie

Not dead but spinning on the pinpoint hazard,

The fiftieth angel. Bay, bay in the blizzard

That brings a tear to my snowman's eye

And buries us all in what we most treasured.

Dog, why do we die so often before we die?

Dog, good dog, trick do and make me take

Calmly the consciousness of the crime

Born in the blood simply because we are here.

Your father burns for his father's sake,

So will your son burn in another time

Under the bush of joy you planted there.

Dog, dog, your bone I am who tear my life

Tatterdemalion from me. From you I have no peace,

No life at all unless you break my bone,

No bed unless I sleep upon my grief

That without you we are too much alone,

No peace until no peace is happy home:

O Dog my God, how can I cease to praise!
James Joyce, Heretic

**JAMES JOYCE: A CRITICAL INTRODUCTION.** By Harry Levin. New Directions. $1.50.

The shade of James Joyce is probably smiling rather sadly in its sleeve at this quite excellent study because, although it anatomizes the technical Joyce with penetration, it slighted the spiritual. Harry Levin remarks, "is orthodoxy enough to go on believing in hell." This sentence, properly speaking, should have presented us with the crossed keys to the solution of James Joyce. Both "Ulysses" and "Finnegans Wake" were written in spiritual circumstances that only a Dante Alighieri or a Julian the Apostate could perfectly visualize: for every word that James Joyce wrote took its dynamic from the thing he sought to escape. This, in two words, was God Almighty. Thus the best thumbnail introduction to Joyce is not Stuart Gilbert's concordance or Levin's volume but Francis Thompson's all too facilely discredited "The Hound of Heaven." While Mr. Levin has demonstrably observed this dynamic of recoil in Joyce, I do not think that he has ascribed to it the dominance that in fact it possesses here. On the day he died Joyce was not an atheist or an agnostic or a Parsee or a Holy Roller; he was a Roman Catholic who hated Roman Catholicism.

It is, finally, as exegesis that this introduction to Joyce is most meritorious. For in the matter of specific elucidations the critic can dispense with his faculties of abstract investigation, that is, if he happens to have them, and get down to the much more amusing and much less pretentious business of textual detection. This, in the works of James Joyce, became as entertaining as a murder mystery and infinitely more hazardous. Mr. Levin may not be particularly ingenious in observing that "Nobirdy avair soar anything to eagle it" is an ornithological "Nobody ever saw anything to equal it"; but when he states that "the real romance [of Finnegans Wake] is between Joyce and the language," then he really pulls a plum; as in the remark, at once so obvious and so necessary, though I know of no one else who has made it, that Joyce's "restless play of allusion depends, to the vast extent of his knowledge, on the acceptance of a linguistic status quo." I wonder that this observation did not invite the critic to suspect that here again the Joycean dynamic of recoil asserted itself. For this "restless play of allusion," continually in a state of flirtation with the language proper,amounts, in the end, to a retreat in the face of established authority.

When a person sets about the invention of a new language, he is either schizoid or James Joyce. The real difference between the two is that Joyce invented variations on the English tongue for the sake of reasons: he was in love with it, and wrote the oddest things. It took Mr. T. S. Eliot, with his judicious eye fixed on the reasons why writers write so rather than on the way in which they write, to see that James Joyce, instead of being, as he polled and the Bohemian suspect, the most heretical, was in fact the most orthodox writer. I imagine that Mr. Eliot is of this opinion because he recognizes in Joyce the writer who takes his drive from his hates, and Joyce's hates consisted of authority in the shapes of the British constitution, the Oxford Dictionary, and the Roman Catholic church.

GEORGE BARKER
A NOTE FOR T. S. ELIOT
BY GEORGE BARKER

It is becoming, at the beginning of this note, to express, no matter how modestly, some deference to that great poet whose sixtieth birthday was celebrated this September. I write this note for T. S. Eliot not because, in any remarks about contemporary poetry, he must be continually and honourably and even exclusively referred to, but because, since I was twenty-one—and that is fourteen years ago—I have been, in a small way, a friend of that very gentle man. This note is not an evaluation or a revaluation or an exigesis—because I have almost reached that stage, I discover, where the only serious form of criticism is simply an examination of the subject's personal charms. When I read books like The Meaning or The Foundations of Aesthetics or Archetypal Patterns in English Poetry, I feel at a loss to account for the paucity of my response. And then I recollect that literature, in any and in all of its various forms, has got, at heart, only one subject. This is the human being. And what I find absent, or pretty well absent, from so much of the intellectually responsible criticism of English poetry, is its responsibility towards the human being. It is absolutely no good to address the fallible and the vulnerable and the human as though they were infallible and invulnerable and inhuman. And this is what happens if one addresses the human being as though he were made up of an impeccable intellect and a pair of old boots. In between the intellect and the old boots, a most remarkable phenomenon goes on enacting the comedies and tragedies of the great human passions. It is these human passions which, moving the intellect to offer them a sanctuary, reveal to us, in our poetry, in our paintings—in all the seven major arts—the privilege of being human. I am by no means seeking to depreciate the immense magnificence and the immense magnitude of intellectual interpretations. I see a great deal more latent excitement in the idea of the recurring seven than I ever could in a bunch of dilapidated dahlias. But the intellect, like a blank cheque, needs resources to meet its demands. And these resources, upon which the intellect calls and makes demands, are, in fact, the human passions. The matter upon which the intellect properly operates is not itself and its own personality, but the matter of human affairs. In these human affairs intellectual issues certainly occupy a place, but a place subordinate to the imperative operancy of the human passions. I never knew a man who could think himself into happiness.

Eliot is a man whom the imperative operancy of the human passions has not left unannealed. It does not need to be said by me that those who suffer and endure in silence nevertheless both suffer and endure. I remember a sentence, and a tremendous pronouncement it is, that concludes Eliot's essay on Tradition and the Individual: "Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality. But, of course, only those who have personality and emotion know what it means to want to escape from them."

This sentence moves me very deeply because it leaves out so much more than it says, and it says a great deal. It tells us exactly what Yeats meant in between those two deadly lines:

The best lack all conviction, and the worst Are full of passionate intensity.

But, unsaid, merely hinted at, unspoken, the anguish, the agony, the absolute tribulation of the human condition, this is expressed in the negative pathos of that concluding sentence of Eliot's. "But, of course, only those who have personality and emotion know what it means to want to escape from them."

For I have heard too many of the feebleminded second-rate poetasters, full to the tooth of passionate intensity, accuse the poems of Eliot of a poverty of feeling. The reason is perfectly simple. His poems are
poems about passions that only an adult person experiences. They are not poems for adolescent poetry lovers with whom passion can only be compared to a primus stove. Why does Eliot love cats? It is because they are genteel during the day and diabolic during the night. Why does Eliot dress like a respectable publisher? It is not only because he really has got inside him a monster disguise. This monster speaks exquisitely in the lines:

The tiger in the tiger pit
Is not more irritable than I.
The whipping tail is not more still
Than when I smell the enemy
Wringed in the essential blood
Or dangling from the friendly tree.

I, the hating over the arched tongue
Is more affectionate than hate,
More bitter than the love of youth,
And inaccessible by the young.

Reflected from my golden eye
The dullard knows that he is mad.

Tell me if I am not glad!

But I must not give the impression that I am trying to interpret the personal character of Eliot through his idiosyncrasies or his poems. He is much more capable of doing this, if it should be required, than anyone else will ever be. When it comes down to the interpretation of any given poet, it is necessary to recall that the poet himself is in a very advantageous position. He is his own subject. It can therefore be assumed that he tells you as much about himself as he thinks wise and nice. But, whereas the poet may know all there is to know about the man—the human being—he knows very little about the poet inside himself. For the poet inside a man can only function on a single subject, and this is the poem he writes. This is why the opinion of poets on such matters as the political issues of the times is really of no more significance or sagacity than the opinion of an intelligent bookmaker. Unless, of course, the poet happens also to be an intelligent man. In which case he ought to have more sense than to be a poet.

Some two or three months before the declaration of war I went to see Eliot in his little office overlooking the gardens of Russell Square. It was late in the afternoon and there was about everything that atmosphere of resigned melancholy that seems to precede all catastrophic events. I forget what was the occasion of my calling upon him—I think it was to say good-bye, for I was leaving England. He looked out of the window. And, after a while, in a tired voice, he said: "We have so very little time." I never knew whether he was referring to that interview or to more general matters: I do not think he wished me to know. But it remains in my mind because it is almost the only occasion on which I have heard the poet Eliot speak through the man.

And when I was twenty or twenty-one I used to call and see him whenever I visited London from the southern county in which I lived. And he would enquire about my dog and advise me on the planting of potatoes and warn me not to cudgel my brains for poems. But for the most part he spoke to me about matters of infinitely more service to me than the technique of English versification (for this, he knew, I would learn if I were able). He concerned himself with the problems of how the devil I was to get some money whilst I tried to learn how to write good verse. I speak of these personal matters because the occasion of his sixtieth birthday is an opportune time to remember that Eliot is not only a great poet who redeems this time from mediocrity: he is also a man.

In the highly distinguished history of English literary criticism three figures stand out in superlative prominence. These are Dryden, Coleridge and Matthew Arnold. To these three names, in its proper season, I believe the name of Eliot may be added. For he has restored to that almost discredited art, the art of literary criticism, some of the intellectual responsibility and some of the etymological veracity that his immediate predecessors had sacrificed or degraded. I do not think that he is an inceptor. Few of the critical propositions upon which he establishes his theories have, for me, very much that is new about them. The kind of innovations Coleridge introduced into English critical thinking were in truth revolutionary. For Coleridge invested us with our intellectual self-consciousness. Before him, the English critics, even the most hard-
A NOTE FOR T. S. ELIOT
headed, men like Johnson and Dryden, laboured about in an atmosphere in which the fundamental assumptions were uncertain and obscure. Coleridge introduced the lightning. And what it revealed was not at all as neat a scene as either Dryden or Johnson confidently imply. I speculate on Doctor Johnson’s response to those lines of Gerard Hopkins which would, I suspect, have so delighted Coleridge:

The mind, the mind has mountains, cliffs of fall
Sheer, no man fathomed.

For, since Coleridge, it has been absolutely impossible to disregard the presence of these precipices both in the work of art and in the work of criticism: these precipices which are inhabited by monsters whom it is the special operation of a poem to tame. These things, these otherwise indescribable denizens of the human imagination, were first discovered as subjects of critical and scientific analysis, by Coleridge. (But they had always been the subject of the work of art.) For this reason Coleridge is the first great English critic. I would almost say that he showed the poem that it was capable of original sin. I do not think Matthew Arnold fulfilled any such eminent destiny in the history of English criticism: he was as utterly incapable of making Coleridge’s mistakes as he was incapable of equalling Coleridge’s innovations. But he did remind the poet that his vocation involved wrestling with both angels and monsters: I take this to be the meaning of his forgivably pedagogic remark: “Poetry is at bottom a criticism of life.” And this quotation brings me to Eliot, whose comment on this remark of Arnold’s was: “At bottom? That is a great way down. The bottom is the bottom. At the bottom of the abyss is what few ever see, and what those cannot bear to look at for long; and it is not a criticism of life.” Perhaps none of us have ever been there, down where the ultimates exist in their mystery; but I believe that Eliot has been deeper down than Arnold. I believe this because I see in Matthew Arnold’s substitution of poetry for religion, I see, here, only the debilitation of his religious passion. Only an anemic spirit could seek to substitute poetry for its aspirations towards the divine union. And because Arnold is weaker in spirit he has not descended so far into the abyss as those who acknowledge the secularity of poetic consolation. But, in defence of Arnold, it should be said that, bottom or no bottom, the sentence, “Poetry is a criticism of life” strikes most of us as a better statement than that statement made by Eliot many years ago: “Poetry is a superior amusement.” But between Eliot and Matthew Arnold one is between the devil and the deep blue.

In spite of the apparent originality of many of his poems and the less apparent originality of many of his critical judgments, Eliot is not an inceptor. What characteristics of the original his poems display—and The Love Song of Alfred Prufrock seemed inexcusably original in its day—these characteristics were really nothing other than judicious pilfering of French sauces. It was not the originality of a man like William Blake, who invented a new way of writing because he had new subjects to speak about. These remarks are, of course, in no way a derogation of Eliot as a poet or as a critic: it is not a condition of things that all good poets should be violently original. I remember that William Shakespeare addressed a sonnet to himself asking why he did not turn to new found methods and to compounds strange. But it is salutary to try to clear out of the way some of the false impressions that either are or have been current about the work of Eliot. And just as his apparent originality as a poet is merely a glance he took across the English Channel, so his distinction as a critic is that he has very deliberately elected to follow the traditional evolution of English criticism. The difference between the poet Eliot and the poet Matthew Arnold is that Eliot practises what he preaches and Matthew Arnold just preaches. A poem like “Ash Wednesday” could walk around and hold up its head in all of the civilized European countries: it is not insular. But I suspect that even such a supremely-beautiful poem as “The Scholar Gypsy” would suffer all sorts of embarrassing misunderstandings if it went and displayed its beauties at a bullfight in Barcelona. The point I wish to make is perfectly simple.
Eliot is catholic. He is not parochial. Matthew Arnold is parochial. He is not catholic. And I am using the word catholic in its secular rather than its ecclesiastical meaning, although I do not think these two meanings can be entirely separated.

It is not a frivolous accident of nature that Eliot is a member of the Anglo-Catholic Church. (I write as a Roman or Real Catholic when I speculate that only his membership of the Anglo rather than the Roman Catholic Church obstructs his complete catholicity.) This is why, when poor Matthew Arnold makes a seemingly innocent remark like: "Poetry is at bottom a criticism of life," the catholic Eliot seizes it and imposes a theological interpretation upon the most unlikely word in the whole sentence: the word "bottom" is made to refer to the great Abyss. The explanation, of course, is quite simple. Arnold, for all his conscience and all his ethics and all his whitewashed morals, was not a man with any great pressure of religious passion. He suffered from anaemia of the spirit. And this anaemia of the spirit is the counterpart of his intellectual parochiality. His obsession with morals does not arise, like Eliot’s, from a conviction that the mad troglodytes of the human passions are so dangerous that they must be kept chained up in moral systems: Arnold’s obsession with morals arises from a simple habit of domestication: he likes to see tame animals with tame emotions behaving tamely because it looks much nicer. This is what he would have termed the Hellenic practice of moderation. I sometimes wonder what Arnold’s response would have been if, one night as he pulled back the sheets of his bed he had found the incestuous Clytemnestra coiling there. We know what Eliot’s response would have been. It is The Family Reunion.

I add a word more about Eliot’s religious convictions, because I believe that any comments about him which did not discuss these convictions at some length, would amount to no more than superficial whimsy. At the dead centre of Eliot is a dark confessional into which, as I believe, none of his poems has ever entered and from which, most certainly, none has ever emerged. Because Eliot in no way interchanged the operations of the poem and the operations of the spirit. Poems are very pretty things indeed, but in the presence of the seven great orthodox damnations they take on as little significance as the handful of flowers we sometimes place upon altars. To Eliot, I think, the substitution of poetry for religion (whatever this may mean) could only seem as benighted and as purblind as to venerate the bunch of roses rather than the deity these flowers are placed there to glorify.

It is absolutely no good to try and separate the poet in Eliot from the religious man. One so often—I have so often—overhears young men—usually young socialists—divide Eliot in two parts so that they can admire the poet and deplore the Christian. This can no more be done than you can back the Derby winner but deplore the fact that the wretched beast is a horse. Eliot is the kind and type of poet he is for the demonstrable reason that his poems arise from his religious convictions. You may be able to establish a distinction between the poet in Eliot and the human being in Eliot, but you cannot establish a distinction between the poet in him and the Christian in him. The poet—in Eliot or any other poet—may be sitting with wings folded inside the human being who is going for a walk or talking or taking a drink. But the moment the poet unfolds his faculties and speaks, then each of his various natures get together, unite, and, in the poem, utter praise.

I said: “At the dead centre of Eliot is a dark confessional into which none of his poems has ever entered and from which none of his poems has ever emerged.” This is because the poet cannot write without the benediction of the spiritual man, but the spiritual man can pray without the permission of the poet. Somewhere or other, Eliot points out the rareriness of good devotional poetry. The explanation, I think, is because the poetic impulse, rare as it is, nevertheless is more common than religious passion. And rarest of all is the meeting of both inside a single skin.
APPENDIX B:  
BARKER AND THE MIDDLE AGES

Contents


2. From the National Gallery:

Fig. A. Carlo Crivelli (Active 1457-1493), The Demidoff Altarpiece (Detail: The Virgin and Child).

Fig. B. Hans Holbein the Younger (1497/8-1543), Christina of Denmark Duchess of Milan.

Fig. C. Jacopo Tintoretto (1518-1594): The Origin of the Milky Way.


5. 'The Neo-Geordies', Seven, No. 7, Christmas 1939, pp. 2-3.
BooKs OF THE Quarterly

THE CRITICISM
Memento homo quod cinis es
Et in cinerem reverteris.

Erthe out of erthe is wonderily wroghte,
Erthe has gotten on erthe a dignitie of noghte,
Erthe appon erthe hase sett alle his thoughte,
How that erthe appon erthe may be heoghe broghte.

Erthe appon erthe wolde be a kinge;
Bot howe erthe to erthe sall, thinkes he no thing.
When erthe bredes erthe, and his rentes home bringe,
Thane schalle erthe of erthe hafe full harde partinge.

Erthe appon erthe winnes castells and tourres,
Thane saise erthe unto erthe "This is alle ourres";
When erthe appon erthe hase bigged up his bourres,
Thane schalle erthe for erthe suffere scharpe scourres.

Erthe gos appon erthe as golde appon golde.
He that gos appon erthe gletononde as golde,
Like as erthe never more go to erthe scholde,
And yitt shall erthe into erthe ga ratheere than he wolde.

Now why that erthe lufes erthe, wondere me thinke,
Or why that erthe for erthe scholde other swete or swink;
For whan that erthe appon erthe is broghte within brinke,
Thane shall erthe of erthe hafe a foule stinke.

Mors Solvit Omnia.

From the Thornton MS.
Do you own, as your body will. the dovem," "Now, instead of becoming a creature, my face is not

I have heard the death of the dove in your face. I have been there. My face is not a creature, but a thing, and I am not a creature, but a thing.

And the hawk. And the dove. And the hawk.
breathe in love.

The Hawk and the Dove
GEORGE BARKER

The Neo-Geordies

Geordie shall be hung in chains of gold
Such chains as there never were any...
Cambridgeshire Ballad.

I
NieMoller hung in chains of gold
Near the cloud and the axe flash,
Is dumbstruck Gabriel in the flesh
Trumpeting silence for his glory.

II
Thaelmann hung in chains of fire
Between the Reichstag and a grave,
Speaks with open vowels of
Subjective passion and objective love.

III
Michael Collins hung in chains
Across the harp-tongued Channel,
Sang like a sweet bird in a tunnel
Seeing daylight far away.

IV
Beneath hung in chains of tears
Between the swastika and the drum
Haed terrible syllables in a dream
Sell history to the abattoirs.

V
Haile Selassie hung in chains
Among the Abyssinian mountains,
Saw the Imperial Mussolini
Passing on his palace ruins.

VI
Schuschnigg hung in chains of steel
Felt the Austrian angel come
Making its only home
Where his breast became its nest,
And his tear its world.
APPENDIX C
BARKER AND BLAKE

Contents


2. 'To Robert Owen', Wales, No. 10, October 1939, p. 261.

3. 'A Sermon on May Day', Seven, No. 8, Spring 1940, pp. 3-6.
OCTOLOGUE OF EMOTIONS

Lodged in the Bodleian Library at Oxford is a copy of a work under this title, published, according to the title page, at the February Press in the Summer of 1932. The February Press would seem to have been the immediate forerunner of the Phoenix Press which Barker and his brother Kit (Albert Gordon) set up at their parents' home in London the following year. The Octologue consists of eleven un-numbered pages on which the text is typed with generous spacing. After two preliminary pages the title page proper occurs on the third sheet. After another blank page the text begins.

/Title Page/

OCTOLOGUE OF EMOTIONS

G.G. Barker

Published at the February Press by G.G. & A.G. Barker;
1932.

/Text:

After all the tears that fell into patriotic mud;
The Historical patrimonial tears,
And the first tears of God -
It appears
That the years
must be two thousand of God's tears for us -
All that you have to do, (must do, will do)
Will expedite your tears, for which,
Encasing the earth, observe
Our bright cosmic and cosmetic handkerchief
Bespread over all.

Chipping automobile gears
my sweetheart expedites the years,
Wearing beneath his overalls
an handkerchief of rod and balls.

With which he can:
Erase spiritual blemishes, incited upon
His immobile body by the spinning gearteeth
which
Grip into him, tearing
off divine shining skin,
(have a banana:)
in the rear seats of omnibuses,
Snatch like life requisite at my mouth -
From which gradually drip
remedial pips, oranges; and, afterwards,
Subtract one blemishment, pip.
Fate may come
Darling, and deprive us of
those: what of it: who
Cares, about Fate, that dark
In surrounding darkness,
Impendingly predacious?

You and I may
Pressed into one mass,
blind, ignorant, unconscious,
(like mashed potatoes, cover those eyes)
In increasing time,
Decreasing physical stress,
Glide into one inside us both,
as we externally seem to be one,
our duality by something, Love, singularised,
Our duality by love singularised,
Who cares?

(Love.) Vote bigotedly against
Love. You are commanded, it is your duty.
Return lust and duty.

The lust to act, combat actual objects, cottonmills.
Where Love drew a ladylike you let duty draw
Your coherent beauty, obedience to force.
(Experiment in beauty: Magnet's
Magnetic field, mesmeric radius: over this hesitate
Hairpins and filings in order,
Like exhausted stars.)

If you will remember the forces which attract you
Towards swarming licentious centres
With evil gummed, (Orderly streets
Make an Orderly City) you will notice,
The order of your day is order, day and night
Drawing lust to act in day, and in night lust.

The impercipience of foundries worries
People: one sees lorries
Nonchalance cancelling latent maturities;
Destroying the bimetallic arteries
Of my haemal homeland; and conveying
Agricultural tanks to demolish my compatriots
Through their fields: steel
Indurates furnaces, has stolen
Our soft endearment, home; and is yet superhumanly
Charitable, benevolent, and generous.

Came on them in beastly situations
Between building hope - blends into tenements, and men
Between automatons; and this,
Like practical men, you have accomplished.

How right you were, that marvellous
Marvellous machine, our human body!
Lucretious, come -

Deliriously shout in stereotyped
Ictus, in apprehension

How like a God! How like a God to turn
The heart into glassy reflectors, steel, turn
Diastole and systole, this neat, into
Exhaust, induction; valve, cylinder,
Propellor and propellor.

Sentimentalize but only within the periphery
Of one's own heart.

Allow steel and steel, meeting, to meet steel and

---

Confirm, personality, remittance, pay, order.

Conform your personality; this person
which finds itself upon aerial ground.
Surely this is simple. Remit
Vistas behind the mystery -

pay pay pay!
Or die.
Constrain yourself, can't gravity
Or the sun rule from their security.
Or the moon, cannot remove this sanity?

Move forward, the ground pulls with you. The sunlight is sails.

vii

Minus, the mind is negative, they cannot:
Creation cannot become, nor a creator.
Humanity remain incurably conventional, we possess
Physiological photography, of the pasts
Etherally concomitant to photography,
which represents the irony
of our superior predecessors, who lure us into
The empty useless future.

What, in acute air and
On astute ground and
through brute responses
Is there to do.

Is the fallacy space. Can
The symbol X multiply. Are
twice ten twice ten, or twenty. Sit
and recoil statically into
your reverse birth nonentity.

Repeat, reply, retreat,
perhaps reverse.

Get back, queer progeny into an ova,
The egg which spun out of a cipher.
Reinhume the commonly derivative germ,
Permit a negation of nothing,
Continually an illusion,
To re enter itself.

Summer 1932

Dedicated to JMM and JWTW.
TO ROBERT OWEN

I walk under the winter tree,
It scatters heavy drops on me,
I lift my left hand and look,
It is the blood of the folk.
I turn, and the tree turns and cries,
I have wept out my eyes.

I feel the burning of that blood
Penetrate my sense of good;
And where the weal shows on my hand
The figure of Robert Owen stands.
I did mine, he says, you
Do what you can do.

I walk near the summer sun,
Among the plethora of plenty,
Calcutta roses suffocating;
I see the many have none,
I see two rise on twenty,
I know the way they suffer.

In the plenitude of rot,
Like pearl and like spirit,
I again recognize his spirit
Rising like a whirlwind at
The summer tree that has too much,
And blows it on the winter branch.

GEORGE BARKER.
On January 1st, 1800, Saint Robert Owen took over control of the cotton mills at New Lanark in Scotland. An account of the authenticated miracles performed by this prophet would occupy, on the estimate of a human life lasting the usual 70, about 175,000 years. This figure is obtained by multiplying with their lives the number of persons employed in the cotton mills. Each day and each hour and each minute of this one hundred and seventy five thousand years which Saint Robert Owen controlled with the tips of his fingers transpired to be a miracle. For each moment accelerated the apotheosis of this two thousand five hundred "slaves at my mercy" (St. Robert) to normal human persons. Thus in the quarter of a century from 1800 to 1825 we see the spectacle of perhaps the greatest, as it was certainly the most numerical, continuous sequence of miracles which civilised society has ever witnessed. And in accordance with the laws of historical evolution the classification of St. Robert Owen with the general hierarchy of saints and prophets can be corroborated by the fact that along with all such saints and prophets he also was without honour in his own country. Beginning his career as a simple and simple-minded philanthropist he was as such rewarded, "with nothing but wealth, applause, honour and glory". But when St. Robert, instructed by the spirit of Duns Scotus and Wat Tyler, evolved no matter how ramshackle a system for the social and economic reformation and liberation of the poorest order of Society, a system invented by an inventor of a very different calibre from those who had preceded him, and one which functioned without the expensive lubrication of the Orthodox Church, without the hatched patchwork of private property, and most of all without the sanctified single cylinder of normal marriage, then what happened? Like ostriches he was ostracised, former friends pronounced excommunication; relegated from social heaven to social hades he walked about with a bowl of water for the thirsty in his hands and a plot against God as Society elaborating itself in his mind. His halo, invisible to any but his closest disciples, first appeared at the moment when he stood at the top of an extemporised table as President of the First Congress of all English Trade Unions.
At this time it is appropriate and salutary to devote a moment of profound meditation to the ghost of St. Robert Owen. I say profound so that those of us who have come to regard him as no more than a mere dreamer of doomed dreams, a properly dishonoured prophet, may hope to penetrate a little deeper into the formidable simplicity of the Saint's mind. For nothing, my friends, presents us with so puzzling a pattern as the mind of a really, a madly, a militantly simple man. How many of us, either in our occupations, or in our recreations, or in our everyday associations, encounter such a man as the Saint who is the subject of this Sermon? I assure you, very few of us. How to shake hands with him, how to converse with him on commonplace subjects, how to follow the impossible obvious logic of his thoughts, nonplusses us. And so it must be a matter for profound meditation if we hope to understand the life and behaviour, the achievements and the aspirations, of St. Robert Owen, who is, after all, no more than a ghost among us, an echo of hope, a reverberation of love.

The first characteristic of St. Robert Owen's system for the metamorphosis of man consists in its mathematical exactitude. This accords with the mind of the Saint in that it expresses extreme simplicity, for we have all observed the obsession which figures exercise over most men with enormous simple minds. His computations of cost, his concern with architectural details, his enumerations of populations, etc., seem like the amusement of a child imagining a new country. Let me repeat a passage from that paper of the Saint's regarding the New Lanark factory which is addressed to the Red Republicans, Communists, and Socialists of Europe: "The working part of this population of 2,500 persons was daily producing as much real wealth for society as, less than half a century before, it would have required the working part of a population of 600,000 to create. I asked myself, what became of the difference between the wealth consumed by 2,500 persons and that which would have been consumed by 600,000?" Could anything, on the face of it, appear as falacious as this formidable simplicity, which shouldered to the wall all considerations of human duplicity and cupidity, all the elaborations of an accumulating historical evolution, and asked, with a positive beatitude of purity, what became of profit? But the lightning that penetrates into the husk of a rotten house and illuminates the contortions of vice and evil being practised inside is also simple; it is the Saint Robert of the sky is the lightning.
Therefore I am moved to think him beyond our pedestrian understanding, this archangel of society who strove to communicate to us an annunciation, namely that Heaven has mathematics for its foundations. Can we comprehend that almost mythical simplicity which goes home to the roots of all dialectical complexities and brings up the seed of the matter, the hope of the future? Nor must we forget that his man, this Saint, this lightning of Society, Robert Owen, in whom must have existed such apassion for the human person that his own humanity got scorched, was not scorched, but was a simple man.

Some of you, no doubt, have heard voices of seemingly divine language exhorting you to perform miracles in the Spring and your son has been born in the Autumn; but no such voices informed Saint Robert Owen how to make love to Society. His only angel was his 2,500 persons, which increased as his passion grew so that by 1820 it included the whole of the human race. I suppose that at nights when he lay awake from overwork and exhaustion he heard voices exhorting him: but never were these voices divine; he listened to them for the reverse reason, they were human. The voices of Irish peasants, then in their trial by famine, or the voices of Yorkshire cotton workers who had all work and no pay, or the voices of women who laboured twenty-five hours a day with the daughter still transfixed by the abdominal cord. I suppose that these voices may have paid him occasional visitations. But such reflections pertain to the blasphemous for it was in such obscure hours as these that the communication between the Saint and his God occurred; it is no more seemly to enquire into these Gethsemanes than it is seemly to question your parents how long it took to create you in a summer evening.

What it is more appropriate to enquire is why, among our palladium of Saints, the name of St. Robert Owen has not hitherto been introduced. Others of no greater light have been permitted inclusion, such as the recently canonised Kier Hardie or the long forgotten Tyler. However insignificant the official recognition of St. Robert Owen may seem to us when we contemplate the splendid martyrdom of passion in which he perished, nevertheless certain formalities of recognition serve to keep him in the mind and these I think should not be denied his memory. It is as such a formality that I contribute and dedicate these reflections to the spirit of a man in whom had been brought to a concentration of passion the hitherto fugitive spirit of Man.
In concluding this address I can think of no gesture more in keeping with the occasion than a cursory review, such as, on this May Day, is conducted in various places over Europe, of those whom I may call the Saint's progenitors or predecessors or parents. The descendant of an illustrious line of philosophers, he was not by nature a philosopher; the issue of an illustrious line of metaphysicians, he was not by nature a metaphysician; the son of a man, he was the father of men. He inherited a plethora of precedents: Bacon, Hobbes, Locke, Collins, Coward, Hartley, not to mention those relations of his who sent presents from overseas, namely Voltaire, Rousseau, Saint Simon, Fourier, etc. Those who came after him found his intellectual heirlooms in no way maltreated; principal and principle of these, found suspended from the ceiling of his room like a sun about which his thoughts and his actions rotated and in which he found his dynamic of gravity, the prophetic crystal of historical materialism swung its pointers of light towards the future.

Therefore I must trouble you to spend a moment or two longer contemplating the image of this Saint as I set it before you. I show you the figure of Saint Robert Owen, his bosom of sympathy transfixed by the splinter of his period, a Scottish cotton mill held like Winchester Cathedral in his right hand, and 175,000 miracles, each a year of human life, flashing in the air about his shoulders like stars. Remember on May Day to render appropriate honours to his memory; recall also the date on which the liberation of humanity, at the hand of this formidably simple individual, achieved its initiation, January 1st, 1800.
APPENDIX D:
BARKER AND TENNYSON

Contents

Two sets of proofs for Poems, (1935), corrected by the author, Brotherton Collection, Leeds University Library. Description and extracts.
Housed in the Brotherton Collection at Leeds University are two sets of proofs for the 1935 volume corrected in pen in Barker's own hand. The divergence between the second of these sets and the eventual published version are slight, but the first set, stamped 'Robert Mac Leros & Son Ltd, University Press Glasgow, 1st Feb. 1935', displays many slight textual variants, some of which are detailed below. The text on the left hand side of the page is that of the first uncorrected page proof, that on the right hand side of published version.

"The Amazons" (p. 11)

1. 28
within the hot places
within the dark places

1. 43
Queen Masters,
lying under the hills
Queen Masters! Lying easy
under the hills

1. 60
Find a whole
subjection to them
Find a last servitude to them
with the dead
with the dead
'The Traith-Friend' (p. 16)

1.2
towards concealed retreats Toward unreal retreats

1.12
Fugitively stand I fugitively stand'

1.35
no rearward egress no upward egress

'Fistral Bay' (p. 19)

1.9
From invasive breath From corrosive breath

'No Feeble Dream' (p. 20)

1.2
across pellucid air across lucid air

1.6
Saps away courage Feeds upon courage
1. 9-10
Of callous destruction
proceed carefully
Treat with caution, anaemic
feeble people.

11. 14-15
Their fever to act than
dreams
Desires aspirations more
worth.

Their fever to act than all
dream
Desire, aspirations, more
worth.

*I Am That Land, Surrounding Sea*
(p. 21).

11. 1-3
I am your land, your
surrounding sea
And your sky; the structure
of my hand
Forms your promontories, and
the mountains of my knees.

I am the land, surrounding sea
And sky; the structure of my hand
Spreads promontories, and the
mountains of knees.

1. 14
Thousand on thousand of
doomed inhabitants falling

Thousand on thousand of doomed
you's falling.
'Harcissus I' (p. 26)

11. 8-6
That slim mouth upon my mouth
Keep mine for the inconceivable period
Between meeting in dream and meeting in deed with the unknown person.

'The Leaping Laughters' (p. 28)

11. 14-20
Whom the noon
Washes whole, whom
Strange heavens compel,
To whom pass immaculate messages
How soon will you again
Lift irresistible fists

'The Crystal' (p. 9)

1. 1
With mesmeric fervour

1. 6
Travels erratically
'Touching with permanent Disturbance

'Daedalus' (p. 30)

1. 21
With a reversal or growing older

1. 25
In scraggy grave

'His Perennial' (p. 36)

11. 17-18
Reappears in very place
The Fact to deface

11. 25-26
Whom love adored
Who love abhorred.

Reappears in all places
And the fact effaces

Whom Love adored.
'The Chimera' (p. 43)

II. 11–14
Like annual fields the glorious fleece surges
With energy animal and human,
Five annual hoofs bear
This body, the stellar seven's despair,
And the eyes iridesce with urges.

Life fields the annual fleece surges
With energy animal and human,
Five silver seas bear
This body, the stellar seven's despair,
And the eyes are tidal with celestial urges.

'Iiie Comes Among' (p. 45)

1. 1
The summer rush of the young

The summer throngs of the young

1. 12
Tempting in echoes the spatial

Tempting in echoes the aspatial

'Northumberland, Bound Down'
/pp. 58-9/

11. 29–32
Teeth and tongue against the breast
Draw with lust's greed in zest,
Northumberland (âh Clitheroe!)
To black dust pressed.

Whose teeth against the breast
Draw with lust's greed in zest,
Northumberland (âh Clitheroe!)
To black dust pressed.
APPENDIX E:
BARKER AND HOUSMAN

Contents

1. Draft in two sections of an Inaugural Lecture to be delivered at Imperial Tohoku University, Sendai, Japan, 1940 as Professor of English Literature, 1939. Three foolscap sheets in Barker's own hand. Courtesy of Elizabeth Smart.

2. Synopsis of a Course of Twenty Two Lectures entitled The Preliminaries of Poetry, to be delivered at Imperial Tohoku University, Japan, 1939-40.

3. 'The Finer Frenzy', (Review of Rejoice in the Lamb by Christopher Smart), New English Weekly XIV, No. 27, 13 April 1939, pp. 413-4.
would like first of all to express my appreciation of the honor that the Thalian
League of University, by donating me its Saltonstall's name. I
shall find it so difficult to follow. The speech which I have written is not
really acceptable to me and I am not sure if the report of my speech will
be made in the subject of popular literature but the more I think about the
existence of the phenomenon of the voice, the more I am in accord with
the voice of my former colleagues, for all the work so far is too
more than a rare thing from Shakespeare or a sort still from
Bloomfield. Therefore I salute the memory of my predecessor. A day before
I shall not be equally felt where he is equally successful: at any rate, I could not be satisfied
in my future work by a better, no more consistent praise than that of
my former colleagues. There
remains in this school of Chicago a tradition to keep the change at bay, the whole
more of them getting amount for here like the motto that petite gallery.

In conclusion I am going to speak about English poetry as an interesting
questions in the part of academic authorities, for it is more usual to write
established criticism of literature it abounds poetry than the poets who write it: if they,
are understandable if we shall bring the experience of the society who, when he acquired the
meaning of their poems from the poet
we demanded, receive the simple answer that they 912 not have. I can begin my lecture from the
point, namely the element of the transcendental or the naturally inadmissible in poetry.
When we read a poem that we do not at first understand it is natural that we should simply
say that the poem has no meaning: but this is not true for what we mean is that simply
that a first reading we have not understood it. Nevertheless, although we may well have
understood the poem naturally or intellectually yet it is possible that a certain communication
of meaning may have taken place. I can think of a number of poems in English which
are not right and which the reader so meaningless: such poems as Christopher Smart's
celebrated public address is to present or almost every example of the prophetic books of
William Blake. But this sort incomprehensible is not really the case it really signify
that these poems have no meaning, no communication, no fundamental significance. But it
means is that the fundamental significance is not intellectual, is not rational: indeed
both with the Prophetic Books and Rejoice in Judgment: I believe that what he said
is Eustace to say in the poem is an imaginative expression rather than an intellectual
statement. By this I mean that the Prophetic Books of Blake can communicate an
imaginative meaning to us without our being able to reduce this meaning to a
communication in matter which prose cannot properly communicate. Do not think that paraphrase in prose of any of the great passages of English poetry would help us to understand more clearly the statement made in great poetry. The lines,

Mr. mom muthers

Thepoetry hence even of the meaning better;

Reply is all.

as by no means the same as the statement that all men are born to ransom and must mature and die.

The simple intellectual statement made in these lines, but the function of expression and poetry

this paraphrase of this intellectual content by no means conveys the meaning of these lines; for

they certainly also convey depths of sentiment and spiritual significance that no paraphrase in prose

can hint at.

III

Therefore I can take the pleasure of dwelling upon the intellectual in the intelligence of the poet; I mean to observe the spirit of the poet creating its own statement of immortality and this is the reason why the study of poetry will be continued the pleasure when the science of psychology and natural investigation are no longer allowed; for in

studying poetry we study the history, the growth, the rise, and the descent of the human spirit.

And I mean not to claim any superiority to claim that in the history of English poetry this growth and descent of the human spirit occurs as magnificently and as inevitably and

true in any other species of the same arts. I propose therefore to put before your attention these

few notes on the greater figures in their history in the hope that they may facilitate the study of these most important and beautiful masters of the art of the sonnet.

The historical sense of Chaucer is the prototype of the truly 'English' poet. His sonnets are fundamental and his characteristic is the solitary one of keeping his eye on the object: he balances with admirable minuteness - we have only to compare him with some of the other poets to observe this - and yet universality is

responsible for the same lofty natural and not prose. If I call William Blake the original

son of poetry it will be clear that Chaucer is the genuine father. But most of all I

point out that the characteristic act of Chaucer is his domestic concentration on

the object. His characteristic, which Chaucer established, runs down the human

...
like a spectre, the backbone, the element that renders it realistic when it is most fantastic, and reminiscent of the spinning of rainbow glories. It is what he supplies to the exercise of this characteristic of keeping an eye on the object that Blake sets in such transitory forms as the moon or the type, in which, looking at the object with the intuition of the poet, he makes it a crystal lens a means of it.
Lecture I

Elucidatory lecture devoted to establishing the scope of the series: in terming the course The preliminaries of poetry it is intended to convey that after such a survey the student can hope to cope with English poetry as such. The 'preliminary' of poetry might be described as a rapid scan of the historical development of poetry, providing the student with a sense of perspective in which, subsequently, his mind can range with greater confidence and freedom.

Lecture II

The origins of English poetry occur really in the anonymous poetry of the Middle Englishists, which can be said to establish the lyrical source of poetry where Chaucer establishes the narrative source. The finest specimen of this anonymous and almost always ecclesiastical poetry is certainly also one of the finest poems in the language. It is proposed to devote much of this lecture to an examination and analysis of the Middle English poem _Amore Languor._

Lecture III

Chaucer as the prototype of the truly 'English' poet; instancing his fundamental sanity and his salutary characteristic of keeping his eye on the object. His position as the so-called parent...
of English poetry thus becomes an unusually perspicacious description - he behaves with admirable circumspection, and even his levity is respectable in the sense of being 'natural' and not forced. The mention of William Blake as an example of the prodigal progeny serves to remind us how much the cautious father of Chaucer reads from his successors, e.g., Skelton, Jackville, with particular reference to that very fine poem the Induction to the mirror for magistrates.

In discussing the poetry of Edmund Spenser as cursorily as it must be discussed here, it is considered preferable to deal with the minor poems (The Shepherd's Calendar, etc.) than with The Faery Queen. This poem, unlike Paradise Lost, which can be read for its narrative and dramatic events and situations like any thriller, can be read most advantageously by the deferred system. Spenser, it should be remembered, rather than Keats, is probably the 'purest' poet in the English tongue.

With Spenser the adolescence or preparatory stage of English poetry is completed. During the following quarter of a century the event of magnificent maturity occurred in the of the Elizabethan
dramatists. In the historical design of the period, which this lecture describes, Shakespeare appears in more or less human proportions along with the whole of the mermaid gang.

The Elizabethan dramatists excluding Shakespeare: Kyd as a sort of younger brother to Shakespeare, Marlowe as an assassinated Tamburlaine; Marreur, Webster and Ford as three Mlllions in black cloaks, Chapman as a same non Quijote. The birth of modern English can be observed in the work of these poets: note the sense of stretching, or waking to the possibilities of words, in the following lines:

what would it please me to have my throat out with diamonds; or to be smothered with cassis? or to be shot to death with pearls? I know death hath ten thousand several doors for men to take their exits;

or indeed in almost any passage of Christopher Marlowe.

William Shakespeare - The Historical plays. This cycle, in which Shakespeare deals with recognised, commonplace, everyday reality more closely than in any other cycle of the plays, reveals (a) that he has inherited the Chaucerian characteristic of keeping the eye on the object, and (b) that he introduces to poetry, for the first time on a grand
scale, the subjective depths of human emotions described first-hand. In the light of these two aspects, we can examine Richard II as an experiment for Hamlet.

Lecture VIII

The Comedies and Poems. More attention should be devoted to the Poems, where the poet, almost for the only time, speaks without a mask. Here, if anywhere, the poet is explicit. But just as it is injudicious and unbecoming to read too much autobiography into the poems, so it is unwise to deny them a species of personal authority. The Lover's Complaint as the consummation of the Chaucerian tradition: its perfection of poetry typified in the lines:

O then advance of yours that phraseless hand
whose white weighs down the aery scale of praise.

Lecture IX

The Tragedies. Perhaps the only satisfactory method of appreciating the tragedies in such a series of lectures as this is merely the reading of them. The incidental exposition of superficial difficulties can be indulged in by the way, but any really serious examination of them should be conducted privately. Here we are dealing with one of the few occasions on which the human person became completely
articulate.

This lecture proposes to show how the occurrence of Shakespeare provided English poetry with more fodder than it could at the time properly handle - the magnificent manipulations of words performed in the plays and the idems peter out into the acrobatical contortions of the metaphysicals. There is a general sense of the over-ripe and of the running to seed about this time. Donne, Jonson, etc.

The decline ensuing upon the death of Shakespeare, which can be described as a decline only when it is recalled to what heights poetry had formerly achieved, rises to a new kind of poetry written by Herbert and Herrick and also, in one or two poems, by Henry King. Crashaw as the natural descendant of Donne but with the new fluty note of his period purifying the turgidity of his predecessor.

Once the major achievements of Milton as epic poet have been accepted it is permissible to indulge in the fairly harmless game of throwing mistletoe at a man who is anything but 'Balder. Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot on the Miltonic Style: such criticism is salutary, signifying that the poet remains a subject
of fairly strongish feeling. Here again, as with
Spenser, the best introduction to the work of the
poet consists of the minor poems.

The perfection of minor poetry is reached with the
work of Andrew Marvell. It is, within its limits,
quite faultless. The inimitable idiom of Marvell
is originated, exploited, and exhausted by the poet
himself in about a dozen poems. Vaughan's Retreat:

Happy those early days, when I
Shined in my Angel-infancy!
as the source of Wordsworth's Ode on the Intimations.

John Dryden as the originator of the type of poetry
brought to its consummation by Pope. Dryden's own
statements on the nature and types of poetry should
not be omitted. The division of poetry into the
so-called Romantic and Classic begins to reveal
its first schisms. Satire as the natural instrument
of the 'classic' poet. This distinction has grown
out of characteristics noted earlier: namely the
classical formula of keeping the eye on the object,
(which can be called objective poetry) and keeping
the hand on the pulse, (which can be called subjective
poetry). The former definition owes something to
Matthew Arnold, and the latter to Keats.
The technical perfection of Alexander Pope indicates not only the poet but one conspicuous quality of the major poet. His satires examined in the light of his life. Discussion of the work of Pope permits us to investigate no matter how lightly the relationship of poetry to prose: C. S. Joachim du Bellay and Ezra Pound - 'poetry should be as well written as prose'.

Gray and allusion or scholarship in verse. The Elegy has tended rather too much to obscure the two or three remaining poems, certainly as fine in their way, such as The Bard, etc. The exquisite verses of Collins, who suffered insanity, compared with those of Cowper and Christopher Smart, both of whom suffered madness also. The peculiar lucidity of their work. The remarkable hybrid Thomas Chatterton whom Keats considered to be the 'finest writer of the English idiom'.

This lecture conducts an examination of William Blake in the light of present psychology - his affinities with the famous schizophrenic case of James R. Here, in the spectacle of a man who was almost certainly certifiably insane, occurs an indictment of the lunacy laws rather than a criticism of William Blake. Poetry ostensibly similar
to his had been written before but only by the anonymous makers of Border Ballads. It is illuminating to juxtapose say The Daemon Lover and The Mental Traveller. The characteristic gesture of William Blake is the inversion of reality so that its workings is revealed. E.g.:

The Whore and Gambler, by the State License'd, build that Nation's Fate.
The Harlot's cry from Street to Street
Shall weave Old England's winding sheet.

The publication of Bishops Percy's Reliques as the initial cause of the Romantic Revival, which was neither romantic, being realistic, nor a revival, for romanticism has never been thoroughly dead. Wordsworth's proposition to use the language of everyday men indicates much more the Realistic than the Romantic mind. His collaboration with Coleridge: the benefit to Wordsworth to the detriment or Coleridge. Resolution and Independence as perhaps the most representative poem of this period and certainly one of the greatest. The advanced age of Wordsworth ought to be considered an unhappy accident of prolongation but an example of the poet's failure to adapt himself to the emergence of a new world.
The Biographia Literaria can be termed the analysis of the anatomy of poetry. Studied in conjunction with Wordsworth’s critical prose it supplies perhaps the most exhaustive as well as the most penetrating description of the intellectual landscape of a period. The fragmentary nature of Coleridge’s poetry explicable in terms of his erratic life and habits. The Ode to Dejection presents us with what we might call the Medical Report on the Case of S.T. Coleridge.

Byron and Clare - a contrast in types. This lecture might enlarge on the subject of the poet and his position in society. Byron and his palazzi in Italian cities, his geese and panthers, his title and Newstead Abbey, his diet of vinegar, etc., etc., and on the other hand Clare, Crabbe, and Southey, impoverished, insane, or ignored. Byron, like Bernard Shaw, being really more of a great personality than a great writer.

Among the group of Romantic Poets of this period Shelley is conspicuous by reason of his being the only poet with anything like conscientious intellectual convictions. His atheism is apparently the result of his obsession with human affairs: it
is fallacious to consider him as the ineffectual angel of Matthew Arnold's essay. This description is more likely to have arisen from an imperfect picture of the poet's appearance. His concern with the conditions of society and especially with the poorer people reveals that so far from having his head held in the clouds, Shelley, next, perhaps, to Wordsworth, is the most 'Realistic' poet of this time.

I met Murder on the way -
he had a mask like Castlereagh -
very smooth he looked, yet grim;
Seven bloodhounds followed him.

Nothing like an approximate understand of Keats can be achieved without acknowledging his constant poetical dependence upon Shakespeare. Not that his work in any way reiterates that of the latter, but something like the relationship of father to son may explain the depth of Keats' passion for Shakespeare. This passion, which provided him with the highest point of ambition to strive for, coupled with his magnificent gift for seeing things, hearing things, feeling things, etc., and his fine touch with words, renders him as much greater in poetical stature as he falls short in poetical achievement of his contemporaries. His letters really represent his only, or rather his best, adult work.
From the bric-a-brac of the Victorian plethora three poets emerge no less in proportions than their predecessors: Tennyson, Swinburne, and Hopkins. Tennyson, who appears to be returning to that general favour from which the Georgian poets and critics relegated him, is remarkable for a verbal mastery second only to Alexander Pope's: In Memoriam, in particular, shows, like Lycidas, what the gifted word-worker can perform with little or no emotional material.

Swinburne has, for all his only too apparent and unpardonable vagaries, that elemental gush which denotes the major poet. It is timely to evaluate the poetry of Swinburne: all his idiosyncrasies have become unpopular, his mannerisms succeed only in amusing us, and generally speaking the day is now against him: in these circumstances, an evaluation of his work, if it should discover matter of permanent worth in him, could establish his name for all time. Hopkins need only be cursorily treated, for the same reason as Swinburne should be exhaustively treated: viz, the times are with him.

In concluding this series certain salient points in the preceding lectures ought to be reiterated. Of these the most important is this, that the so-called objective and subjective schools of poetry are in no sense
opposed but merely the antitheses of human personality.

Or there are always two ways of looking at anything: firstly as though one were an absolute machine, and this is the classic manner, and secondly as though one were wearing rainbow spectacles, and this is the romantic manner. But in fact one looks at things through a rainbow machine, which is the seven coloured pillar of blood that spins behind the eyeball.
The Finer Frenzy

I suppose that when a man goes mad the mind loses or confuses that element which has hitherto enabled him to appreciate the form of things; I mean the great abstract pattern which at one end rotates in the cycles of the seasons and the orbits of stars, and exists at the other end in the mathematics of the Iambic line or the architecture of a fly's eye. For when the mind collapses it seems that a process of eclipse occurs which fills the mind with those daft poltergeist which wreck the sequence and order of common form. Then the remnants of these iconoclasts may sometimes be gathered together during a lucida intervalla and the documents or drawings of the lunatic appear, like a man's monument erected over his death with his own hands. I recall the case of the schizophrenic, James R., who evolved a private cosmology and half a new language, both in many respects as exhilarating as poetry. The trouble with it, as with Surrealist Art, existed in that the really exciting vencer, the mirage of a new kind of reality, wore off after a third or fourth encounter, and left one with a mere illusion in one's hand; it was never much more than the skin of a raging vacuum. But this poem by Christopher Smart,* written during his insanity, is by no means an ecstasy with a voice and without a shape; in fact, I can think of very few poems with quite so strict a figure when it is observed that the total of 2,000 lines divide into two sections, one of which opens each line with "Let—" and the second of which opens each line with "For—." Then again, the thing is so simple in significance as to be exquisite, for it glorifies things merely by enumerating them in an elaborate doxology:

Let Linnet, house of Linnet, rejoice with Tanos, which is a mean sort of emerald.

Let Hind, house of Hind, rejoice with Pederos Opal down, the walls, as it were, are cracked; but not a few of the details are worth examining. There is plenty of rubbish, there are seemingly pointless remarks, and grotesque absurdities: yet amid all this, one is continually coming across a revealing phrase which tells us what the poet has been thinking, reading, praying for, suffering and enduring." But in fact this poem was not intended, I suspect, to serve as a sort of latterday diary, nor is it best to be understood and evaluated if studied in precisely the same manner as one would study the work of a confessedly sane poet. I suspect that to look for 'revealing phrases' which may merely reveal the occupations of the poet, when he happens to be a lunatic with a mad God-bias, is misguided of Mr. Stead, who could better have remarked on the extraordinary reverberations of such lines as:

Let Alexander rejoice with the Tunny—the worse the time the better the eternity.

Regarded as the rather overblown supplement to the "Song to David" this poem is done a serious injustice, and on this score I diverge from Mr. Stead, who examines it mainly as an illuminating catalogue of the paraphernalia which furnished the great trappings of the "Song to David." I see no reason for denying this poem an independent existence, and indeed I consider that one can do so only at the expense of critical acumen. The verse of "Rejoice in the Lamb" is the verse of the disbalanced mind: it is nevertheless exciting to the balanced mind. The statements of the poem are the statements of a mind to which 'meaning' has acquired an altogether simpler significance: he means whatever he happens to say, instead of endeavouring to say what he hopes to mean. And the intellectual geography of the poem is the geography of the mind when off the rails, blowing its whistles through bedrooms and wedding rings, across continents and down history for the mere exhilaration, for the sight of the curtains flouncing and the long dead rising from their graves.

Let Mandai rejoice with God's Remains.

It is nevertheless apparent that the relationship between this poem and the "Song to David" is roughly that of a notebook to a novel, and I can see nothing to be gained by a comparison between the two which can only succeed in exaggerating the fundamental similarity and decreasing the fundamental dissimilarity. The raciness and the recurrent incon¬sequences, the violent private drive of "Rejoice in the Lamb" reads like a notebook poem written for no one's eyes but the poet's; and this is an invaluable divestment. Indeed I think that this is a more valuable poem than the "Song to David," and not for mostly psychological reasons, but because here we observe the spectacle of a poet, and a very good one, playing an insoluble resolution of this flux into the final in the act of collapsing or rising to that state of intellectual flux which is at once insanity and inspiration. But in the "Song to David" we possess, as we possess it in a thousand examples, the formidable poem.

*Rejoice in the Lamb. By CHRISTOPHER SMART. Cape, 15s. 6d.
APPENDIX F:
BARKER AND YEATS

Contents

1. Rev. of The Herne's Egg by W. B. Yeats, Life and Letters Today, 18, No. 2, Spring 1938, p. 17.

2. 'Ben Bulben Revisited', from P. N. Review 32 (No. 6), April 1983, p. 39.
REVIEWS OF BOOKS

PLAYS

THE HERNE'S EGG. By W. B. Yeats. Macmillan. 5s.

In his new play Mr. Yeats continues to elaborate his love of Gaelic mythology, his passion for human passions, and his magnificent manipulation of words. I think that what is least good in this particular play is the first quality, the rather cumbersome and crepitating machinery of a not too good mythology; what is most admirable the concern with the mutations of human passions; and what is most expert and extraordinary the way in which the words come and move and militate. Thus I consider that the vulnerable plane of the play is that on which it really devolves: the semi-divine plane where the Great Herne, attended by the Priestess Attracta, sits just above the wings and guffaws down at the King of Connaught and his six rapscallion soldiers: for these men are magnificent, and the scene in which they violate Attracta to violate the Great Herne, is conspicuously fine: personally I like this most because I understand the soldiers and the priestess—they become actual creations or creatures—whereas the Great Herne, who merely sits and broods and governs, looses his look of immortal authority when he leaves the bogs and shadows of his native place. He is, as it were, the Jabberwock of Connaught, with a hint of the owl and the phoenix. And against the nothing less than superb humanity of the King and his soldiers, the Herne looks a trifle taxidermic. The character of Attracta the Priestess succeeds in suggesting the real female quality of collusion or double sympathy so well that one feels that she, rather than Congal, King of Connaught, must be the true protagonist. But I have the impression that these implications have arisen almost adventitiously from the play: and this is of course a trick of legerdemain that most good poets quite intentionally exploit. Especially when this particular poet is capable of writing such flesh-and-bone lines as, for instance:

I am Kind Congal of Connaught and of Tara,
That wise, victorious, voluble, unlucky,
Blasphemous, famous, and infamous man.
Fool, take this spit when red with blood,
Show it to the people and get all the pennies.

Indeed, so impressive is the run of reality's blood in the play, the passion tawdry but strong, the logic simple but fundamental, that the image of the Great Herne in the rear and shadow becomes by contrast less impressive than absurd, and less fabulous than sorry. What makes the play a representative work of Mr. Yeats is mainly the words and the characters—but the extraordinary interpenetration of the real and the shadowy, the anæmic myth and the bloody man, the credible and the simply incredible, also shows the hand of a grand if erratic poet.

GEORGE BARKER
GEORGE BARKER

Ben Bulben Revisited

Lie still, old man, lie still,
Nothing's here to disturb you.
The ghosts are gone, the heroes
Lie snoring under the hill.
And the sea-bedded hoydens-
That used so to perturb you,
Yes, you and your monkey gland.
Now sleep and never feel
The hallowing in your hand;
But now the beast is real-
Slouching from Nazareth
With death under its elbow
And filthy on its breath
The ordure of Armageddon.

Old man, old man of the mountain
Only us silly sheep
Wander over the mountain
To populate your sleep.
The statesmen they may rave
And the soldiers roar
And old Adam behave
As foolishly as before
Now that we take our leave
Of every thing we have,
There is nothing to save
Old man, any more,
Only, only the ground and the grave
And the angel at the door.

Old man, old dreaming man
Dream us also asleep
And then perhaps we can
Somehow manage to keep
The dream with which we began:
That vision of walking through
The common or garden wood
Until we came home to
The knowledge of evil and good
Wherein, like a holy house
We sat down at last
And found ourselves free to choose
An agape, or feast
With the black mystical beast.

Was it no more than a dream
This holy house of knowledge
In which we seemed to seem
At liberty to encourage
Either evil or good? Time
And the triumphant fiend
Have blown the house down
Bombed and blasted and blown
The homely house down
And now nothing remains
For all our many pains.

Save us and a few ruins,
Neither evil nor good,
Only wrack and the wreckage, or
And where old Adam stood
Only the brute and its carnage.

Sleep on, old man, among the ruins;
The ruins and the echoes, and the clods;
The small lies and the great crimes, too
The stones and the rocky poem
For they at least belong
By the Ben Bulben of dreams and men.
APPENDIX G:
BARKER AND HOPKINS

Contents


2. 'Sprung Rhythm' (Letter in reply by Guerard, dated 17 April 1942), The Nation, 154, No. 17, April 25 1942, p. 500.

3. 'Sprung Rhythm Defined' (Letter from Barker in reply to Guerard), The Nation, 154, No. 24, June 13 1942, p. 695.


5. 'Tuition to Recruits', Twentieth Century, 4, No. 23, January 1933, p. 13, with introduction to Poetry Supplement.

A Study of Robert Bridges

ROBERT BRIDGES: A STUDY OF TRADITIONALISM IN POETRY. By Albert Guérard, Jr. Harvard University Press. $3.50.

"It has long appeared to me," wrote Yvor Winters, "that Bridges and Hardy must be regarded as the two most impressive writers of poetry in something like two centuries, perhaps since Milton. . . ." Dr. Winters then proposes that on "mature consideration" Bridges will be recognized as greater than Hardy "as a result of greater intellectual scope and a wider diversity of artistic mastery." And by this remarkable process of elimination Robert Seymour Bridges becomes the greatest poet since Milton, not excepting William Blake, William Wordsworth, Alfred Lord Tennyson, Alexander Pope, and Samuel Taylor Coleridge. I can only take it that Dr. Winters reserves to himself a private meaning of the word "impressive" and the phrase "writers of poetry." Possibly Dr. Winters finds himself impressed by nothing but propriety, as when he crowns his encomiums of Bridges with the Abercrombie and Fitch observation: "Bridges . . . is the heir of the universities." Possibly he wishes to distinguish between poets and "writers of poetry." Possibly Dr. Winters finds himself impressed by nothing but propriety, as when he crowns his encomiums of Bridges with the Abercrombie and Fitch observation: "Bridges . . . is the heir of the universities." Possibly he wishes to distinguish between poets and "writers of poetry." I do not know. But I do know that when Robert Hillyer marks, "I believe that The Testament of Beauty is the D R e R e u m N a t u r a of our civilization," this represents a condemnation of our civilization and not a feather in Bridges's cap—no matter what Dr. Hillyer meant. For Robert Bridges is not the greatest poet since Milton, nor is "The Testament of Beauty" as good a poem as "De Rerum Natura"—for the following reason: poets and poems are better than verses and versifiers. The former poet laureate—and I quote Dr. Winters's disciple, Dr. Guérard—"compared with . . . the greatest of poets, was narrow, but his evaluation of expertise was at every point sound, lucid, and complete." This final phrase constitutes the most penetrating and the most cruel judgment on Bridges, for it is, truly, a judgment that the critic should pass on a handbook for tea-up reading rather than a major poet. I defy even Dr. Tillyard to prove that Milton was sound, lucid, and complete. William Shakespeare is unsound, turgid, and incomplete. I know of only one poet to whom these particular three epithets could be applied without immense overtones of irony, and that is not Robert Bridges but Dante Alighieri.

But I would not wish to give the impression that this study is so biased as to vitiate the majority of its evaluations and analyses: in particular Dr. Guérard deserves the applause of the literary for his Appendix on the Prosody of Bridges. This is an exhaustive and sensitive dissection of the poet's technique from which all the log-rolling and the ax-grinding of controversy naturally exclude themselves. The appendix and, indeed, the complete work might be susceptible to accusations of pedantry. (Does it really matter whether Bridges's imitations of classical prosody show no false quantities? Presumably it does, but I can think of no good reason why.) But I observe that an auxiliary characteristic of pedantry is scrupulousness; this appendix is brilliantly meticulous. Where most of the elusions of this scrupulousness occur, they are, unfortunately, the more noticeable: I refer to Dr. Guérard's citations from A. E. Housman—who, as it seems to me, truly possesses all the merits that the critic arrogates for Bridges—and Gerard Hopkins. Thus Dr. Guérard, in dealing with Housman's translation from Sappho, dissimulates it as a kind of thing unworthy of the talents of Bridges; "facile and obvious" he remarks of these exquisite verses that begin, "The weeping Pleiades wester." As against this minor masterpiece Dr. Guérard adduces a lyric of Bridges's:

The tall pines were sighing,
O'ercut and chill was the day;

nor does it occur to him that singing pines and o'ercut chill days have become a trifle shoddy as poetic apparatus. The weeping Pleiades, I feel fairly certain, will go on westering; but these pines are going to sigh only a little longer. For where Housman is simple Bridges is crude, and where Housman is moving Bridges is forced; the comparison of the two poems mentioned above elicits this incontestably, to me at least. For the universities to which Bridges was heir left him an inheritance that most poets are much better without—namely, an intellectual self-consciousness that paralyzes the poem even before it is written.

As for Dr. Guérard's lapses of scrupulousness concerning Hopkins, to what removes of aloofness can he have retired that permit him to commit such misdeemeanors as, "The greatness of this [the sonnet No. I'll not, carmine-comfort] and other poems by Hopkins does not alter the fact that no other poet has been able to make a similar use of the medium . . . ." The obvious conclusion is that Dr. Guérard has omitted to read any poetry published since the year 1910. The number of poets who have employed sprung rhythm—which Hopkins never claimed to have "invented," as Dr. Guérard assumes, but only to have restored—might conceivably help him to see that all sorts of extraordinary things have been happening since the death of Bridges.

George Barker
**Spung Rhythm**

*Our Sir*: I admire George Barker for raising the question in his review of my book on Robert Bridges in your April issue. And I should scarcely want Mr. Barker's poetry or my criticism to fare differently at the hands of one who considers Shakespeare "unsound, turgid, and incomplete." From his remarks I judge Mr. Barker to be a forthright admirer of the English university wits, for whom "A Hope for Poetry" and "New Bearings in English Poetry" are central critical documents. Between this anachronistic and currently fashionable tradition and my own unfashionable traditionalism lies a gulf which a brief letter can hardly hope to cross. However, Mr. Barker makes two assertions which I feel bound to answer.

1. Mr. Barker accuses me of adducing "against" what he calls a "minor masterpiece" of Housman, Bridge's lyric "The hill pines were sighing." I do nothing of the kind. After noting that Bridges is sometimes facile and obvious in the Housman manner, I criticize "the hill pines were sighing" for its unvaried intensity, I do not compare it with Housman's poem.

2. Mr. Barker concludes that I have "omitted to read any poetry published since 1930." I see no reason to furnish Mr. Barker with a reading list or a bibliography of my reviews, but if he wishes to pay the established Harvard tuition fees I shall be glad to read some contemporary poetry with him.

The basis for Mr. Barker's conclusion —my statement that no subsequent poet has been able to make a "similar use" of Hopkins's "wrenched form" of sprung rhythm—is worth discussing. Mr. Barker points to the number of poets who have employed sprung rhythm since 1930 as a proof of my omissions. My main point was that a very cautious use of sprung rhythm is a means of metrical variation—such a cautious use as one finds in Wyatt, Jonson, and Bridges—is more valuable as a permanent influence than the extreme violence of Hopkins's meters, in which sprung rhythm is used as a metrical norm. I should be the first to agree that not only the poets of the thirties but many earlier poets use occasional sprung rhythm. But the question is whether Hopkins's own meters have been successfully imitated.

The common mistake is to narrow Hopkins's general and wide influence on the language of recent poets to a metrical influence. Thus crammed imagery, startling ellipsis, and a general tightness and nervousness of line are often described as "Hopkins's sprung rhythm." The illusion is strengthened where diction is actually borrowed:

Mr. March, you do with your movements master and rock
With wing-whirl, whale-wallow, silent budding of cells...

These lines of W. H. Auden's, which illustrate what C. Day Lewis calls "mal-digested influence," certainly have the Hopkins flavor. But they are neither Hopkins's sprung rhythm nor anyone else's. If variation in degree of accent is recognized, both lines are iambic hexameter, with the third, fourth, and fifth feet inverted. If the lines are sprung rhythm, half of Meredith and nineteenth of Browning are sprung rhythm.

What in fact one finds in Auden and many of his contemporaries is a sporadic use of sprung feet or sprung lines as variations on the accentual-syllabic norm. This is also Bridges's practice. But what one almost never finds in sprung rhythm used as a constant prosodial basis, as in Hopkins. Recent poets, who never attain Hopkins's breathless rush of sound, normally compensate for accentual gain or syllabic loss somehow else in the line or in an adjoining line. Thus their experiments appear to me healthily tame. The sprung feet in the following examples are italicized:

Rest from loving and be living...

Fallen is fallen past retrieving

The unique diter dawn's dove

Arrowing down feathered with fire.

(C. Day Lewis)

A turning page of shine and sound, the day's 

mace 

(MacNeice)

Where we went in the black hull no light 

moved 

But a calf white pranced along the restless wave...

(Tatie)

The ambiguity of the last example is typical; there is no syllabic loss and the accentual gain might be questioned. Though the ruggedness of Dylan Thomas's diction sometimes gives an impression of sprung rhythm, Hart Crane alone among modern poets attained some of Hopkins's peculiar effects. But his verse was not technically sprung rhythm, and some of his own Hopkinsian lines were written before Mr. Winters introduced Crane to Hopkins's poetry.

Mr. Barker will no doubt accuse me of further pedantry in thus insisting on a strict definition of Hopkins's sprung rhythm. But those who speak so blandly of sprung rhythm and of Hopkins's influence would do well to recognize the precise meaning of the term and to explain what this very wide influence consists.

ALBERT GUERARD, JR.
Cambridge, Mass., April 17

**Sprung Rhythm Defined**

*Dear Sir*: I have just had the pleasure of reading Mr. Guerard's letter to you on the subject of sprung rhythm (in *The Nation* for April 25), and in spite of a conviction that these matters should properly be conducted through private rather than public correspondence, I would like to point out that in all my remarks on the subject of the use of sprung rhythm by poets since 1930 I had in mind the following definition:

"Sprung rhythm is the most natural of all things. For (1) it is the rhythm of common speech and of written prose, when rhythm is perceived in them. (2) It is the rhythm of all but the most monotonously regular music, so that in the words of chanters and refrain singers, written down, it becomes rhythmic. (3) It is found in all rhymes, weather saws, and so on; because, however these may have been once made in running rhythm, the terminations having dropped off, by the change of language, the stresses come together and so the rhythm is sprung. (4) It arises in common verse when reversed or counterpointed, for the same reason."

This definition I take from the Author's Preface to the "Poems" of Gerard Manley Hopkins, edited by Robert Bridges and pretty scandalously edited at that.

GEORGE BARKER
Brooklyn, N. Y., June 5
That tomorrow is also a day,  
That I must leave my bed and face the music.  
As all the others do who with a grin  
Shake off sleep like a dog and hurry to desk or engine  
And the fear of life goes out as they clock in  
And history is reasserted.  
Spider, spider, your irony is true;  
Who am I—or do—to demand oblivion?  
I must go out to-morrow as the others do  
And build the falling cage;  
Which has never fallen, thanks.  
Not to any formula, red tape or institution,  
Not to any creeds or banks,  
But to the human animal's endless courage.  
Spider, spider, spin  
Your register and let me sleep a little,  
Not now in order to end but to begin  
The task begun so often.  

LOUIS MACNEICE

BIOGRAPHY OF ORPHEUS-APOLLO

I was walking down Kensington High Street  
Recalling the occasion when at Bournemouth  
William Wordsworth accosted me in the street,  
Remembering also the time at Minterne Magna  
When Edmund my Spenser spoke to me of Truth,  
Generally reflecting upon coincidence, when strange  
My imagination than, Orpheus-Apollo  
Took my arm and said to me Follow.  

Remembering Virgil who had the run of Hell  
Revealing visions to my grand parent, I  
Kept at his heel as he lead me to Notting Hill.  
Here he halted and as he did so I saw  
History crashing its ratios in his eye.  
He glanced up. I attended and he said,  
I am perfectly aware that I ought to be dead,  
Therefore I bring you here to hear me die.
Why here, I answered, Notting Hill has pansies,
Prostitutes, cinemas, cafes, but no tomb.
I come here, he said, because the bright frenzies
Of whores and pansies, the dark songs in cafes,
The angel in the cinema, go to form
Song and dance sketches of my life.
I come here, he continued, Orpheus-Apollo,
To find a life and make a death follow.

Trapped and trammelled in life from that
Appalling morning when I dropped on Mount
Rydal or Olympus from God's throat,
Poet I was on whom grief spun its point.
Life for a word is grief. I can count
Grief on my body like a smother of leaf
Under which, crushed like birds, I lie
Dying the agony which will not die.

Lyrics like cups I tried in which to catch
That Freudian poison, to drain from
My horrible body on its bed of ache.
Love I tried like heroin, but found
Life dogged me there, gazing out with my face
From the girl's guts. I was bound
By flesh on the fire of my own fate
But never my ash fell to the ground.

I am not me, for I am you—
Orpheus-Apollo the so-called poet.
The finger of the fire I knew
Wrote life on your back in pain.
Wordsworth's age, turning to salt like Lot's,
Marlowe's dragon-fly pinned against death,
These make two of my postures of pain,
That I shall suffer again, suffer again.

But I'm you and the hundred succeeding you's,
Except I die here by the axles of cars, or
Unlikely lightning. I'm brimming with the terrible blues
Love cannot make gold or poems dye with words.
Too much life, too much life makes sore
Like too much love. O wear widow weeds
My world, for me to-night. I'm coming home,
Poems I have written, to your empty rooms.
Then he stopped speaking, and I saw him die.

GEORGE BARKER
This issue contained a poetry supplement entitled 'Twentieth Century Verse', with an introduction which read:

This supplement represents a neutral zone, or - how shall we describe it? a breeding ground, an allotment, a laboratory site - at any rate a definite clearing, partitioned off from, but within easy reach of, the ever-restless politico-economic and politico-philosophic sector upon right and left. This plot we have caused to be furnished with strange structures, the delicate aerial erections, which you will see here, and strictly all that remains for us to do now is to cut the ribbon and declare them open to public inspection.

Then, on pp. 17-18, we find Barker's 'Tuition to Recruits':

You know that we everyone must sometime go
Down below
to the grave and slow
perambulation of our onetime foe:

Get your stiletto
bayonet typehammer
Under the opposing
hammering pulse -
One pulse, your pulse
must pulse, if one pulse must go.

And we all know that everyone must sometime go
Stab upwards and utterly be physically
Destructive, toe to toe fight the foe o
Ravenously contest but remember the best
Or you'll go below before your time.

Man may be the dutchman but underwater
subaqueously gloat in
Darksome schools:
Behold the elliptical split Moon whose flittering
lingerie in noiseless spirals is all to glitter,
about him wound, within him time and conscripts
Through his moons, white wombs

(to enquire profoundly into
One's own genitals, Love.)

or the greek, spaniard, mormon a listless platitude, but
the international cosmopolitan surface
In the moon-beams rocks and flats
smoothly rather similar to something mown or unsmooth,
But, brother, below, the same old phallic fishes
Come and go, from pristine crag and fish. Brother
Do not bother, for above
In emblazoned clouds rests our incestuous
Universal timeless common mother,
For many years we hope longer than tomorrow.
POETRY

EPISTLE

When instruments of music ornament my ear
I hear the silence they decorate like dancers
Deligning the night with bright dresses; when I see
Birds inscribing the sky or boats on the sea,
The element they move on means the most to me.
So at human I marvel not but I admire
The zone of death on which he writes fire.

Morning touches mountains with lines of light
Making the mountains swivel, but I know
Mountain is immobile on the turning sphere,
The sphere turns on the immobile year.
So the gay chaos I see has at its rear
Rendering it real, creating light with shade,
The scope of death into which it fades.

O man Ashburnham blazing on a darkness,
Blossoming on a bough of time, burning
Summer strong seventy summers, how fine
I watch you at the pitch of life shine,
Fomenting glory when Sorrow throws brine.
O man Ashburnham in the suburban grove
Make it marvellous with flowering grief!

Look at the lilac lacing of frost, it writes
The lines of living on the face of white.
But when I walk out in the winter, what,
What is it seen but the long plain sheen?
So is it life is lost like the frost's designs
Seen in a distance when only white is seen.
O so few are, and so many have been!

Or when I lie my life down on a bed
I am more happy than rest can render me.
For what I know is the temporary surrender
When the blood ebbs and the body tenders
Triumphs of day to nothing in the night.
And then, when through its ripples to a calm,
My mind is still, I have the last balm.

The lake from which I write, lying between
The Dolomite mountains like a shiver of silver,
Shows me the points and the paradise sky
And my wraith face gazing again as I
Look down for the life I have lost before I die.
Heaven in water lies below me—Death
Drowned in the lake has heaven underneath.

Then when I go walking through valley and field
Images of felicity gather behind my eyes:
Men hoeing and men digging and ragged women
Waving long good-byes to men in lorries,
Or boys wrestling by the roadside. And my eyes
Register the images of joy or pain, and thus
Life creates its symbols to coerce us.

Happy, I cry, gay birds! And then I open
The eyes that saw them sailing through clouds
No more than a moment before like points of joy,
And now are stars of sorrow in my day
Presaging fall when seen in a dark mood.
Happy, I cry, gay birds! vaulting and veering
Not knowing and not caring and not fearing.

Now agony like a twisting graph inscribes
My epitaph on the ground I live on.
The ruts I cut up in the meadow tell
My pain and panic like a pell-mell
Scoring on life the diagram of hell.
So like the baited bear or the blind boxer
I and my million agonize for the joker.

O now I want the great remove from things
That gives the ecstasy of the aeroplane
Not knowing and not caring and not fearing;
Sure only of the death to which I’m bearing
And the end of it all. Life disappearing
Like the invisible writing meaning nothing.
Fading to leave the message nothing clearer.

Coil of wind toiling in a vacuum
Loud like an echo, bleeding at the centre,
Half a wing broken, flapping at an angle,
No good to guide me, I come down the century.
Like a star’s sigh or an eagle’s tear,
Gathering the garbage and a fallen fruit.
O good-bye friends with whom I was not here!

GEORGE BARKER
APPENDIX II:
BARKER AND AUDEN

Contents

1. Writer's Notebook, 1931, in the possession of Elizabeth Smart. Description and extracts.


A notebook of 137 pages, approximately 8" x 5½"
with black cover and red corners, in the possession of
Elizabeth Smart, the date 1931 inscribed on the inside
cover. What follows are extracts, with the relevant
page number in the right hand margin.

The method of style of Immaculate Conception
and Baptismal Font is not correctly adaptable to
poems of different rhythms: it can only be used
for subjects in which the rhythm is more essential
than anything else. And as, in such a poem as
Foundation Piece, where there is no rhythm, it
cannot be used anytime: there must be found a
different method for such as Foundation Piece.

Note for Reflection
Kiss or two boulders grinding osculate.

Stand up walk about play
occasionally laugh
sit down
drink and eat: love's
kiss as two boulders osculate
endure the pain of

For what he insists on is not the charm or the
brilliance of the note but exactitude of tone and
of line, the obedience of the key to the will, the
subordination of every detail to the Idea that
governs the movement.

Beethoven.
All you do is apply this to poetry and you get a more exactly explained Robert Graves and Riding.

To render the impression by the sound and construction of the words: and by the images associated with them rather than with their own actual images

thus to describe a maypole the two words: skipping happiness.

Caesura? To hesitate, stop the hesitant stop at the end [sic] or in the middle of a line

cesura caesura (cesura) a syllable cut off at the end of a word at the completion of a foot: a pause in a verse

clotted with consonants

Good: give me over to all the vowels

The completion of a poem means its utter separation from the poet G. & R.

In the same way the birth of a child is its separation from the mother.

B, P, V, W, V - labial
Z, C, F, M, S - sibilant
D, L, R, T - sibilant
G, K, C, Q - hand sound
M, N.

These following eleven shall be devoted to Blake; because I believe that he has the fire clearer and clearer in him: and because I must have something of him about me to remind me continually of my dispicable [sic] sieve.
He was ignorant or careless of any policy of self
control

"No man of sense can think that an imitation of the
objects of nature in the act of painting, or that such
imitation (which any one may easily perform) is worthy
of notice - much less that such an art should be the
pride of a nation"
William Blake.

"Pope's metaphysical jargon of rhyming" Gorgeous. 72

I think it good to gather here those of my beliefs and
technical deliberations into a kind of understandable
clear unity:

1. The definite and concrete is better than the
indefinite and abstract. This I take so usually
for granted that I almost forget it: anyhow, it
is either in you to prefer one or the other, or
it is not.

2. There can be no such thing as sentences in a
poem; the poem is one, and cannot be subdivided
into parts.

... The poem should be swiftly continuous; and
such stops as the meaning or personality of the
poem require are provided either by the repetition
of the last word, or a space, or comma or
semicolon.

3. Since alliteration and repetition have been as
near exhaustion as they can be, I think that I
shall not back anything on them. I prefer the
rhyming of vowels, or consonants, and to place
greater stress than others do on prepositions,
conjunctions, and other parts of speech which are
generally either ignored or stuffed in to make
5. A long word is really always more musical and has usually such sweet changes of sounds in it (which all run into one another). For this I prefer it.

5. There appear to be two divisions of poets today: one set who repeat and use little punctuation; and emphasize the harmony of words; of which set Graves and Riding lead. And others headed by (apparently) Lowrfells who write freely and usually to some length in a more Romantic way.

To me it seems that they are an outcome of a long line of Futurists Imagists Vorticists and Dadaists.

Poets, then who need the support of a system are obliged to adopt not only the workshop method of science, but the whole philosophic viewpoint of science, which is directly opposite to the point of view of poetry.

Graves and Riding

The real poet is a poet by reason of his creative vision of the poem.

Consider G. M. Hop. did he not attain proper expression of himself really through a very lovely system?

The difference between a bad artist and a good is, that the bad seems to copy a great deal, the good one does copy a great deal. Blake.

Reading of Fra Angelico reminds me that years and years ago sometime about my ninth or tenth year there was a little brown book passed round the house with perfectly coloured reproductions of his pictures; and would recollect that I would sit and look at them and
think of nothing but how exquisitely and prettily they were coloured and how gentle a loveliness the feeling was with which they rendered themselves to me.

Benson's Rosetti.

Today I lay on a bank of Thames by Sonning oh the sun was shining too goldenly and I so lay that I could see only the milkanceram clouds which were tiny and puffing, companion to the sun, was revealed a vision of an angel with a countenance which considered me sweetly; and he was of such a marvellous size, as he came down like a water pouring from a vase, that he could gather the biggest trees into his hands like flowers and touch me as I would touch the biggest bird of paradise.

Blake finds my weakness every time; the man not only wrote like an angel: he was an angel: he said:

I must create a system, or be enslaved by another man's

I will not Reason and Compare: my business is to create

(Jerusalem)

which is just what has been rambling in my mind for a couple of years

Vowels are beautiful for a longer time than consonants: often the vowel lasts 20 times as long as a consonant.
REVIEWS
I'm not sure what you're asking.

The text appears to be a mixture of letters and numbers, possibly a fragment from a larger document. It's difficult to decipher the meaning without context. The text includes various symbols and characters that are not clearly identifiable as standard language elements.

If you have any specific questions or need assistance with a particular segment of the text, please let me know, and I'll do my best to help.
POETRY AND CONTEMPORARY INERTIA

by George Barker

BY THE PHRASE CONTEMPORARY INERTIA I DESIGNATE THE CONDITION WHICH SOCIETY TODAY IS LYING IN, THE INABILITY TO ORIGINATE A DECISIVE MOVEMENT INTO THE FUTURE. WHAT D. H. LAWRENCE CALLED A PURPOSEFUL STEP. IT IS A PROPOSITION, FOREMOST IN THE CONSCIOUSNESS OF MOST PEOPLE THAT WE ARE TODAY VACILLATING ON THE EXHAUSTED EXTREMITY OF AN ERA THE BODY OF WHICH HAS GONE: IT MUST ALSO INTENSELY CONCERN THOSE PEOPLE, NOT THAT WE PROLONG THE EXTREMITY, BUT THAT ONE FOR ALL WE ABANDON IT AND PROCEED IN FULL KNOWLEDGE OF WHAT WE ARE DOING, ON TO THE POSTERIOR DIVISION OF COMPLETE CONDITION.

We are not making transition between the past and the future, which is the only reason for the collective present. We are seeking to be nostalgic after pre-war comfortability, and scared of the severity through which the new conditions must come.

I shall, however, try to use in this essay such words as imply that what I am writing about is not simply a secular and temporal matter, but, at the same time, a matter which has a profound relation with parts of us less easily comprehensible.

The inertia, as far as I can analyse it, does not appear in any way to be economic, or political, but it might be very mildly religious: it is certainly nearer to the undecipherable quality which animates human beings rather than to the qualities which are animated.

Poetry is not as prominent in these days as it ought to be, as it has reason to be. It seems to me that this decisive movement into the future could more concordantly be accomplished if accompanied by the passionate exhortation of poetry. This can in no degree of remove mean that the obviation of social and economic troubles consists in expatiating verses concerning the superperfection of national or international ambitions. But if it were possible that a majority of individuals in each country could be purely educated in the national or international ideals, and efforts which must be expanded to attain these ideals, by the consequential unanimity or concentration, the movement into the future could be practically accelerated.

The education of this majority entails the simplification and repopularisation of poetry, which again entails a readjustment of the precepts at present underlying our serious poetry. It also means that poetry shall become a passionate and profound instrument of national or international propaganda.

Both of these readjustments may appear pervert to some poets and admirable to others. Those to whom it may appear pervert are men who cannot be contemporary. The poet will poetise not for the solution of any personal problem, but for the solution of a national or perhaps international problem. And in the same manner as the personal problem which the poet in the past has been forced to solve for himself has been an embodiment of the spiritual and the emotional, so the problem which we shall endeavour to solve for the community is also spiritual and emotional. The poet is a poet because he is aware that in him the community is identified and articulate. Thus poetry will cease to be vitiated by the liabilities of the individual, and will be simply elucidated by his personal disinterested obsession with words.

Presuming that one writes what one is compelled to write for the benefit of other people, poetry, to be effectively valuable, must be intrinsically impersonal, and in verbal and grammatical choice quite personal. It is about the best compromise as far as verse is concerned that can be established between the individual and his obligations to all other individuals.

'The poet' Michael Roberts wrote 'must be abreast of his own times.' He must also be the precursor into the future of his own times: he must be 'the fingertip of the consciousness of his period.' He must be profoundly didactic and moral: I believe it is at the present time enormously vital that his didactics and morals be emphatically lucid, since what we do not seem to have today, apart from the urge to move along, is the vision of what we must move along towards. We have a semi-circular future of which no more than a bare score of degrees are nearer to the ultimate to which we must attain. It is the obligation of the poet, among other things, to provide men with some notion of where precisely lies the correct destination, and some sort of a diagram about how best to get there.

In our contemporary inertia the sound of a few people reciting verse has become distressingly theatrical and embarrassing. We are prone to distrust poets for poetasters, since it is rather difficult to understand why men should be tunefully irrelevant when momentous and dark premonitions appear everywhere around them. It is this distrust of the poet which proves the presence of inertia. When poets can impress their poetry intensely into us we may be sure of one thing and that is we do not suffer from spiritual castration. And what I am trying to do is to assist people as much as I can to see that distrust of poets does not postulate that they are giving cause for the distrust. It is the right time and the right place, now and here, for poets to produce larynxes and to lead people. By the production of larynxes I mean it is time for the repopularisation of poetry, the time to discard poetic esotericism; it is the time not perhaps for that universality which Althus Huxley considers is cherished only by lunatics or conscious
supermen,' but at least for the nationalism which Milton chose.

Obviously our poetic esotericism is in some way similar to our social esotericism. We seem almost to have excised the social illusion: we do not seem to have questioned the identical illusion which asphyxiates poetry. Again, if the intellectual and imaginative liveliness of a period is confined to a few despotic mentalities, the remainder, to whom only intermittent vibrations manage to reach, can only induce a liveliness in their minds and imaginations by imitating the callisthenics of the few. I am certain that comprehension of the psychic callisthenics of poetry does not depend on anything but the state of imaginative and emotional sensibility and sympathy. Why either sympathy or sensibility should be conceived as cultivated by education, when both are so plainly things either implanted and innate, or not at all, I cannot pretend to know. As our universities cannot by schedule turn out serious poets, so they cannot purposively turn out minds and imaginations specifically attuned to poetic appreciation. This was proved by Mr. I. A. Richards in Practical Criticism.

It seems optimistically probable to me that the next twenty or thirty years might experience a reappearance of poets and audiences for poets such as have not been known for a good many decades. Poetry by reason of its immediate derivation from some constituent of us which we do not even now comprehend: except through poetry, we do nothing but resume its prominence, providing active poets feel it imperative that they convey it there.
We need a new mature poetry divested of smarmy verbal beauty -
oh beautiful [sic] young comrades - of technical knacks to seduce
the peruser, of striving after expression of contemporary
impurities, for example Communism, which is nowhere near its
maturity today. (The trouble about poetising an immature thing is
that the poet never treats a thing as itself, but always, or nearly
always, as his projected desires about that thing. Get this if you
can into your heads, and let them write about what they want.
Communism to be, not what they think it is.) We need a new mature
poetry, one that is to be born straight out of the head in its
maturity, in stark nude debunked simplicity. A poetry perhaps a
shade nearer the white (are you not English poets) than Lawrence's
dark visions. Perhaps wearing too a loin cloth, as poets have a
habit, I understand of amplifying public sounds. Anyhow, it can't
matter two hoots what I say I want it like, so long as I am
understood to have stated something true, for myself at least,
obviously not something spasmodic in the soul, but brought about by
an inexorable series of psychic hungers.

So much hot air, the comment is superfluous. The hotter the
better, he replies. New poetry. Mature poetry. Now what, by these
adjectives, do I mean? Here, consider Spender:

Not to you I sighed. No, not a word.
We climbed together. My feeling was
Formed with the hills. It was like trees unheard
And monumental sign of country peace.
But next day stumblng, panting up dark stairs,  
Rushing in room and door flung wide, I knew.  
Oh empty walls, book-carcases, blank chairs  
All splintered in my head and cried for you.

The first verse contains, or carries, hints of a dexterity new,  
as far as I know, to English verse. The second verse halts like  
Rupert Brooke, is immature, and entirely bad. As a poem the two  
verses entirely fail. And similarly, somehow or other, Spender's  
poetry as an entirity fails. It begins, so to speak, youthfully and  
splendidly potential, to conclude in tubs of bathos. Perhaps it  
were more clearly comprehended put thus: the poems are precisely the  
right nutriment for the right man; they originate, no matter how  
genetically, growths quite new: Spender himself seems unable  
correctly to encourage or attend them. But, for the poet who has  
got lying inside him an abundance of lyrical experiences, the hand  
proper to attend these innovations and amplify them, and, more than  
these, a 'heart beating with 1933' and onwards, for him, it seems,  
the immortality.

'Writing poetry is an anti-social activity', Spender affirms in  
the Five Notes on W. H. Auden, (The Twentieth Century, July  
1931). By what series of mental or imaginative hops he arrived at  
this dogma, I do not recall: but for a poet of his kind (he in his  
poetry apparently makes efforts at building up in people the  
ambition to build up), it is a conclusion wearing a slight miasma of  
the insincerely dramatic.

Writing cheap bad poetry is and always has been an anti-social  
activity. Writing good poetry, in the sense that good poetry is that  
poetry helping society get straight about itself, is in all ways  
beneficial to society: in fact, poetry perhaps can be of greater
assistance to society than can the film, because as yet at least, the film fails to illumine explanatorily the deeper labyrinths of that nonsensical mystery the soul. The poet, I repeat, can at this point in time, lead people, 'society', with more optimism, straighter, than any other sort of human person. All other sorts of persons have failed, left us circuitously wandering. The man Lawrence might, as Murry says, have led us. God knows why, but he did not, although as dead observe him followed in larger companies than as alive.

Spender, Auden, and the group of poets supplementing them, may possess a vision of our destination, but I am dubious. They wear too flippantly the laurel: as it were, look minors. From this I think derives the disappointment of Spender's Poems. (Observe the flautist under the dark cracking tree, not worrying very much). And yet, on second thoughts, one is thankful that in Spender so little as hesitantly flickered on to a new thoroughfare into the future (since the present thoroughfare apparently is too straight, too narrow for us), so little as denounced by describing it the heterogeneity of contemporary faith, or so little as contributed one chorus to encourage us to bang our way forward and through, he surely were more worthy to receive the title, 'the lyricist of this poetical renascence.'

Poem XXIII, 'I think continually of those who are truly great', refutes in major proportion the contrasting duality of fire and bathetic that I find in the Poems as a work. Unfortunately it is somewhat too long to introduce here.

The first verse consists in six lines of exciting if conventional delina, and two closing lines of surpassing poetry:
And who hoarded from the Spring branches
The desires falling across their bodies like blossoms.

The second verse, five lines of superlative rhetorical verse,
and two anticlimactic lines of - as against the preceding lines -
prosaic overstatement:

Never to allow gradually the traffic to smother
With noise and fog, the flowering of the Spirit.

Near the snow, near the sun, in the highest fields,
See how these names are feted by the waving grass
And by the streamers of white cloud
And whispers of wind in the listening sky.
The names of those who in their lives fought for life,
Who wore at their hearts the fire's centre.
Born of the sun, they travelled a short while toward the sun
And left the vivid air signed with their honour.

That, the concluding verse, with pride shows that Spender has
inherited practically every accomplishment that makes an English
poet. He stands in direct derivation from Wilfred Owen, the young
Tennyson, Keats, and the bright line which will disappear when?

George Barker.
NOTE ON THE DIALECTICS OF POETRY

George Barker

There are certain obvious material ends to be achieved, no matter what the system of belief by which we achieve them. Such as, that war is to be extirpated, that some men ought not to starve whilst others surfeit, etc. From such elementary agreement the establishment of material conditions at least adequate to all men ought to follow. And with the assistance of the poet, no less than with that of the politician, such a state of existence may sometimes be brought about. If he is nothing else the poet is human; if he is human he is conscious of the disparity and schism which jeopardise human life; and as poet the onus is upon him of protesting as best he may against these things. Provided as he is with a specifically acute instinct about human desires and aspirations, by which he can render them a voice, he must acknowledge the obligation upon him of stating these desires and requirements in language confessing its refusal to be denied. As much as he may be the crooner in the mansion the poet is the voice of the servile, by which their need can be heard—that is, those needs so profound and so familiar that the sufferers themselves cannot voice them. I do not so much mean that the poet nowadays can write only about the poor. But what I do mean is that the poet cannot now escape the poor without betraying his nature as poet; any more than he can escape the possibility of catastrophe by war without betraying his nature as intelligent. Both of these matters exist, and dictate the angle of glance at reality. About both the poet as well as other people must endeavour to act.

But before the tendencies of this note begin to indicate specific political opinion it would be as well to examine the one or two fundamental assumptions about human behaviour upon which all political conviction erects itself. Thus, although their particular policies must and do vary, yet the assumptions common to opposed parties are the same.
Namely, that what they propose to do is worth doing, and that the achievements of the species, in the face of ultimate extinction, are laudable if absurd. On a consequent sense of resignation (I think the only tolerable attitude for the conscientious artist) it is possible and necessary to extemporise a purely temporary and practical attitude which, as against the fundamental 'spiritual' attitude, we term the immediate or 'political' attitude. So far from it being impossible to hold mutually exclusive beliefs, complementary in that they are mutually exclusive, this appears to be the only method by which the human can render tolerable both his immediate circumstances and the circumstance of his inherent insignificance. Because in the long run it does not greatly matter is not good enough reason for permitting the undesirable. It is pleasant as well as natural to eliminate the unpleasant. If we disclaim the everlasting we may all the more passionately claim the immediate present. The fact that within a number of years one must necessarily secede does not prevent one from endeavouring to create the 'immortal,' any more than it prevents the enjoyment of the wonderful ephemeral. And this is not so much the feeling of the complete materialist (if this term is kept strictly to its meaning) as of the incomplete transcendentalist. The contradiction of the beliefs one holds (that endeavour is absurd but inevitable) implies an element outside calculation: and it is upon this element of the incalculable that the major artist relies. The systems work miraculously and ludicrously in front of his face: he resigns himself to their miracle and absurdity. This the materialist does not do.

The elementary hope that the poet militant may succeed sooner or later in ameliorating the condition of the human is no less false a hope than that the professional politician may succeed in this. I can compare the kind of gift intellectually exploited by the poet to the kind of gift physically exploited by the acrobat; and the likelihood that the acrobat may some day succeed in improving the physical condition of the human is only more powerful than the likelihood that sooner or later the poet may contribute to the improvement of the human environment. Just how unsatisfactory in its result direct recommendation on how to act can be, is obvious from the Decalogue: but I consider that coercion by circumlocution looks more hopeful. The writing of simple or even subtle propaganda poems would probably have much the same effect as violent acts by over-impetuous communists; they invoke mainly the amusement of the neutral. But I take it to be the object of propaganda to convert: acts, therefore, or writings, which tend to alienate, or which actually do alienate, those whom they endeavour to convert, cannot be called good. For this reason the writing of direct propaganda poems seems to me at present inadvisable and misguided: although the negative propaganda to be achieved by illustrating merely the processes of decline inherent in capitalist society ought to succeed initially.

If we accept it as probable that the poet experiences insights into, or instincts about, the human person which the acrobat, for instance, does not experience, then it is obvious that he has obligations to the human person which the acrobat does not have. Thus it follows that the poet, more so than the acrobat, whose activity is confined, is obliged to exercise some thought on the problem of political action, and to reconcile his function as an instrument not only of aesthetic excitement but also as an instrument of political discrimination.

When I refer, as I have done, to the 'special instinct' of the poet about human persons I am using a term which ought to be at least examined if not defined. I am not claiming for the poet a sort of spiritual clairvoyance, permitting him to see in the behaviour of the human all sorts of motives and all sorts of designs which only he can see. Perhaps it is possible, darkly and intermittently, for him to catch glimpses like a phantasmagoria of those designs. But such glimpses do not illuminate him in the same way that the 'special instinct' about human things illuminates and stimulates him. For this special instinct, which, I think, could be described as the angle of the detached and tragic, the attitude of the resigned and neutral, supplies the poet with that absolute negative on which the positive of life can gloriously or ingloriously inscribe itself. It is the condition in which the chameleon prevails. It is the region of the supernaturally Newtonian. It is No Man's Land.

What I am trying to say is that the special instinct of the poet is not particularly active but generally passive, like the plane of vision of an elevated spectator, which enables him
PURPOSE
to observe the parties on both sides of the wall, the width of the wall itself, and the vulnerable point. It is immediately related to the statement of Mr. Herbert Read that "Judgment may follow, but should never precede or become enbroided in the act of poetry." But this statement does no more than advance a particular and fairly simple manifestation of the poetically passive. It is also a dubious statement in the sense that any statement which attempts to dictate to, rather than to describe, the act of poetry, is dubious. It is comparatively simple to instance poems which rely to greater or lesser degrees on the function of judgment as an element in the poem; and these poems, for instance, The Ancient Mariner, cannot, therefore, be condemned.

The function of judgment may conceivably precede or become enbroided with or follow the act of poetry; but the act of poetry must be performed in a sphere removed from the function of judgment if it is to succeed as an act of poetry. Judgment, like passion, or like prejudice, may contribute to the writing of a poem; but these are no more than the habiliments of poetry; the body itself exists in a different sphere, like a vacuum. This vacuum is the 'instinct' of the poet about the world, the sense, if the thing can be described, of the supremely resigned. It is the plane of vision that the circle achieves. Between the periphery, which is the region of the poetic, and the centre point, which is the final poem, any number of brilliant ephemera—judgment, passion, love—may intervene to be caught in the rays of poetry; and, indeed, it is almost like flies in invisible amber that the extrinsic elements of the poem lie and are fixed in poetry.

From this it might be supposed that the instinct of the poet about the world and about human persons could succeed in little more than catching flies; but this, in fact, is not so. The poet, by reason of his nature, contemplates the world and the human from a point towards which the masks of these two do not face. I am once again not repeating, that motives hidden to stockbrokers are necessarily obvious to the poet; they may be, but if they are it is because the poet, the particular poet, happens to possess a little intellectual acumen. What I am saying is that the poet, because, as a poet, he exists in a different region and is not susceptible, as a poet, to the motives of the normal human—because he exists spiritually in the passive and not in the active—sees

THE DIALECTICS OF POETRY

things, in the pure act of conceiving poetry, as a vitally interested neutral, or possibly like God.

His spiritual state is passive and negative; his intellectual condition is neutral; and his emotional atmosphere is chaos. The relation of these conditions is dialectical. His emotions, enbroided with things, events and people, correspond to the physical or political. His intellect insists on the absurdity of all effort. And the product of this antithesis is the passivity of spirit which can be described as the no man's land where the imagination and the mundane cross.
I think that a style not "of its age" is to that precise degree, hypothetically
historically.

Kinna once wrote, "a perfect style must be of its age".
How important to you is that kind of temporal responsibility?

In your volume _In Memory of David Archer_ of 1973, looking back to your association 40 years earlier with Archer's progressive Bookshop and the Prometheus Society which used to meet there, you wrote: "The vision of Herbert George Wells united with that of Arnold of Rugby consummate themselves in a political idea over which the Sun would, I believe, refuse to preside, or the Moon to mourn." Is that a statement of a long-standing conviction or the recantation of an old love?

In 1933 you reviewed Middleton Murry's _William Blake_ for the magazine Twentieth Century. Is that a book which influenced your thinking a lot?

Would it be fair to say that your attitude to Auden and his school in the thirties was a mixed one? I cannot imagine a mixed attitude. I hated the boy scouts in Auden and revered the inky-fingered magician.

You spoke recently of the sombre shade of Eliot haunting London "like a plain clothes policeman." Did he ever arrest you, and, if so, what warrant did he shew? Yes, on Ash Wednesday. He showed me that poem.

In a Questionnaire published in New Verse in 1935 you answered the question "Do you take your stand with any political or political economic party" by an emphatic 'I do not'. Yet by 1936 you were writing the powerfully committed _Calamiterror_. What caused you to change your mind?

During the years 1936 and 1937 when working on _Calamiterror_ you contributed poems to the journal Contemporary Poetry and Prose edited by Roger Houghton, a member of the English Surrealist Group. Did the Surrealist method ever appeal to you? No, just No. I have always detested formulas, particularly for poems, particularly from one.

As a teenager you were forever being sacked from jobs as a result of unlicensed forays into the National Gallery. Which pictures were you looking at: _The Birth of Venus_ (Tintoretto) _The Dancers_ (Carlo Ceresa), whom I then particularly loved—Rusetti—and most of all the sculpture of Rodin and Rembrandt and that young German—Lamplugh? Suicide, I think, when he was thirty eight—who made huge elongated statues of schoolgirl goddesses/Samhain?
There seems to be a widespread conspiracy of opinion to the effect that you spent much of the late forties and the fifties talking and drinking in Fitzrovia pubs. That association was clear, crucial for others. How important was it to you? It was not important. It was very pleasant, for me.

Do you think that a comparison between *The Dead Seagull* and Elizabeth Smart's *My Grand Central Station* would be entirely misleading? No, but it would lead into the bog, into the mire, into the bottom of the hated thing.

In coming to London you say that by your late teens you had informally seceded from the Catholic Church. Yet by 1950, the year when both *The True Confession* and *The Dead Seagull* appeared, the presence of St Augustine looms large. Did you at some time take Pascal’s wager? Who wouldn’t?

It seems to me that in both parts of *The True Confession* the ghost of Villon is holding a fairly vigorous dialogue with the shade of Byron. Do you think that you were influenced by any particular translation of *Le Grand Testament*? Was it Norman Cameron’s?

You’ve been called a ‘New Romantic’. Is that a botched label? At the age of 70 I have to think of myself, at all, as an Old Romantic.

Both William Empson and yourself during your tenure of the Japanese professorship made the experiment of teaching Housman to your classes, and both of you encountered a baffling literalness of interpretation. Also, both of you put this down, partly to the Japanese mind, and partly due to the fact that, in one sense, Housman is busy saying precisely what he does not mean. Do you think that your own poetry is ever ambivalent in this kind of way? The 8th Type of Ambiguity?

I hope my verses are ambivalent. I also hope they are not.

Do your friends ever assume the likeness of Arthur Henry Hallam? If only they provided me with an Epithet for membership?

Do you think that there is such an animal of the English elegiac tradition, and, if so, did you ever apply for membership? I did so.

Then discovered that in order to be perfectly eligible you have to be dead also.
In his book *Modern Poetry* of 1933, Louis MacNeice defined the style of the thirties, the style which emanated from Auden's first volume, as "a sort of verbal telegraphese". Thirty years later, introducing your book *Dialogues etc.* for the Poetry Book Society you spoke of a desire to cultivate a sort of metrical 'telegraphese', out of a conviction, you said, "that the rhetoric of metre has become almost as meretricious as the rhetoric of grammar." Is the technique of elimination important to you? I am the only member of my family who can do it twice a day.

In *Asterisks* you wrote "Comic writers know one thing more than tragic writers: Life ain't really funny." Is the joke a sort of sacrament? *It is*, to put it mildly, the ceremonial celebration of the triumphal carabellum.

Does the poem operate entirely below the level of the conscious will? No, not entirely, only about 99.99 degrees.

You admire courage. Is courage a poet's virtue? Can it ever, do you think, be his undoing? *Only too often. But the poet is better undone than done.*

You were close to Dylan Thomas, and a frequent contributor to *Poems*. Also you once wrote "I wore the shape of Ireland on my mind". Do you think that there is such a thing, pace Arnold, as the Celtic Element in Literature? "They went out to battle & they always fell." Why? Because style is the femme fatale of the Celt.

In 1936 you suggested to Eliot a comparative edition of the anonymous medieval religious lyric 'Quia Amore Languo'. Has anything of the Middle Ages got into your own verse, do you believe? Not only believe this, I have quite deliberately incultated this precious communicative into my work.

In your early twenties you had already "fallen in love with the idea of Italy, and the passion has clearly never extinguished itself. What keeps drawing you back? *The Italians have a saying: Englishmen who fall in love with Italy become wolves. Where else would a wolf want to go come back to Rome?*
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