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War Modernism, 1918-1945

Adam Piette

The interwar years began as postwar with the Great War haunting the parties, politics and pipedreams of all citizens as they underwent the extraordinary shifts and changes of the 1920s and 1930s, from boom to bust. With the rise of extremist politics, itself a creature of disaffected or revolutionary ex-combatants in Italy, Germany, Russia, Ireland, the world then turned to fears of a Second World War, and anxiety drew minds towards apocalyptic futures. Between these two world wars, minds were pulled two ways, back to evaded, repressed trench dreams coded as internal waste land (as the rubble of all history), or forward to a bombed-out, totalitarian war zone called the end of the world. At the same time, the social energies, revolutionary creeds, paramilitary visions, international-corporate military-industrial complexes, and state of emergency mass politics that had been boosted by the First World War (the vortex, in other words), threw everything into radical doubt, tempting populations to violent means, extreme desires, revolutions of thought and class that were consolidated in the stand-off between the forces of progress and conservatism, Soviet Communism and German Fascism as poles dividing the liberal mind. This article will be looking at the writing of the interwar years as an exploration of modernity as a vortex splitting minds in two, between repressed war experience and fear of the future, between violent war-mongering Id and scientific reason, between communist or nationalist revolution and fascist militarism. Images of lethal technology haunt the texts, and ideas of nation are troped through sinister haunted warscapes, spacetime transformed by war dreams into zone of elegy, myth, and fantasy crossing psychoanalytic dreaming and collective memory. The writers considered will include Robert Graves, Wyndham Lewis, David Jones, David Gascoyne, Auden and Isherwood, Spanish Civil War writing, Charles Madge, Irish writing from Civil War stories to Yeats, Beckett, Denis Devlin. The article will then move on to consideration of Second World War texts, looking at the poetry of the neo-Romantics (the work of Lynette Roberts and J.F. Hendry in particular) to register the war endgame of those interwar concerns.

1920s modernism is often dismissed as apolitical, inward, obsessed with order; and yet its vanguard text, T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, presents its fragments as symptomatic debris speaking of the effects of the war on the sexual unconscious and pan-European politics. At the heart of the poem is a shell-shocked, transgendered intelligence, Tiresias, who cannot speak of his war experience except through mad routines of estranging impersonation; who cannot recognize his lover or his world without projecting onto them the desolation of the trench-system's waste land. Shell-shock haunts all postwar culture in other key modernist texts: Virginia Woolf's Septimus Smith in *Mrs Dalloway*, Tietjens in Ford Madox Ford's *Parade's End*, Chris Baldry in Rebecca West's *The Return of the Soldier*; all display the divided psyches of the ex-combatant, the amnesia, uncontrollable physical symptoms, and feminizing emotionalism of PTSD. The texts present their shell-shock sufferers as victims of the war and as representatives of the psychological division of mind of the postwar's collective unconscious. For psychologists at the time, shellshock was a war neurosis that acted like a wound preserving the abject fear generated by war experience: they write in 1919 of 'the enormous importance of

contemplative fear in the perseveration of hysterical paralysis, contractures, and speech defects.¹ It is this disabling fear – living on as psychic wound speaking of trauma through dream and hysteria, despite social taboo and control – that triggers class- and gender-transformation at the level of the political unconscious.

That wound can be heard in Robert Graves' poetry: the god called poetry 'shouts and screams when he is hot / Riding on the shell and shot' and is radically divided by this inner conflict: 'he has two heads / Like Janus [...] He is YES and he is NO'.² Graves had settled on poetry as a form of therapy for war-neurasthenia following his experience of shell-shock treatment by W.H.R. Rivers at Craiglockhart. Poets learn to induce trancelike states 'in self-protection' whenever they feel 'unable to resolve an emotional conflict by simple logic'; the poem is a secondary elaboration of the dream, and will have 'a therapeutic effect on the minds of readers similarly disturbed by conflicting emotions'.³ The emotional conflict, as poem, acknowledges the persistence of war experience as irresolvable wound within all minds: 'Lucifer, Lucifer, am I, millstone-crushed / Between conflicting powers of doubleness'.⁴ In the 1925 'A Letter from Wales', Graves imagines two ghosts of soldiers who fell in the war, living on as 'substitutions' in postwar Wales, incapable of even formulating questions about identity due to the repressions of the conflict within: 'Something we guessed / Arising from the War, and yet the War / Was a forbidden ground of conversation'.⁵ Those two soldiers are two sides of the same mind, fissured by the forbidden ground, the no-man's land, lying between them.

Graves' sense of the doubleness symptomatic of war experience builds on the homo duplex theme developed by Ford and Conrad with modernist impressionism, and on the master-slave dialectic figured in Wyndham Lewis's Vorticist model of the creative imagination. Ford revised the homo duplex theme as war-induced with *No More Parades* (1925), staged as objective correlative in the form of O Nine Morgan split in two by shrapnel: 'In the bright light it was as if a whole pail of scarlet paint had been dashed across the man's face on the left and his chest'.⁶ Lewis also revised the master-slave struggle of *The Enemy of the Stars* in 1932, giving it a First World War spin. Hanp rises in resentment against master Arghol by thinking about his heavy body in wartime sexual-lethal ecstasy, captured in the newsreel of the mind: 'the heavy body, so long quiet, flinging itself destructively about – face strained with the intimate expression of the act of love – what a repulsive picture was that, as it shot up in retrospect, reel after reel'.⁷ He accompanied the rewrite with an essay on duality, 'Physics of the Not-Self', which argued that established normative culture represses any reference to the 'not-self established at the centre of the intellect', and marginalizes the artists who represent that duality. The repression is equated with the ways culture redefined the destruction of the First World War as quasi-

¹ Frederick Mott, *War Neuroses and Shell Shock* (London: H. Frowde, Hodder et Stoughton, 1919), x.

² 'The God Called Poetry' [from *Country Sentiment* (1920)], Robert Graves: *The Complete Poems*, ed. Beryl Graves & Dunstan Ward (Manchester: Carcanet, 2000), p. 70.

³ 'The Poetic Trance' (1922), *The Common Asphodel: Collected Essays on Poetry, 1922-1949* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1949), p. 1, p. 3.

⁴ 'I am the Star of Morning' [from *The Feather Bed* (1923)], *Common Asphodel*, p. 173.

⁵ 'A Letter from Wales (Richard Rolls to his friend, Captain Abel Wright)' [from *Welchman's Hose* (1925)], *Common Asphodel*, 232-37 (p. 236).

⁶ Ford Madox Ford, *Parade's End* (Manchester: Carcanet, 1997), p. 307.

⁷ Rewrite of *Enemy of the Stars* (1932), Wyndham Lewis, *Collected Poems and Plays*, ed. Alan Munton (Manchester: Carcanet, 1979): 141-91 (p. 185).

natural and Darwinian, rather than the product of science.⁸ In 1933, Lewis reflected on the need for a more militant aesthetic, advocating a writing of irrepressible energy, allowing the not-self to distort and militarize the text, a burly, doubling compositional field full of martial command, yet anarchic too: 'Let words forsake their syntax and ambit'.⁹ Writing becomes a surfacing of the not-self as militarizing recreation of trench warfare:

Do not expect a work of the classic canon.
Take binoculars to these nests of camouflage –
Spy out what is half-there – never completion –
Always what is fragmentary – [...]
Reading between the lines – surprising things half-made
(‘The Song of the Militant Romance’, p. 33)

The doubleness of the struggle between the creative intelligence and the parasite within is shadowed by this other form of duality, the binocular vision of the cultural present as doubled by camouflaged secret wartime with its inchoate ‘lines’ of trench. The result is a fragmentary writing, a half-made textuality hinting at secretly militant halves within.

Chiming with Lewis in 1932-33, but inhabiting the left field, W.H. Auden had developed the creepy premonitory style of his extraordinary *Poems* (1930) with *The Orators* (three editions between 1930 and 1934) which meditated on the wound in culture, on the fascist war-mongering double within each individual and nation, and on nightmare already-‘invaded’ states of being. England is transformed into a war zone of occult civil war in a prose poetry characterised by quietly feverish Anglo-Saxon rhetoric and sinister folk-fanatical myth-making:

Interrogation of villagers before a folding table, a verbal trap. Execution of a spy in the nettled patch at the back of the byre. A tale of sexual prowess told at a brazier and followed by a maternal song. The fatty smell of drying clothes, smell of cordite in a wood, and the new moon seen along the barrel of a gun.¹⁰

The imagination is war-ridden here, as if locked into a militarized family romance become national, communal-neurotic. Christian culture is replaced by a semi-pagan cult with warlord Leader as focus of the Oedipal cathexes and affects: ‘a league of two or three waiting for low water to execute His will. The tripod shadow falls on the dunes. World of the Spider, not Him’ (*The Orators*, p. 20). Authority figures take on uncanny psychoanalytic as well as political aura, as Auden captures the shift of the lustful, self-infantilizing imagination towards the right and deep fascism: ‘Rook shadows cross to the right. A Schoolmaster cleanses himself at half-term with a vegetable offering; on the north side of the hill, one writes with his penis in a patch of snow “Resurgam”’ (20-21). What will rise is the return of

⁸ ‘Physics of the Not-Self’, *Collected Poems*, 195-204.

⁹ ‘The Song of the Militant Romance’ [part of *One-Way Song* (1933)], *Collected Poems*, p. 31.

¹⁰ W.H. Auden, *The Orators* (London: Faber & Faber, 1932), p. 19.

the repressed, the war spirit of 1916, a return to the speaking wound. In the nightmarish 'Letter to a Wound' (section IV), Auden's person writes:

Thanks to you, I have come to see a profound significance in relations I never dreamt of considering before [...] Even the close-ups on the films no longer disgust nor amuse me. On the contrary they sometimes make me cry; knowing you has made me understand. (The Orators, p. 36)

The wound speaks through the new technologies, especially film, the art of the techno-unconscious, the 'close-up' idea of Englishness always shadowed by its militarized enemy, the fascist not-self.

Auden moves into radical exploration of the English inner fascist with the 'Journal of an Airman', which tracks a Tiresias-intelligence maddened by cultural shell-shock into paranoid apprehension of the enemy within: 'The effect of the enemy is to introduce inert velocities into the system (called by him laws or habits) interfering with organisation. These can only be removed by friction (war). Hence the enemy's interest in peace societies' (The Orators, p. 39). The technology of warfare and the systems and organisation of a military culture are allowed to structure the ways the mind apperceives and believes it is perceived, as we see with the 'Observer' entry to the airman's alphabet: 'Peep through periscope / and peerer at pasture / and eye in the air' (The Orators, p. 50). Glimpsing sexual secrets, Romantic visions of nature, sighting the sublime: all three are given military counterparts (submarine vision, sniper-sight, RAF-surveillance) in registers which seem irreparably to have transmuted the very language itself. The illogic of all this is: first to submit to the fascist leader as 'Uncle'-bogeyman; and then to turn war's destructive energy upon the self, to accept invasion by the enemy: 'Conquest can only proceed by absorption of, i.e. infection by, the conquered. The true significance of my hands' (The Orators, p. 75). Auden sensed the paranoia in Lewis's fiction of himself as the Enemy; and constructed the Orators fiction as a display of the psychic war-mechanism generating the split in English postwar culture, conqueror-conquered within the same servomechanical paranoid body, like spectral hands.

The analysis of fascist war-paranoia continued with Auden's collaborations with Christopher Isherwood in the Group Theatre projects. In the 1936 *The Dog Beneath the Skin*, the political split between progressive and conservative classes is written into the body, this time as right and left feet:

RIGHT FOOT. Why are you pushing me, Left?

LEFT F. Cos yer tiking up all the room, that's why.¹¹

The Vicar of Pressan Ambo describes the holy war between God and Satan ('conflict on an astronomical scale') in Great War terms: 'no depth-charges or detectors, no camouflage, no poison-gas [...] can have been unknown to them' (*Dog Beneath the Skin*, p. 165). This vision is given communist spin once Francis reveals himself as the dog-spy on the fascist secrecies of village life; the revolution is war around the corner: 'You are units in an immense army [...] I am going to be a unit in the army of

¹¹ Auden and Isherwood, *The Dog Beneath the Skin* (London: Faber & Faber, 1936), p. 112.

the other side: but the battlefield is so huge that it's practically certain you will never see me again' (Dog Beneath the Skin, p. 174). Auden and Isherwood introduce complexity into the picture by the unavoidable comparison of Francis's militarism and the war-propaganda of the Leader of Westland, who summons totalitarian energy from the image of an absolute fascist enemy:

a Nation: trained to arms from infancy, schooled in military obedience and precision, saluting even in the cradle [...] My mind's eye saw the long silent grey ranks. [...] And a voice said: Woe, woe to the unprepared (Dog Beneath the Skin, p. 71).

The vision of the grey ranks issues from the trenches, and feeds into a Vansittartian jingoist-apocalyptic alarmism. Implicit in the recall of the Leader in Francis's vision of a huge battlefield is the eerie looking-glass resemblances between right and left extremes in the paranoid body politic. As the two leaders of the semi-choruses sing:

We are the guardians of the gate in the rock.
The Two.
On your left and on your right
In the day and in the night,
We are watching you.
(Dog Beneath the Skin, p. 15)

Internalized within the war culture still operative as secret state of emergency in the postwar, and working away in the citizen-unconscious as a militarized translation of Oedipal subjection to the parental gaze, the Two signify the left and right wing versions of war ideology, revolutionary and totalitarian, set up as uncanny control systems within the mind. The war paranoia that was such a feature of the years 1916-1918 beats on now as prophetic voice, both at the level of the Leader and resistance fighter, and as the choric voice of inward anxiety about the impending Second World War: 'The sky is darkening like a stain, / Something is going to fall like rain / And it won't be flowers' (Dog Beneath the Skin, p. 16).

The split self war-anxiety analysed by Graves, Lewis and Auden coloured not only retrospective accounts of the war, but also the manner in which military conflict was represented in the interwar. The retrospective narratives summoned the ghosts of the war years in order to speak of the unacknowledged power of the technological vortex internalized within the mind as political Id. McKechnie goes mad under barrage in *Parade's End* and 'argued with himself, taking both sides in an extraordinarily rapid gabble', and that deranged inward argument is played out in Tietjens' self-wounding shell-shocked monologues. Here he is split into brain and panic, with panic taking over cognitive experience with its frightening surrealist film turning into a cartoon nightmare of the whole world, blurred by the blood of trauma:

Panic came over Tietjens. He knew it would be his last panic of that interview. No brain could stand more. Fragments of scenes of fighting, voices, names, went before his eyes and ears. Elaborate problems...The whole map of the embattled world ran out in front of him – as large as a field [...] with the blood of O Nine Morgan blurring luminously over it. (492-3)

Septimus in Mrs Dalloway is drawn to the wound by uncanny detail, as if the panic within were a crazy artist at melodramatically obscene work: ‘And there the motor car stood, with drawn blinds, and upon them a curious pattern like a tree, Septimus thought, and this gradual drawing together of everything to one centre before his eyes, as if some horror had come almost to the surface and was about to burst into flames, terrified him.’¹²

That near surfacing of the war’s vortex runs through David Jones’ *In Parenthesis*, as the narrative retrospect recreates the vulnerability of human flesh to the lethal war machine. Private John Ball senses, with minute anxiety, the oncoming shell: ‘an on-rushing pervasion, saturating all existence; with exactitude, logarithmic, dial-timed, millesimal’. Here Jones not only narrates wartime expectation of death, but the pervasiveness of war technology in the postwar imaginary, ‘a stillness charged through with some approaching violence’, another fierce vortex, targeting each and every one: ‘He stood alone on the stones, his mess-tin spilled at his feet. Out of the vortex, rifling the air it came — bright, brass-shod, Pandoran; with all-filling screaming howling crescendo’s up-piling snapt.’ The Pandoran release of evil knowledge accompanies the rifling shell, and creates an epic and world-shattering event: ‘the pent violence released a consummation of all burstings out [...] the dissolving and splitting of solid things.’ Underscoring the aftershock in the postwar, Jones names it an ‘unearthing aftermath’. The earth itself as solid ground of reality is decreed, as the vortex rifles through the postwar aftermath to the now of reading, sundering the mind, leaving the body bereft: ‘[he] stood fixed and alone in the little yard — his senses highly alert, his body incapable of movement of response.’¹³

When writers turned to the violence of the wars of the interwar, the vortex could be registered again at its ego-splitting work. In Ireland, wracked by the War of Independence and the Civil War, war within the emergent nation created a strange literature of witness split by contending claims. In the short stories of Frank O’Connor and Sean O’Faolain, the split in identity is figured in the trope of two men on the run in the countryside. In O’Connor’s ‘September Dawn’, two republicans on the run from the British, Keown and Hickey, act out the division,¹⁴ and in O’Faolain’s ‘Fugue’, two men again on the run, reduced to one when Rory is shot by the Black and Tans; but the split persists, between the solitary imagination hunted by enemy and the unreadable landscape of the nation at war with itself. The memory of this psychic ‘civil war’, turning Irish landscape into war zone, both hostile enemy’s country and loving-patriotic refuge, ripples through to Beckett’s tales of tramp pseudo-selves. The civil war split occupies Beckett’s writing in obscurer ways too. Reviewing Denis Devlin’s poetry collection, *Intercessions*, in 1937, Beckett notes the lines from ‘Est Prodest:

¹² Virginia Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway* (1925) (London: Penguin, 1992), p. 16.

¹³ David Jones, *In Parenthesis* (1937) (London: Faber & Faber, 2010), p. 24.

¹⁴ Frank O’Connor, ‘September Dawn’, *The Best of Frank O’Connor* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 2009), 39-54.

Frightened antinomies!
I have wiped examples from mirrors
My mirror's face and I
Are like no god and me
My death is my life's plumed gnomon.¹⁵

He remarks: 'This is the type, the identity made up of cathexes not only multivalent but interchangeable, the "multiply netting/ Of lives distinct and wrangling / Each knot all other's potential"'. Devlin's religious poem about the mirroring of God and human subject also explores the ways bodies are intricately interlinked with all others as fish in a net. Beckett subversively reads this multivalent interchangeable identity as a bundle of cathexes, which reveals the strangeness of the Devlin lines. The antinomic self is plural, only half-revealed since so easily wiped from the mirror surface, uncanny since the face and I are 'no god and me', so cryptically not god, not me, potentially made up of collective lives, or perhaps of nothing at all. Beckett cuts two lines from the Devlin when quoting, however – after 'mirrors' it should read 'I have brought to heel my shadow – / Soul from her rebel heavens'. What has been cut is the Audenesque allusion¹⁶ to the conflict between God and Satan; and it is this (censored) allusion which encodes warfare as at the heart of the uncanny mirroring of self with gnomonic, antinomic self. The Catholic baroque twist on surrealist poetry which Devlin was experimenting with in the 1930s is revealed as an evasion from the disciplinary self-violence of Irish politics, the Free State basing its censoring and amnesiac polis upon a 'Catholic' bringing to heel of the shadow enemy within.¹⁷

Disguised within all post-Civil War writing in Ireland is the self-destructive urge Yeats saw running all history: the gyre spiralling in and out from acts of blood-letting, a sequence of interfamilial murders of like selves. His play *Purgatory* stages patricidal father killing his own son within sight of the destroyed Big House haunted by the aisling ghost of mother Ireland (who also inhabits the symbolic tree at the back of the stage).¹⁸ It was a play that was to inspire Eliot's encounter with the ghost of Yeats in 'Little Gidding', as it was to inspire Beckett after the Second World War, with the barren tree and the two suicidal men of *Waiting for Godot*. The cycle of destruction speaks in Yeats' play of the emptily purgatorial sequence of wars, from 1916 through the War of Independence to the Civil War, that put an end to the Ascendancy dream of Anglo-Irish nationalism. For Eliot and Beckett, the play foretold the need (necessary for Eliot, impossible for Beckett) to redeem the purgatorial sacrifice of lives in the Second World War.

The frightened antinomies generated by the looking-glass war in the mind haunt the poetry of the Spanish Civil War too. Jack Lyndsay's call to arms, 'On Guard for Spain!' (*Left Review*, March 1937), tries to break through the screen created by atomizing class exploitation:

¹⁵ Samuel Beckett, *Disjecta: Miscellaneous Writings and a Fragment* (London: John Calder, 1983), p. 92. ('Est Prodest', *University Review* 3.5, *The Complete Poems of Denis Devlin* (Summer 1964), 46-50 (p. 49).

¹⁶ Beckett praises Devlin for being 'Extraordinary' in his review.

¹⁷ Beckett's clearest response to the Irish Free State is his 1935 essay, 'Censorship in the Saorstát' (*Disjecta*, 84-7).

¹⁸ W.B. Yeats, *Purgatory*, in *Collected Plays* (London: Macmillan, 1952).

Men and women, come out of the numbered cells
Of harsh privation, mockingly called your homes,
Break through the deadening screen with your clenched fists,
[...] and you will hear the guns in Spain¹⁹

The walls of the bourgeois home imprison the workers within zones of poverty which separate and divide the people from themselves and from their fellow workers at war abroad. But calling the house wall a screen suggests a surface that both conceals, as in 'screens off', and which falsely communicates, as in cinema screen. The screen disguises resemblances at the same time as it posits the fake potential of those resemblances: only by mimicking war's violences (bringing down the walls of the houses as through bombardment) and only by destroying the news media that control all representations of international politics can the working class identify with its shadow souls at war in Spain.

Juxtaposed in Valentine Cunningham's *Penguin Book of Spanish Civil War Verse* are Stephen Spender's review of Picasso's *Guernica*, and an ekphrastic poem by J.F. Hendry, both responding to the painting when seen in Whitechapel in 1938 – Roland Penrose had brought the painting to Britain to raise funds for the Republicans. For Spender, Picasso has painted not the event but the newspaper report of bombing ('a picture of horror reported in the newspapers'). It is, therefore, an activist painting based on second-hand experience. For Spender, this distance from the event is not necessarily disabling:

the many people who are not indirect contact with the disasters falling on civilization live in a waking nightmare of second-hand experiences which in a way are more terrible than real experiences because the person overtaken by a disaster has at least a more limited vision than the camera's wide, cold, recording eye. (419)

For Hendry, however, Picasso has painted a still photograph transformed by the affect it must release in humanitarian hearts. The dead and screaming victims of the fascist air-raid are radically fixed by war's killing moment: 'Frozen in the fright of light chilled skull and spine / Droop bone-shriek-splinters sharper than the Bren', Hendry writes.²⁰ The photographer's flash of light is identical with the flash of the bomb blast as it annihilates. What is frozen in time are war's chilling effects: the lethal cold brutality of the murderous act of violence. Light has chilled skull and spine (as in 'light-chilled'), as though the blast of light were both lethal X-ray and flash-freezing refrigerant. The camera's cold, recording eye chillingly embalms what it witnesses. At the same time the rhythm and passion of the line speaks to antifascist outrage at war as murder of civilians that is 'sharper than the Bren'.

¹⁹ *The Penguin Book of Spanish Civil War Verse*, ed Valentine Cunningham (London: Penguin, 1980): 253-4.

²⁰ This is how the lines run in the *New Apocalypse* anthology. In *The Bombed Happiness* (London: Routledge, 1942), however, Hendry changes this to 'Frozen in the fright of light chill skull and spine / Droop bone, shriek splinters sharper than the Bren' ('Picasso for *Guernica*', p. 39) – which was a mistake.

Experience of the war in Spain sharpened Popular Front reactions to war as agent of revolutionary, anti-fascist struggle; and this is what motivated Auden and Isherwood when they travelled to China to report on the Sino-Japanese war, and to register the chances of a communist revolution triggered by that war (as the First World War triggered the revolution in Russia). Isherwood's account of the trip is nevertheless characterized by a sleepy Englishness unable quite to wake up to the reality of the war as blasting event. In Canton, taking tea with a missionary host and hostess, Isherwood uneasily listens to an air-raid across the river and tries to integrate the contradictions of the experience:

It was all very well for Auden to sit there so calmly, arguing about the Group Movement. He had been in Spain. My eyes moved over this charming room, taking in the tea-cups, the dish of scones, the book-case with Chesterton's essays and Kipling's poems, the framed photograph of an Oxford college. My brain tried to relate these images to the sounds outside: the whine of the power-diving bomber, the distant thump of the explosions. Understand, I told myself, that those noises, these objects are part of a single, integrated scene. Wake up. It's real. And, at that moment, I really did wake up. And that moment, suddenly, I arrived in China. (22)

In the aftermath of the failure of the Republican cause in Spain, writers began to record the spiritual drift into neurotic waiting-game consonant with the uneasy and complicit years of appeasement. Mass Observation, set up in 1937 by Charles Madge and Tom Harrisson as a left-wing sociological experiment to record popular opinion, especially in the working-class northern towns, registered the ambiguous, self-destructive and blinkered fear of a future war that characterized the Munich crisis.²¹ The fear was a resuscitation of the war experience of the First World War, the past war leading to a 'collapse of belief in any future' under the present crisis, according to Madge and Harrisson. They quote a wife and mother, 42: 'I have been collecting poisons for some time with guile and cunning. I have sufficient to give self, husband and children a lethal dose. I can remember the last war. I don't want to live through another, or the children either. I shan't tell them, I shall just do it' (Britain, p. 49).

This suicidal impulse is simultaneously a blanketing off of the impending war, as we can see in a comparable move in the Paris journal of the young and naïve David Gascoyne. As a surrealist, war was always already a psychoanalytic category, symptom writ large of mental conflict following the illogic of Dali's paranoid critical method. As he walks the streets of Paris in August and September 1939, Gascoyne ponders "the mental and spiritual war that had been going on inside me for weeks and months – perhaps years?", and relates this to a general schizophrenia across Europe: "schizophrenia" is one of the fundamental hallmarks of everything important that is happening in the modern exterior world'. The rhyme between the inner split and the European crisis leads to two contradictory impulses: believing in himself as a prophet, leading war-torn populations towards spiritual renaissance, and a death-wish drift towards immobility: 'Altogether, what with all this inward turmoil, and the "nerve-war"

²¹ Britain, by Mass Observation (London: Penguin, 1939).

crisis that the newspapers are full of, and the thundery weather, I shall probably be left quite prostrate soon'.²²

With the war underway, modernist writers felt the rival sleep-walking and prophetic impulses sway under the influence of the rising tide of propaganda, the communal and communitarian hopes generated by war socialism. I will concentrate on the New Romanticism of the war years because it was wartime surrealism which most clearly demarcated the split drives of the imagination in wartime. In his 1941 collection, *The Father Found*, Charles Madge ponders the 'metaphoric double' generated by war's mediatized dreamwork. The double appears as a mermaid, creature of the watery unconscious, curiously ambivalent: 'The glass entanglement of flowery hair / Deceives a plane.'²³ The 'plane' could be a surface, or it could be an aircraft: the entanglement of meanings is about the ways technology in wartime will always be coloured by deception operations, camouflage effects, fears that the natural might be a cover for war's techné. The mermaid is deceptively televisual, both in the sense that her image carries across space into the mind, and as an object of desire screened on TV: 'Not less perfect was, / They say, a face once found in television' (45). Something about wartime, for Madge, is televisually matching mass marketing of desire and the news of the war on its way, creating for the first time a global audience out of the World War's spectators: 'our new ray / Hits heaven's ceiling and reduplicates // On screens in New York Paris the same day / Bright-eyed, and dressed in new clothes, while war news / Sharpens the orchestral irony of play' (47). The new ray is the mermaid screen goddess at the same time as it is television itself: feeding off the allure of war news to create a 'glass entanglement' of minds split between mediatized consumer desire and propagandized citizenship in wartime.

War visuality, for Madge, entangles the deep dreaming mind and public war operations. In 'Binocular Vision', he reprises Lewis's sense of the militarized imagination, discovering the 'glimmering duplicate' not in the imagination's replica of objects in the world, but in the war's doubling of the body of flesh with the war machine; the erotic body is ghosted by the armoured body within:

The robe falls down, stained with some flower,
Turns to powder, cannot hide
The tremendous body inside
Of steel, machine, the ruling power. (67)

The wartime mind is, for Madge, asleep in two realms: 'our suspension in this deep' (69) signals both the deep unconscious of the trancelike state that Graves saw as poetry's origin, and the deep wartime of steel, machine, and ruling power.

Lynette Roberts worked on an extraordinary homefront document, the long poem *Gods with Stainless Ears: A Heroic Poem*, written between 1941 and 1943.²⁴ In the preface she speaks of the

²² Journal entries for August 22nd and September 3rd, 1939, *Paris Journal 1937-1939* (London: Enitharmon, 1978), pp. 126, 127, 130.

²³ 'The Mermaid', *The Father Found* (London: Faber & Faber, 1941), p. 45.

²⁴ Lynette Roberts, *Collected Poems*, ed. Patrick McGuiness (Manchester: Carcanet, 2005)

mediatized imagination as compositional fact: 'the scenes and visions ran before me like a newsreel [...] the poem was written for filming' (43). The thick textures of her style speak to the ways language is both a medium for the projection of images and a disruptive screen, publically/privately self-referential. The compositional framing of experience, however, is not so much hers as a function of the shaping rationality of war culture:

In Euclidian cubes grid air is planed.
Propellers scudding up grit and kerosene, braid
Hulls waled 5 miles hollow, spidering each man stark
On steelweb, hammering in rivets ambushade
Interrupted by sirens screaming tirade (I, 47)

The war industries and technologies parcel out time and space and bodies within a total 'steelweb' of relations that pollutes, victimizes and enslaves all, including the 'air' of the poem. The war is turning Wales into another nation, as a function of the war machine ('Hulls waled...'), and as dragon raised by British propaganda – a woodpecker-machinegun hybrid:

O the cut of it, woe sharp on the day
Scaled in blood, the ten-toed woodpecker,
A dragon of wings 1 6 2 0 B 6
4 punctuates machine-gun from the quarry-pits (I, 45)

The cut and woe of it lies in the fabrication of the new Wales as war creature, scaled in blood, rationalized into source of war matériel: and this death-machine infects the poeisis too, the 'ten-toed' punctuating rhythm hidden within the loose lines.

The anarchic first four parts of the poem track the years 1939 to 1941, and then, with the entry of the Soviet Union into the war, and the growing knowledge that the war could be won, the narrator and her gunner lover rise in apotheosis above the war machine into ecstatic communal vision and love. They fall to earth, though, under war's compulsions, and the airy fantasy is replaced by the grimmer vision of a crashed war machine: the gunner goes mad, and she is left alone. As they fall, they cease to become birds and become subject to the technological gaze again: 'Earthwards like arctic terns the spangled / Mirrors still on our wings. Colder. Continuous as newsreel, /Quadrillion cells spotting the air, stinging / The face like a swarm of bees'(V, 68). Something of the mirroring split between progressive and dystopian visions of war culture is intimated here with the mirrors on the wings – there is resemblance between the fallen hopes of the war-socialist dreamers and the ways the war machine targets and brings down its enemy. There is a sensing of the ways bodies are 'planed' within the war's 'Euclidian cubes': Roberts feels those gridlines rushing by on the skin, and intuits the relations as a material newsreel, representational steelweb of the war.

J.F. Hendry in 1945 reflected on war in his time, and saw 'two caps in the present war', conservative and progressive, with social myth replacing reality in both cases. War and revolution are

both, he argues, ‘the expression in violence of the individual or social “subconscious”’.²⁵ Yet neither view takes into account this real war, the ‘inner war’ based on the ‘primary division’ within the mind. For Hendry, it would be a mistake to see a straight distinction between ‘a divided and fissured psyche’ and war as ‘mass hypnosis’ (17). Instead war invites us to identify ourselves with our weapons and turn ourselves into ‘object-mechanisms’, and it is this which divides (15). To resist the ‘kind of poisoning [...] set up in us by these same object-mechanisms’ (15) is to see the sacrificial logic running relations between object-mechanisms and minds during wartime. Christ at the Last Supper offered wine as blood and bread as flesh because he knew his disciples would ‘gape like a crowd in a circus’ at his sacrifice, and that they would:

carry out the communion ceremony like pathetic puppets in a kind of compulsion neurosis which would not cease until they understood the horror of it; still killing others, daily shedding blood and breaking bread and bones and bodies directly and indirectly, only to be recalled annually to the flesh that is eternally murdered, a recall to pity, an emotion, a terrible satire: the eternal crucifixion: WAR. Our own Last Supper. (19)

Modernism was continually haunted by war from the time it had to deal with the First World War as aftermath shadow in the political unconscious, through to the years minds prepared themselves for the sacrificial war machine of the Second World War. That war revealed the sacrificial logic to the surrealist wing most keenly of all: for they felt the recall to pity, emotion, terrible satire deep in the steelweb of the war-imagination, and registered the ways the mind (split between the compulsion neurosis scripted by the war machine and the need to transcend the object-mechanism) suffered at the crossing point between the two. At best, the writers, seeking some therapeutic vision for art beyond object-mechanical acts of witness, slipped the steel net, by way of emotion and satire, self-watchful guile and cunning.

²⁵ J.H. Hendry Henry Treece, *The Crown and the Sickle* (London: King & Staples, 1945), p. 10.

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