WARTON LECTURE ON ENGLISH POETRY

WASTE LAND, HOLY LAND

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YOU have done me the honour of inviting me to give the Warton Lecture for 1976; and since I am a poet I must conclude that it is as a poet that you wish me to speak; not from learned sources but from my own experience of the literary scene as one of the generation who emerged from childhood in the mid-twenties.

Yeats wrote, before the First World War, of 'the rise of soul against intellect, now beginning in the world'. Subsequent history, and literary history, may not seem to support his prophecy; there is little soul and much intellectual arrogance in our world. Yet the voice of the greatest of poets is always prophetic, and Yeats's vision embraced a time-scale far beyond those superficial waves and wavelets of fashion upon the ebb and flow of a greater tide. His younger contemporaries, both in this country and in America, who because they reflected current ideologies thought they understood the direction of history better than Yeats did, ridiculed the great poet's preoccupation with that whole range of knowledge belonging to the soul and its nature.

Auden accused Yeats of not having a sympathetic attitude toward the most progressive thought of his time; by which he presumably meant (I quote) 'the social struggle toward a greater equality' which 'has been accompanied by a growing intellectual acceptance of the scientific method and the steady conquest of irrational superstition'. (The Public *v.* the Late Mr. William Butler Yeats, *Partisan Review*, Spring 1939.) But scientific method has not proved so universal a way to knowledge as Auden's generation had thought; reformist ideologies have been seen to fail; while the transforming power of the words of our century's supreme 'singing-master of the soul' continues to work towards the fulfilment of his prophecy.

It seems to me a very short time since I was myself a young and most obscure poet caught up in that war; not as a combatant but as a fugitive. Now I surprisingly find myself old,

looking back on it all, and wondering about the issue of that battle. And it may be that my time has come to turn back the pages of my own book of life, and tell you what it was like to be of the soul's party at that time when intellect—rational, scientific intellect—held the field. I am no victor; at best a survivor; but since the story of those years has been told so often in terms of the then (and still now) current values, it should perhaps be known that there were some who did not assent to those values and who would tell the story differently.

I have chosen the title, *Waste Land, Holy Land* because these are the terms in which I now see the struggle that was taking place. T. S. Eliot, the other major poet of my time, has once and for ever described the Waste Land of the modern world; that profane world in which the soul can only suffer exile. For the soul is, as Edgar Allen Poe understood, native of another country:

> Lo, in yon brilliant window-niche
> How statue-like I see thee stand,
> The agate lamp within thy hand,
> Ah! Psyche, from the regions which
> Are holy land. (*To Helen*)

It was T. S. Eliot who gave its true name to our time and place: the Waste Land. His judgement had nothing to do with politics, with W. H. Auden's social struggle; Eliot's truth was the truth of the soul, unable to endure a world in which many would, before the two world wars, have seen a picture of prosperity. He declared our world waste and his great poem is a lamentation because life in that country has withered at the roots. I first read a poem by T. S. Eliot in a magazine I picked up by chance on the table of a provincial newspaper—*The Criterion*. I was at the time (1926) so ignorant as never to have heard his name and I therefore had, as a first-year undergraduate, the pleasure of discovering him for myself; for the impact was instantaneous and tremendous. Here, I felt—and how many others felt as I did—is a voice that speaks the unspoken, the nameless disquiet in which I, as a member of my generation, found myself. That generation (and we were fortunate) had been brought up on Shakespeare and the Romantic poets and Palgrave's *Golden Treasury*; 'modern' poetry was the Georgian poets who wrote of rural life; Walter de la Mare, and Gilbert Murray's translations of the Greek drama. Going up to Cambridge in the mid 1920s as a student of

natural sciences I found the ground cut from beneath me; those old assumptions made by the Romantic poets, for whom poetry was the natural speech of the soul, withered in the light of logical positivism, dialectical materialism, and the prestigious 'science' of the Cavendish Laboratory, which recognized no soul at all. Eliot's poems explored with undeniable truth the state of being which must, without that fiction or reality which the age had disallowed, pass for the real world. This was the region, this the soil, the clime my generation must inhabit; the romantic dream had failed and we found ourselves imprisoned in a profane and soulless reality no poet had as yet explored.

Here I must say that I am not venturing to attempt a 'criticism' of Eliot's poetry nor an evaluation of it; only I am recalling the impact of that poetry upon myself and others of my generation of *entre deux guerres*. Those who read his poetry now may find in it more than we did, read it more accurately or in truer perspective; but that first impact is irrecoverable. In words of Dantesque gravity Eliot's poetry gave words to an experience whose truth found its echo in our own condition. We did not read his poems in any perspective at all: rather we were in them, ourselves figures in the sad procession of Eliot's London, that 'unreal city' in whose unreality lay its terrible reality. We knew that city by participation, knew it too well to criticize or evaluate. We knew the Thames whence Spenser's nymphs had departed, the rat-infested shore and the gasworks. Of the glory of Cleopatra's barge or Gloriana's there remained only the luxury of Bond Street. When Goldsmith's 'lovely woman stoops to folly' it matters; there is Mr. Primrose to seek his fallen daughter and bring her home; but now, the joyless seduction of a tired typist in her transient furnished room matters neither to herself nor to anyone else. Instead of the pride of work there is the joyless procession of wage-earners over London Bridge and the echo of Dante's 'I had not thought death had undone so many'. Indeed we may often have misunderstood the poet whose words we borrowed as a kind of magical incantation to help us to bring under control the situation of our own lives. For my generation had not yet become accustomed to a soulless world and continued to mourn an absence no longer felt—or no longer consciously felt—by the generation who succeeded us. I remember chanting to myself from *Ash Wednesday* the words 'Because I do not hope to turn again / Because I do not hope / Because I do not hope to

turn'. Eliot's words lent a kind of valedictory dignity to the turning away from a lost Paradise we still remembered, the halting rhythms of his free verse kept pace with our own knowledge that the 'viewless wings of poesy' were now only 'vans to beat the air'.

Eliot's is the voice of the suffering soul which cannot endure a world stripped of every sanctity by those very ideologies adhered to by most of those who at that time acclaimed him: I remember the shocked surprise with which we learned that Eliot was a Christian. He described our world within the context of the Christian religion, but we saw his burning indictment merely as true to life.

Psyche is in exile, yet again and again the poet invokes her suffering or absent figure; she is the 'Lady of silences, Calm and distressed' who is the 'End of the endless / Journey to no end'; the weeping garden girl who weaves the sunlight in her hair; the 'silent sister veiled in white and blue'; she is Marina, the absent daughter whose return brings peace, and whose very name suggests the long sea-wandering years of separation. Who are all these feminine figures, or the 'Lady whose shrine stands on the promontory' but Poe's Psyche with her inextinguishable lamp whose country is the holy land, the 'garden where all loves end', our native Eden now withered into the waste land by her absence? Eliot's poetry gave utterance to the suffering of a profane society which had no place for the soul to whom alone belong the shrine, the garden and the end of every journey.

Already in *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* the poet has entered the Waste Land; the poem is prefaced by a passage from the *Inferno* and there immediately follows an invitation to another descent:

> Let us go, then, you and I
> When the evening is spread out against the sky
> Like a patient etherised upon a table;
> Let us go, through certain half-deserted streets,
> The muttering retreats
> Of restless nights in one-night cheap hotels
> And sawdust restaurants with oyster-shells:
> Streets that follow like a tedious argument
> Of insidious intent
> To lead you to an overwhelming question.

We have entered the joyless realm and the landscape is familiar. Every image suggests sickness and despair; the evening sky, no longer Hopkins's 'dappled-with-damson-west' charged with

'the grandeur of God', can anaesthetize but cannot heal; it is passively 'spread out', the sickness of the patient 'etherized' as for an operation of perhaps fatal outcome transferred to the sky itself since place and state are one and indivisible. The streets are 'half-deserted' as if life has ebbed from them. Instead of home-coming we are reminded of the impermanence of the houses. St. Teresa likened life to a night in a bad inn; and here there are 'one-night cheap hotels' where the 'sleep' of life is restless and haunted by 'muttering' (whose? It can only be our own). We are led not to any solution, but towards an 'overwhelming question':

> Oh do not ask 'what is it?'
> Let us go and make our visit.

J. Alfred Prufrock's land is waste because, in search of love (for the poem is called a love song) or perhaps because, like that legendary knight, he does not know the question or does not dare to ask it, of the Holy Grail, that sacred presence that appears in this world and yet belongs also to another. In the trivial world in which he is trapped the question cannot be asked nor the answer told. Useless to say

> . . . I am Lazarus, come from the dead
> Come back to tell you all
> If one settling a pillow by her head
> Should say: 'That is not what I meant at all,
> That is not it at all . . .'

Prufrock also dreams, but in those dreams he can find nothing to help him in waking life, to which he must return as to a death:

> We have lingered in the chambers of the sea
> By sea girls wreathed in seaweed red or brown
> Till human voices wake us and we drown.

The world of his dreams is cut off from his waking life as utterly as Lazarus's experience beyond the grave; and perhaps these realms are the same, being regions of the inner life, of the timeless, which has no longer any place in, or way of access to the world where men and women meet one another only on a level of triviality, where there is only the all-consuming passage of time: 'There will be time, there will be time', Prufrock says; but for him time is not as for Blake, 'the mercy of eternity'; it brings only old age and death: 'I grow old, I grow old' is the form of Prufrock's despair.

The city, being man's creation, is a more immediate reflection

of the spiritual condition of a civilization than is 'nature'; yet nature too can be a waste land, reflecting the inner desert. Edwin Muir's poem *The Cloud* describes the profanation of the arcadian image of the countryman tilling his fields by the teaching that 'God is dead' propagated by the Marxist variant of our Western materialism. The poet and his wife were driving through country roads in Czechoslovakia to attend a Communist propaganda lecture:

> At a sudden turn we saw
> A young man harrowing, hidden in dust, he seemed
> A prisoner walking in a moving cloud
> Made by himself for his own purposes;
> And there he grew and was as if exalted
> To more than man, but not, not glorified:
> A pillar of dust moving in dust: no more
> The bushes by the roadside were encrusted
> With a hard sheath of dust.
> We looked and wondered; the dry cloud moved on
> With its interior image.

Coming away from the lecture which exalted the peasant and his toil while denying in him the divine image,

> . . . we longed for light to break
> And show that his face was the face once broken in Eden,
> Beloved, world-without-end lamented face
> And not a blindfold mask on a pillar of dust.

What Edwin Muir felt was an absence of something that should have been there; for Eden is man's native place, or condition and so is Eliot's waste land haunted by an absence, precisely, of the holy; of whose sanctuaries he gave us so many symbols, especially in his later poems. Their placing, like high lights in a dark picture, is all important: Little Gidding, the place where prayers have been said; the Garden with its pool that fills with light; or any

> . . intersection of the timeless moment
> Is England and nowhere. Never and always.
> (*Little Gidding*)

It is we who consecrate or desecrate; and cities also have been holy; Jerusalem is the very type of the image of man's inner heaven realized on earth; and Yeats's Holy City of Byzantium in which 'religious, aesthetic and practical life were one . . . and this vision, this proclamation of their invisible master' the

vision of a whole people. Eliot discerned in our world an absence —of all things the hardest to discern, still harder to identify. The death of God, the death of the soul—name as we will the withdrawal of the inner vision from the outer world—lays waste the earth. Eliot situated the profane world in that place in the soul's order of values to which it belongs—in the hells, the kingdom cut off from life.

To the talented group of writers who followed Eliot Psyche's country was not in question. Auden and Day-Lewis and their friends were concerned with the political and economic reform of modern industrial society and the 'social struggle towards a greater equality'. One might ask, 'equality to what?' To Muir's 'blind mask in a pillar of dust' or the traditional Christian 'image of God?' These poets were indeed moralists, and initially of Marxist politics and the Marxist view of man, though Auden later became a Christian, preaching tolerance and charity towards fallen humanity in a fallen world. They no less than Eliot were concerned with the modern urban landscape but with the object of arousing the slumbering political conscience. Their concern was neither to illuminate the drab with reconciling beauty (as James Joyce had re-created Dublin in the light of imagination, humour, love, and acceptance); nor, like Eliot, to voice the protest of the soul in exile. Utopia, not the Kingdom of Heaven, was their goal; and their work was immediately successful with a generation of waste-landers for whom the outer world had come to seem the whole world. Auden was not concerned with an absence, nor with Prufrock's 'overwhelming question', nor with the shrines and sanctuaries of the soul; rather his object was to focus our attention upon the time-world whose signs and symptoms he so brilliantly read. The world is sick—yes—but whereas Eliot had understood that the remedy is reconsecration, for the poets who suceeded him it was social reform. Fear, horror, guilt, shock, cancer, the grave, jump out of Auden's early poems to startle the reader into repentance like devils in a morality play, against a scene of hard-edged machines—aircraft, and 'the helmeted airman', plate-glass, 'silted harbours, derelict works', arterial roads, fast cars, 'the cigarette-end smouldering on the border'. He involves his reader by the skilful placing of the definite article, implying that we know that world as well as he does: not '*a* helmeted airman' or '*a* Sport Hotel' or '*an* infected sinus' but 'the'—the one we know, the one in which we secretly or guiltily participate: '*Those* handsome and diseased youngsters'; '*that* distant

afternoon . . . they gave the prizes to the ruined boys.' He drives home the imputation of guilt, the inescapable implication in the public world:

> You cannot get away, then, no,
> Not though you pack to leave within an hour,
> Escaping humming down arterial roads.

When I first read these poems I did not feel myself to be one of the 'we' Auden sought to mobilize, the 'us' of 'our time' with its shared world of the documentary film and the news bulletin, a world everywhere permeable to the mass media and a collectivity from which no distance can any longer separate us, the dance-band at the Sport Hotel

> Relayed elsewhere to farmers and their dogs
> Sitting in kitchens in the stormy fens.
> ('Consider This and in our time')

His appeal to a supposedly—and within its own terms a really shared contemporary scene, with its well-placed allusions to Nijinski and Diaghilev (gently cajoling our snobbery) to the van der Lubbe trial and Churchill and Hitler and the rest—why did I not feel the intended response, 'Yes this is the real world, scene of our actions and our moral choice'? For Auden was a most persuasive moralist—his tone is often positively evangelical, full of imperatives—'watch', 'consider', 'summon', 'mobilize', 'It is later than you think'.

Now I can see more clearly than anyone noticed at the time the sleight-of-hand Auden practised on his readers. He sought to cut off the soul from any retreat into those inner sanctuaries where under social conditions of every kind men and women have found refuge and another reality. It seemed to me that Auden, that man of impressive worldly wisdom, and his 'we' sought to close the escape routes and to round us up like a flock of sheep to be driven into his pen, away from that inner country that is everyone's priceless and unpurchased birthright, the imaginative ground we each inhabit. If it can be said that dreamers have too little sense of political realities, too little desire for social change, can it not also be said that political and social unrest afflicts not so much the poor and the ignorant but above all those who have, by our modern ideologies, been driven out of these inner sanctuaries, be these religious shrines or places of dreams? Eliot saw that our profane society was a hell precisely because cut off from that ground; the succeeding

generation thought, like Milton's fallen angels, that the 'unreal city' could be made tolerable—could be made Utopia—by social reform.

In this sleight-of-hand Auden was not so much the creator as one expression of the mentality of his time; for current ideologies, and notably Marxism, assume that our humanity belongs totally to the outer world their power-structures can control, that we are economic and social beings only, that our whole environment is comprised within the daily scene. This assumption totally neglects that other half of life in which every individual is free to turn aside into a secret and inviolable universe entirely inaccessible to their collective imperatives.

Again let me disclaim any intention of attempting a critique of Auden's poetry; I am merely describing my own response to that school of writers. Some would consider it the first duty of the poet to be politically 'engaged'; others might reply that political change can improve the human condition only in very limited ways; while poetry and the other arts, by building for the soul invisible sanctuaries and regions of contemplation, by exploring and extending the scope of our humanity, from Dante's beatitude to his hells, from Shakespeare's Forest of Arden to Lear's heath, has created—that it is its especial virtue that it can so create, at all times and in all places—areas of inner freedom that we can, and do, inhabit, however circumscribed our outer conditions may be. The fallacy that man lives by bread alone has never been more prevalent than in this century. I did not choose to exchange my inner worlds for Auden's hard-edged reality; if a world may be called real which curtails our humanity of half its realm. Had not Eliot, for that very reason, called the same city 'unreal'?

Believing as I do that poetry is in its proper nature the language of the soul; that its proper function is to create for us images of an inner order all share, to open into every present those secret doors, those ways in; to consecrate and redeem for every generation some parcel of the surrounding waste, I cannot feel that those poets of the thirties, brilliantly and admirably as they may have performed some other necessary social role, were fulfilling the proper and vital task of the poet. Genius, Yeats said, is a crisis which joins for certain moments the sleeping and the waking mind. Only at such moments are we fully human, fully ourselves; and for what else does the poem, the work of art, exist, if not to bring about this union?

Auden was, I think, deeply suspicious of—perhaps feared—

the 'other' mind whence comes inspiration. We clashed, I remember, over Blake, when at a party in New York, at the time when I was giving a series of lectures on Blake in Washington, Auden challenged me to admit that Blake was, when all is said and done, 'dotty'. He could never have responded to the declared purpose of our great prophet,

> . . . I rest not from my great task!
> To open the Eternal Worlds, to open the Immortal eyes
> Of Man inwards into the Worlds of Thought, into Eternity
> Ever expanding in the Bosom of God, the Human
> Imagination.
> (*Jerusalem*, Plate 51.17.20)

Because Eliot and Auden described the same modern urban scene in the same sharply defined images of contemporary situations, the two poets were often compared when they ought rather to have been contrasted. Eliot's London is closer to Blake's, whose 'streets are ideas of Imagination' than to Auden's well-photographed documentary world. Yet even Yeats failed to distinguish, in Eliot's early poems, between the image and its intent. In his much-criticized Introduction to the *Oxford Book of English Verse* he wrote that 'Eliot has produced his great effect upon his generation because he described men and women that get out of bed or into it from mere habit; in describing this life that has lost heart his own art seems grey, cold, dry'. Yeats made the common mistake of taking Eliot's realistic images at their face value; he if any poet should have taken note of those bright shafts of illumination from another dimension —those clues that tell us that Eliot was at all times describing the actual in terms of the absent; for the hells are such precisely in terms of that from which they are absent; as no poet since Dante has understood more profoundly than did Eliot. While 'Ape-neck Sweeney', type of the totally profane man for whom life is just three things, 'birth, and copulation, and death' could coldly watch the hysteria of the prostitute whose human face is no more than

> This withered root of knots of hair
> Slitted below and gashed with eyes,
> This oval O cropped out with teeth

Eliot reminds us of the unnoticed wisteria by the window behind his 'golden grin'; or that

> The nightingales are singing near
> The Convent of the Sacred Heart.

The nightingale is Keats's 'immortal bird', type of that music heard by all successive generations; Eliot's 'Convent of the Sacred Heart' the sanctuary of the love that Sweeney profanes.

Yeats made his anthology before 1935; before Eliot had written his Four Quartets. But even then he should have heeded those images whose function is to locate, to identify, to comment upon, the action: the Convent of the Sacred Heart; the weeping girl with her arms full of flowers; 'the lost lilac and the lost sea voices'; all these are things that should be and are not: illuminations of the sacred.

Auden and Day-Lewis in forcing us to confront the social evils of our time shifted the ground of conscience from the inner to the outer world; and many of us felt that we had no answer to give, at that time, to these political poets. Not so Yeats; who, though he read their work, he says, with 'some excitement', saw that 'Communism is their *Deus ex Machina*, their Santa Claus, their happy ending, but speaking as a poet I prefer tragedy to tragicomedy'. In other words, he is accusing *them* of being the escapists. 'It was easier to look at suffering if you had somebody to blame for it, some remedy in mind', he wrote. Tragedy comes from within; politics is tragicomic in so far as disaster can at any point be averted by manipulation of outer circumstances. Yeats, an old man of long experience of politics, could say to these young poets who sought to make the good and evil of our inner experience seem less 'real' than social ills, 'No matter how great a reformer's energy a still greater is required to face, all activities expended in vain, the unreformed.' The force of these words, largely unheeded at the time, is now inescapable: the political reformer may alter circumstances; poetry and the other arts can change what we inwardly are.

Auden—as is apparent in his mistrust of Blake and his 'eternal worlds', mistrusted and feared what comes from the imagination, from beyond reason's little conquered territory. It is characteristic of him that in *The Sea and the Mirror* he should have treated Ariel as a suspect figure: Prospero would miss him, with his flights of fancy and indeed his insights—Auden allows him these—but the balance falls on the side of disillusionment, which is presented as the 'real' with which all the characters must come to terms. Never has poet so extolled the light of common day. As the ship sails away from the enchanted island, Prospero speaks:

> . . . Alonso's heaviness
> Is lost; and weak Sebastian will be patient

In future with his slothful conscience—after all, it pays.
Stephano is contracted to his belly, a minor
But a prosperous kingdom. Stale Trinculo receives
Gratis, a whole fresh repertoire of stories, and
Our younger generation its independent joy.
Their eyes are big and blue with love; its lighting
Makes even us look new; yes, today it all looks so easy.
Will Ferdinand be as fond of his Miranda
Familiar as a stocking? Will Miranda who is
No longer a silly lovesick little goose,
When Ferdinand and his brave world are her profession,
Go into raptures over existing at all?
Probably I overrate the difficulties;
Just the same, I am very glad I shall never
Be twenty and have to go through that business again,
The hours of fuss and fury, the conceit, the expense.

So all that enhances life, all that lifts us, albeit momentarily, beyond our everyday selves, is illusory and silly; we must settle down to be ordinary, to be tolerant, and to die. The young lovers have not seen a momentary vision of the gods who move our lives: they are deluded—'our younger generation' who will know better when they are our age. Their eyes are 'big and blue' (the denigration is implicit) with love; to them sacramental (and the Church after all is on their side) which Prospero now calls 'that business' with even an implication of 'the expense of spirit in a waste of shame'. Miranda as a 'stocking'—an inhuman, indeed a shocking image—is more real than the Miranda who sees the whole world renewed in her own Paradisal vision; redemptive, as Eliot in his own comparable figure of Marina implies, to that world itself. Auden would say that Shakespeare, after all, made Prospero bury his magic wand and return to the world; but did he mean those who had visited the Island to forget it? Or is not that Island rather a symbol of the Platonic 'other' world from which the soul descends into ours, 'not in entire forgetfulness'? Was not that island to remain the rectifying vision of those who remember it? Is it not precisely the task of the poet to ensure that we do not cease to 'go into raptures over existing at all' when young love is only a memory?

In justice to Auden we must remember that he did write of all-too-human love with great compassion. His love-poem with the opening lines,

Lay your sleeping head, my love,
Human on my faithless arm

is a most moving expression of love as it must be for those who have forgotten. But without the archetype, the image of the soul that Eliot never relinquished, the 'Lady of Silences', the quasi-divine 'Lady whose shrine stands on the promontory', the all-too-human must lose its dignity and that sacred core which, as Conrad said, is at the heart of every human love. Eliot knew, perhaps better than Auden himself, the waste land of human love when that sacred core has been lost: Sweeney is a figure that is too nakedly hellish for any humanist to confront.

Had Yeats made his anthology ten years later he would have found poets more after his own heart than Auden and his circle; poets in whom he might have seen the beginnings of the fulfilment of his own prophecy of the 'rise of soul against intellect'. It was with relief that readers who had, obscurely if not consciously, failed to find imaginative sustenance in Auden's kind of poetry, turned to Dylan Thomas whose earthly paradise is made of the simple elements of a country childhood. The word 'holy'—a word that had not been found in poetry for many years—is characteristic of him; all is praise and celebration. What symptoms of political and economic sickness Auden might have seen no less in the valleys of Wales than in the Pennines it is easy to imagine: Dylan Thomas found holy land. The people of Milkwood live in their dreams, good and bad, their inner lives woven and interwoven with the outer life of their village, incorrigibly oblivious to all collectivizing propaganda.

Auden looked for the steady conquest of the irrational: Vernon Watkins, from his early *Ballad of the Mari Lwyd* and throughout his work, reminds us that the house of life stands in a great surrounding darkness that is also native to us; whose voices speak to us from a timeless world with a strange oracular tongue, reminding us of what we are. The dead are not, for him, non-existent: they are a dimension of ourselves, their communications, as for Eliot, 'tongued with fire / Beyond the language of the living'. Our universe is not the world of politician and newscaster but of the soul's history.

It may be objected that, whereas T. S. Eliot and Auden were aware of the predicament of urban mankind, these Welsh poets knew nothing of the urban environment with its consequent ideologies which has thrown so many into a state of spiritual alienation. One poet—too little known—did notably seek to rediscover the holy land in the waste land.

David Gascoyne understood that it is man-made false values

and sick states of mind which alone obscure the holy land everywhere and always present. So with the 'nondescript terrain' of *The Gravel-Pit Field*, 'a stretch of scurfy pock-marked waste' that 'sprawls laggardly its acres till / They touch a raw brick-villa'd rim'. Seen with the eye of vision

> . . . each abandoned snail-shell strewn
> Among these blotched dock-leaves might seem
> In the pure ray shed by the loss
> Of all man-measured value, like
> Some priceless pear-enamelled toy
> Cushioned on green silk under glass.

He beholds the apotheosis of this waste land; freed from utilitarian or sociological values we may project upon it, even such a field in its 'extreme abasement' is seen in another light as

> Between this world and the beyond,
> A tabernacle where one stands
> As though within the empty space
> Round which revolves the Sage's wheel.

Eliot, in one of his *Preludes*, tells of walking at night in London streets aware of the sleepers who will presently and tragically awake

> Impatient to assume the world.

The poet is moved by the mystery of their sleep,

> . . . moved by fancies that are curled
> Around these images, and cling:
> The notion of some infinitely gentle,
> Infinitely suffering thing.

David Gascoyne's *Night Thoughts* is London's nocturne; a phantasmagoria of illusion and loneliness, in which this poet, not focused upon the harsh realities of day, reflects:

'The boundaries of the senses are not often clearly realised. The Infra and the Ultra are fields easily forgotten. Out of hearing stays unthought-of; out of sight is out of mind. And yet, how haunted we are.' He 'half hopes to overhear—that haunting thing.' It is through this nameless 'being' that 'We are closer to one another than we realise. Let us remember one another at night, even though we do not know each other's names.' The poet calls us together not in the harsh light of waking day, but in participation of the inner, hidden regions of the sleeping mind.

Day-Lewis in his poem *The Flight* attempted to make a specifically machine-age poem (doubtless at the time sharing Auden's enthusiasm for science) celebrating the air-ace and his craft, implicitly setting these beside Achilles and Cuchulain, those bronze-age heroes and their armour. The courage is doubtless the same in our technological age as in any other, but I think the poem fails because some artefacts are so complete an expression of the soulless mentality that conceived them as not to be susceptible of any symbolic imaginative existence otherwise than as symbols of that soullessness. This was the considered view of Eliot's friend the poet and painter David Jones whose poem *In Parenthesis* is at once the epic of modern warfare (his theme is the trenches of the First World War) and a consecration of the most waste of all land, the battlefield. But it was not our modern technology he praised:

> I said, Ah! what shall I write?
> I enquired up and down.
> (He's tricked me before
> with his manifold lurking-places.)
> I looked for His symbol at the door.
> I have looked for a long while
> at the textures and contours
> I have run a hand over the trivial intersections.
> I have journeyed among the dead forms
> causation projects from pillar to pylon.
> I have tired the eyes of the mind
> regarding the colours and lights.
> I have felt for His Wounds
> in nozzles and containers.
> I have wondered for the automatic devices.
> I have tested the inane patterns
> without prejudice.
> I have been on my guard
> not to condemn the unfamiliar.
> For it is easy to miss Him
> at the turn of a civilization.

I have watched the wheels go round in case I might see the living creatures like the appearance of lamps, in case I might see the Living God projected from the Machine. I have said to the perfected steel, be my sister and for the glassy towers I thought I felt some beginnings of His creature, but *A, a, a, Domine Deus*,my hands found the glazed work unrefined and the terrible crystal a stage-paste . . . *Eia, Domine Deus*

(*The Sleeping Lord*, 1974)

If David Jones has written an absolutely modern epic of war it is not because he saw modern warfare as unprecedented but because he discerned in the English Tommy in his khaki uniform the timeless figure of the soldier, in modern warfare, the same war that was waged at Troy, or at Badon Hill, or sung in the epic of the Welsh battle of Catraeth or in the Chanson de Roland. If in *In Parenthesis* tin helmet and barbed wire are of a like significance with the Cross and the Crown of Thorns, it is because those who wore them and died upon them share our humanity. Machines may be unprecedented but to the men of the battlefield the 'strange shapes of death' are what they always were. If it has seemed to some that modern warfare is worse than the sacking of Jerusalem by Titus and Vespasian, or the massacre of Drogheda by Cromwell, or the French retreat from Moscow, it is because of the numbers involved; to the individual soldier the situation is neither better nor worse. Death on the battlefield is one of the situations mankind has confronted from time immemorial; and in that situation other ages have been able to find imaginative meaning, however dark. Death, after all, is one of the unchangeable elements of our human existence. Our human range is finite; progress can bring no joy greater than men and women have at all times experienced; nor can there be any situation of unprecedented evil, cruelties and abominations worse than other ages have known. Under whatever political regime—in Utopia itself—our humanity is attuned to a scale of joy and grief which is ever the same. Suffering is immeasurable, as joy also is, in quantitative terms; weapons may be unprecedented but death is not.

In a profane world death is as meaningless as life; and in this respect alone perhaps is modern warfare unprecedented: our wars and our peace alike are waste land. In his great poem David Jones has shown that in our own, as in other ages, the hells are harrowed. Indeed if the worst conceivable situations which our humanity may have to confront lie beyond the scope of poetry, then poetry itself is a mere diversion.

David Jones's battlefield is certainly not a presentation of that 'passive suffering' Yeats said was no theme for poetry. The situation is redeemed by the presence—the imaginative as well as the physical presence—of men in all their poignant physical vulnerability, but also in the dignity of their confrontation. Auden's 'helmeted airman' is not human but a spare part of a machine: we are not shown his face. David Jones's soldiers of the London Welsh Infantry in tin helmet and khaki puttees

tell us who they are, bringing with them their own memories and those of their race. Because of their presence the battlefield itself becomes holy ground.

> This Dai adjusts his slipping shoulder-straps, wraps close his misfit outsize greatcoat—he articulates his English with an alien care.
>
> My fathers were with the Black Prinse of Wales
> at the passion of
> the blind Bohemian king.
> They served in these fields,
> it is in the histories that you can read it, Corporal—
> boys Gower, they were—it is writ down—yes.
>
> Wot about Methuselum, Taffy?
> I was with Abel when his brother found him,
> under the green tree.
> I built a shit-house for Artaxerxes.
> I was the spear in Balin's hand
> that made waste King Pellam's land.
> I took the smooth stones of the brook,
> I was with Saul
> playing before him.

In Dai's Boast (which runs to some five or six pages) he tells us who he is; he stands on the everlasting battlefield of the earth in his full human stature and even in the dignity of his human free will, albeit the free will to accept but not to change the event. Wherever man is present the sacramental consecration is possible; even on the battlefield. Perhaps especially on that field, where so much is demanded of men, who often surpass themselves; 'the "Bugger! Bugger!" of a man detailed had often about it the "Fiat! Fiat!" of the Saints.'

Finally, Edwin Muir, the poet who of all those I have known, most clearly realized that we live in two worlds and that our waking life is rooted in the soul's timeless country. I remember with what gratitude I first listened to him saying so simply all those things I had scarcely allowed myself even to think. But Edwin, for all his quiet gentleness, had a mind that no tide or wind of fashion could deflect from the certainties of his insight. Very early in our acquaintance he asked me if I ever wrote poems from dreams, and I said No. He told me that I should because dream is so important a part of our reality, an aspect of our world and of ourselves. We live in the waking day for little more than half of our time and perhaps even less of our being. There is a life of the night also:

> I have been taught by dreams and fantasies,
> Learned from the friendly and the darker phantoms

—so he wrote in one of his last poems. Again and again he speaks of the knowledge of the night:

> The night, the night alone is old
> And showed me only what I knew,
> Knew, yet never had been told;
> A speech that from the darkness grew
> Too deep for daily tongues to say,
> Archaic dialogue of a few
> Upon the sixth or the seventh day.
> And shapes too simple for a place
> In the day's shrill complexity
> Came and were more natural, more
> Expected than my father's face
> Smiling across the open door.
> (*Day and Night*)

And yet of all his contemporaries it was Edwin Muir who was most directly involved in the political tragedies of Europe before and after the Second World War. He saw at first hand the rise of Nazism in Germany; the disasters that befell Czechoslovakia (he was Director of the British Institute in Prague) first from the German occupation, then following the Communist *coup d'État*. But he understood the outer event in terms of the inner, and saw that the worst violations were those upon the soul. None of his many explicitly descriptive poems better expresses the everlasting paradox of aggressor and victim than *The Combat*, written from a dream. The conflict was one he witnessed in the world of his time, but in the dream the emotion is naked; external events are after all but an expression of the eternal conflict within ourselves and is not even history the enactment of our dreams? Over and over again the aggressor, the 'crested animal in his pride' and the victim—'a soft round beast as brown as clay' repeat the battle in which the dream-victim is always defeated and yet never destroyed.

Edwin Muir had at one time taken his dreams to a Jungian analyst, but had soon realized—the analyst also—that these visions properly belonged to the domain of the poet; never to be explained, only to be made known. In a poem entitled *The Poet* he writes of that living and hidden source:

> What I shall never know
> I must make known,
> Where traveller never went
> Is my domain.

Even Jung's great reverence for the holy land of the psyche fell short of the poet's experience; Plato's 'garden of the Muses' has ever been the poet's source of inspired knowledge; it is the psychologists who are the newcomers.

I have spoken of these poets I have known, who were my friends, in an attempt to discover, and in their enduring words to communicate my own belief that poetry is the proper language of the soul; a speech that never ceases to tell those who are in the time-world of a timeless region that lies beyond the reach of intellectual judgements and evaluations. When the frontier of our consciousness is closed we inhabit a waste land to which neither wealth nor culture can impart life, which no social reform can restore. Thus understood poetry is no mere adornment of the everyday scene but a necessary knowledge of our immortal selves. Because this is so I believe that Yeats's prophecy of the 'rise of soul against intellect' must, sooner or later, fulfil itself, since it is a return to the norm, grounded not only in tradition but in the real nature of things. Truth, Yeats wrote—and he meant the truth of the soul, not of the intellect, 'can never be discovered, but may be revealed'; as Edwin Muir also understood when he wrote, of Psyche's holy land,

> Look once. But do not hope to find a sentence
> To tell what you have seen. Stop at the colon:
> And set a silence after to speak the word
> That you will always seek and never find,
> Perhaps, if found, the good and beautiful end.
> You will not reach that place. (*Images*, I)