

THE EFFECTS OF THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR  
ON THE WRITERS OF THE BRITISH LEFT:  
An investigation of political and  
literary interaction.

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1968

A Dissertation submitted in part requirement  
for the degree of B.A.(Hons.)

UNIVERSITY OF TASMANIA

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Political Parties and Groups referred to in the Dissertation.

British

- C.P.G.B. - Communist Party of Great Britain
- I.L.P. - International Labour Party

Spanish

- C.N.T. = Confederación Nacional del Trabajo (an Anarcho-Syndicalist Trades Union)
- F.A.I. - Federación Anarquista Ibérica (an Anarchist secret society)
- P.O.U.M. - Partindo Obrero de Unificación Marxista (a semi-Trotskyist party)
- P.S.U.C. = Partindo Socialista Unificado Cataluña (a Communist controlled socialist party)
- U.G.T. - Union General del Trabajadores. (a Communist controlled Trades Union)

There are times in the history of literature when writers are like hermits and retreat into themselves, writing of personal matters, of fantasy, and shunning any relationship with the contemporary world. There are other times, however, when the writers become intensely involved with political movements. This interaction of literary and political viewpoints is generally beneficial to both literature and politics, but usually of more benefit to the latter. Such a time of literary/political interaction occurred in the 1930s prior to and during the Spanish Civil War. It was the war in Spain which brought the political involvement of the writers to a peak, but it was also this war which helped to destroy it. In the Twenties the British people were passing through a period of intense revulsion from war. The First World War had made people realize the horrors of fighting, and it was hoped that by the institution of the League of Nations, war would no longer be the final means of settling disputes among nations.

### The Writers and the Cause Célèbre

The literary figures fashionable in the Twenties, such as T.S.Eliot, Virginia Woolf and Lytton Strachey, were not concerned with political theories or practices. They were more concerned with relationships between people, with critical examinations of the past or with the arid nature of the present. The General Strike of 1926 caused no burst of literary activity.

The new young writers who first published their work in 1930 or the very late Twenties, reacted against this lack of interest in contemporary politics. They had only been children during the



Great War but they saw around them the mass unemployment created by the Depression and the disquieting signs of the growth of Fascism. Most of them adopted some form of Socialism. They rejected the bourgeois values they had been brought up in and saw the future in the rise of the worker from his place as the victim of capitalist society. These ideas not only affected their own work, but, as they gained prominence, gave publicity to the various political movements they supported from the Labour Party to the Communist Party of Great Britain. The writers were useful not only in producing party propaganda of a more subtle variety than the political tract, but they also extended the concern of socialist theory to the cultural field, investigating, for instance, the relationship of art and propaganda.

On July 18, 1936 a group of Spanish Generals, including Franco, rose in revolt against the constitutionally elected Popular Front government of Spain. This was clearly an illegal move and the Spanish Government, in attempting to put down the revolt was quite in accord with accepted international law in appealing to other nations to assist it, and in trying to buy arms abroad. It was also clear in international law that other nations should not give aid to the rebels, nor should any other nation allow its territory to be used to support the rebels. Thus the decision of the French Popular Front government to institute a policy of non-intervention in the Spanish War, to be adhered to by all European nations, was unprecedented. The French Premier, Leon Blum, made the suggestion only after pressure had been put on him to do so by

the British Government and the French Right Wing. Practically, the non-intervention policy meant a support of the rebels, for they were receiving supplies and men from the Fascist powers, Italy and Germany, while the government was unable to obtain regular supplies of equipment.

To many Socialists and people inclined towards Socialism, including the young writers of the Thirties, the war in Spain was a clear cut case of democracy fighting against Fascism and all the forces of reaction. The Republican Government of Spain had been bringing reforms to the almost feudal social system and the Government's popularity with the workers was evinced by their willingness to fight for the Republic, following mass desertions from the army to the rebels. The rebels were backed not only by the Fascist powers, but also by the wealthy capitalists who had been the equivalent of the feudal lords of Spain. Spain became the dominant force in the life and literature of the young writers of the Thirties. Many of them went to fight in Spain, some were killed. The realities of the fight in Spain, the activities of the Communists, the disunity within the Popular Front and the sheer horror of war, were all instrumental in changing the attitudes of most of the writers who survived. The political beliefs that had been embraced so idealistically, frequently did not survive exposure to actual political practices. Thus the end of the Spanish Civil War saw the beginning of a retreat from political attitudes by the previously fiercely committed writers. Both the effect of Spain on the writers of the Thirties, and their effect

on their public were not insignificant. Even if the writers have, like W.H.Auden, repudiated their work since, it was influential at the time it was written,

The writers of the Thirties under consideration are those who regarded themselves, and who were regarded by the public, as of the Left in their writings. Writers whose private political opinions were of the Left, but who did not display these opinions in their work, will not be considered. Almost all of the writers dealt with espoused some form of Communism ranging from a vague romanticized form relying heavily on liberal beliefs and personal idiosyncrasies to the fully fledged, doctrinaire, card-carrying members. They included poets, novelists, dramatists, critics, and at times acted as journalists.

#### Objectives of the Study

The main object of the study is to investigate the political ideas of various British writers before, during and after a crisis. The chosen crisis is the Spanish Civil War and the writers on whom it had the greatest effect were the young, politically-aware poets, novelists, dramatists and critics who first began to publish their work in the early 1930s. The study will attempt to demonstrate the interdependence of politics and literature in the Thirties and the importance of literary figures to a political movement. It is hoped to reach a final conclusion that writers become important and influential on the eve of a crisis, but that their experience of their own impotence during a war, contrasted with their influence beforehand, causes them to become politically indifferent

following the crisis.

To achieve this conclusion, it will first be shown that the Thirties witnessed a development of political consciousness among the young writers, the Spanish Civil War intensified and crystallized this political consciousness, but when the young writers were exposed to the harsh political realities of the Spanish Civil War, they became aware of their impotence and generally retreated from politics. However, an attempt will be made to show that these writers were important as propagandists or publicists for their political beliefs whether or not they consciously wrote propaganda.

#### PROPOSED OUTLINE OF DISSERTATION

The dissertation will begin with a brief examination of the disillusionment, introspection and withdrawal from personal commitment exhibited by the authors of the 1920s such as T.S.Eliot, Virginia Woolf, Aldous Huxley and Lytton Strachey. These attitudes will be shown to be instrumental in the development of the mood of the Thirties. The young writers whose work was first being published in the early 1930s reacted against the values of their predecessors. The young writers of the Thirties, observing the economic depression and the growth of Fascism, believed that the divorce of literature from politics was no longer permissible.

Alone among nations in the early Thirties, the Soviet Union was making economic progress. Admittedly this progress was from a very primitive starting point, but nevertheless the five year plans were enabling the Soviet Union to escape the mass unemployment and other hardships of the Depression. Both the Depression and the

growth of Fascism were seen as an example of the decay of capitalism according to the Communist theory. This combined with the appeal of the Soviet Union to create a sympathy for, if not an outright espousal of, Communism. The young writers of the Thirties found in Communism the assurance and the moral code they needed. Bourgeois values had been rejected, as if it was felt that they had helped to create the prevalent crises. The cause of the worker, the oppressed victim of capitalist society was taken up. Some of these writers became members of the C.P.G.B., more of them merely accepted some of its teachings.

The outbreak of the Spanish Civil War enabled the rather vague political beliefs of the young writers to be attached to a definite cause. Almost all of them campaigned actively for the Republicans either by actually fighting for them or by organizing aid for them. Emotional involvement in the Spanish Civil War, which had become almost a crusade, was both sincere and deep.

Unfortunately the Spanish Civil War was not a clear cut conflict, the Republicans were not all representatives of goodness and humanity, and the workers were not united. The rivalries among the various parties of the Popular Front in Spain shocked many intellectuals who had regarded the statements of the British Labour Party about the disunity existing within Popular Front as complete fabrications. Far more important in the disillusionment of the young British writers, was the behaviour of the Communists. Prior to the outbreak of war, the Spanish Communist Party had been a very small group. The disorder of war and the decision of the

Soviet Union to help the Republicans, gave the Communists an opportunity to expand their operations. It was soon apparent that the war was being virtually controlled by the Communists and the fighting within the Popular Front between the Communists and the semi-Trotskyist P.O.U.M. in Barcelona, was revealing to many members of the British Left, but particularly to George Orwell.

The political disillusionment, that realization of political behaviour in Spain occasioned, combined with awareness of their own impotence in war, caused most of the young writers to retreat from political activities and beliefs. Instead of being important in influencing people's opinions and in obtaining aid for Spain, the writers were no more important, once they enlisted in the militia, than any other militia man, and none of them could have any effect on the war. Many young writers stopped writing political, social literature, and began to concentrate on more personal problems. If an interest in political themes remained, it was not the same as had existed previously, it became more cynical, even despairing, as in Orwell's 1984. However, the political opinions expressed by the writers of the thirties were of definite importance. They combined with their actions to bring political ideas to the public and to act as publicity and propaganda for political beliefs.

#### The Organization of the Dissertation

The first chapter of the study will involve an investigation of the attitude of the young writers of the British Left before the Spanish Civil War. The writers will be divided roughly into three groups. The first will consist only of George Orwell, the second

of the fashionable Auden-Spender group, and the third of the more doctrinaire Communists such as John Cornford and Christopher Caudwell. The second chapter will examine the same people during the course of the Spanish Civil War. It will note their opinions, actions, writings and in some cases their deaths. Again they will be divided into the three rough groups of the first chapter. The third chapter will examine the effects that the Spanish Civil War had on the writers who survived. This time they will be divided into only two groups, Orwell and the Auden-Spender group, as most of the doctrinaire Communists were killed. The final chapter will attempt an evaluation of the previous chapters as well as an investigation of the importance of political/literary interaction in the political world.

#### Scope of the Dissertation

The period to be studied in this dissertation will be mainly the Thirties, that is from January 1930 until December 1939, but reference will be made to the Twenties and the period since 1939, primarily for comparative purposes. The years 1936 and 1937 will be dealt with more thoroughly than other years as the Spanish Civil War, although lasting from July 1936 to April 1939, was of major importance to the literary world, and to the general British public during 1936 and 1937. The study of the importance of literature and literary figures to political movements will not, however, be restricted to the Thirties, although this time will remain central to the investigation.

## Sources

The basic material for the dissertation was the writings of the various literary figures involved. Poems, <sup>essays</sup> ~~eaasya~~, novels, criticisms and reviews were all important material. Often more important than these however were autobiographies and memoirs of the figures themselves, which, as the authors were often close friends of other members of the movement, provide information on many relevant figures. These are various studies of the Thirties of a general type such as Malcolm Muggeridge's and Julian Symon's which provide social, political and economic background information as well as literary comment and criticism. Critical works on some of the writers have been used, but wherever possible, material is used directly from the writer rather than by relying on the interpretations of a literary commentator.

The effect of the writers on the public is particularly hard to ascertain. Public opinion polls only began in England in 1937 with the development of "Mass Observation" and thus this avenue of investigation is limited. The sale of works of the various authors is not really a good indication of their influence as, especially with the poets, the influence of a literary figure cannot be directly related to his commercial popularity. Much of the influence the writers exerted would have been through work published in newspapers and magazines. Most of the writers studies published material in The New Stateman and Nation which would probably have been the most influential organ of Left-wing opinion during the Spanish Civil War.



Dating of various poems, which <sup>must</sup> ~~may~~ be as accurate as possible in order to trace the development of the poets' attitudes, is taken from the Penguin Poetry of the Thirties when it is not available from more direct sources.

### Limitations

This study does not involve explanation of the causes of the Spanish Civil War nor of the military actions which decided its outcome. The impact of the Spanish Civil War in fields unconnected with the British writers of the Left is also not dealt with, neither is the place the war occupied in the development of relations between European countries. Political theorists such as John Strachey and Harold Laski are not studied as their writings were political rather than literary. The committees formed to send aid to Spain will not be studied, nor will their activities, even if important literary figures were members of the committees.

Investigation of the relevant literature does not extend past those aspects of the work which were influenced by, or important to the development of political beliefs. Some left-wing writers who fought in Spain, such as Tom Wintringham, Malcolm Dunbar and Ralph Fox, have not been studied, although information on them was available in some works on the Spanish Civil War such as Stanley Weintraub's The Last Great Cause. This is because primary material was unavailable, because they were prominent more as military than as literary figures, and because their reactions to the war did not follow the pattern of the other writers.

CHAPTER 1.

BEFORE THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR

Any reasonably thorough understanding of the literature of the 1930s demands some study of the basic literary ideas of the preceeding decade, as much of the literature of the 1930s was directly in reaction to the earlier work. The important writers of the 1920s, and their public, were revolted by the world which had brought about the Great War. Some, such as Aldous Huxley and Lytton Strachey, rejected the morals and beliefs that were generally accepted; others like Virginia Woolf and James Joyce examined the personal inner life of their characters rather than the external realities. Their attitudes were not affected by political events, the General Strike, for instance, passed virtually unnoticed. The most influential writer was without doubt, the poet T.S.Eliot whose poem The Wasteland, published in 1922, was both highly original and representative of the mood of disillusioned cynicism prevalent among his intelligent followers.

The work of these important literary figures was not intended for the general public (The Wasteland needed explanatory notes for even a highly educated reader to comprehend it). The audience at which these inventive writers aimed their work was educated, intelligent and well-to-do. Cyril Connolly writing of this period, notes how a theory crystallized that politics were harmful and "not artistic material of the first order, that an artist could not be a politician"<sup>1</sup>. Connolly says "A belief in action indicated a belief in progress, a belief in progress was Victorian and ridiculous" It must not be assumed that this was the only important literary attitude of the period however. Other

attitudes did exist but they were generally individual attitudes and consequently not as influential as the cynical, personal ones expounded by Eliot, Virginia Woolf and friends. E.M.Forster and D.H.Lawrence both exhibited strong feelings for humanity, though expressed in very different manners.

1929 brought the Wall Street crash which heralded the world economic Depression. Thus the 1930s began with mass unemployment and poverty. Fascism was no longer regarded as an amusing form of nationalism, it had become a most unpleasant force; by 1933 Hitler would be in control in Germany. An intelligent person coming to maturity among this unemployment and poverty and aware of the growing threat of Fascism, could not dismiss politics as inartistic material. The young intellectuals of the thirties looked for an explanation of the world situation and found one in Marxist theory. The decay of capitalism was predicted to involve both economic depression and the harsh repressions of Fascism. The impact of Marxism was heightened by the fact that alone of the countries of the world, Russia was making economic progress. The Russian economy was still in a rather primitive state, but the five year plans were enabling it to avoid suffering as the capitalist economies were. Marxism thus appeared to the concerned young writer not only to be correct in its predictions of world events but also to be the doctrine of the future, of progress and of hope. Neal Wood, in his study of the British intellectual and Communism, notes the adoption of Communism by the young writers of the thirties, saying

"To the nihilist in search of an escape from the Wasteland, Communism extended the 'scientific' system of Marxism. It was a system of great human ingenuity, indeed of archetonic grandeur, apparently logical, coherent and reasonable. The hesitating empiricist, bewildered by the flux of events, no doubt turned in great relief to such a rationalistic system, that so plausibly accounted for a great number of hitherto in-<sup>2</sup>-explicable and unrelated phenomena".

Some of those who found reassurance in Marxist doctrine became actual Communist Party members. Cecil Day Lewis was a member for a number of years, Stephen Spender for a few weeks, Christopher Caudwell and John Cornford, both of whom were killed in Spain, were very sincere members. Other writers expressed Marxist belief from outside the party or became associated with various other socialist groups.

Very few, if any, of the writers approached their beliefs with the thoroughness of George Orwell. Orwell decided that it was necessary for him to examine mass unemployment and the English working class before becoming completely committed to Socialism. In the book which resulted from this study - The Road to Wigan Pier - Orwell says :

"before you can be sure whether you are genuinely in favour of Socialism, you have got to decide whether things at present are tolerable or not tolerable

"and you have got to take up a definite attitude on the terribly difficult issue of class".<sup>3</sup>

Orwell decided that the present situation was intolerable after spending a considerable time among the unemployed working class in the industrial north of England.

Orwell examines the class issue in three chapters which include autobiographical material to explain how his own attitudes developed. He approaches the class problem with a clear recognition that he is middle class (lower-upper-middle class, to be precise), and that his tastes, notions and prejudices are middle-class. Hence he says "the fact that has got to be faced is that to abolish class distinction means abolishing a part of yourself"<sup>4</sup>

Non acceptance and non-recognition of this fact render most attempts at overthrowing class divisions futile or causes them to backfire and actually increase class prejudice. Often the middle-class Socialist who is intent on breaking down class barriers who tends to idealize the working man, does not come into contact with a real worker. Only two types of working class people come normally with the middle-class and neither type is typical. The working class intellectual and the Labour Party functionary provide the ordinary bourgeois with his only chance of meeting a working class person. These types have to be aggressive to succeed, and <sup>they</sup> often reject the working class background which they misrepresent. They are apt to shatter the middle class Socialists' belief in the exploited but pure worker and Orwell

presents this as one answer to the large number of ardent young Socialists who become reactionary and Conservative as they grow older.

"From one point of view", says Orwell, "Socialism is such elementary common sense that I am sometimes amazed that it has not established itself already".<sup>5</sup> This prefaces Orwell's investigation of the ills of Socialism, for he readily acknowledges that the number of socialists is not growing as could be reasonably expected. In almost all countries of the world, Socialism is failing to advance or being defeated, while Fascism continually gains more support and followers. Orwell concludes that the main things wrong with Socialism are its adherents and its assumption that the ultimate end of Socialism is universally desired. According to Orwell the ordinary person is repelled from Socialism by the large proportion of cranks who are Socialist. Orwell says that

"One sometimes gets the impression that the mere words 'Socialism' and 'Communism' draw towards them with magnetic force every fruit-juice drinker, nudist, sandal-wearer, sex-maniac, quaker, 'Nature-cure' quack, pacifist and feminist in England".<sup>6</sup>

Orwell does admit that Socialism also attracts prim white-collar workers and 'youthful snob Bolsheviks'. For Orwell, a true Socialist must have a love of the working class, but he says that many of the intellectual Socialists appear to be motivated solely by a sense of order. It is this type of Socialist who is

concerned with ideological purity and who expounds theory to the workers in terms so complex that the ordinary person concludes that Socialism is unapproachable. The quest for ideological purity involves the Socialist in constant vituperation against the bourgeoisie, many of whom could be potential allies if they were presented with propaganda that would point out to them how they were oppressed by the capitalists in exactly the same manner that the workers were oppressed.

The propaganda which Socialism was using was completely wrong in Orwell's opinion. The effect of bad propaganda was, according to Orwell such that,

"The ordinary decent person, who is in sympathy with the essential aims of Socialism, is given the impression that there is no room for his kind in any Socialist party that means business. Worse he is driven to the cynical conclusion that Socialism is a kind of doom which is probably coming but must be staved off as long as possible".<sup>7</sup>

Orwell attacks the belief that all people desire the mechanical progress which is so often presented as the object of Marxism. The average Socialist seems unaware that many people view the increasing mechanization as destructive of human effort and creativity. Presentation of the true objectives of Socialism - justice and liberty - is one of Orwell's suggestions for the



improvement of Socialist propaganda. Thus, to Orwell, the worker who is a Socialist because he believes it to be the only way in which he can improve his life, is a far better Socialist than the more ideologically sound intellectual Socialist with his belief in order and mechanical progress.

In his consideration of Socialist propaganda, Orwell examines the Socialist literature available and dismisses it as practically all dull and bad,

"the high-water mark, so to speak, of Socialist literature is W.H.Auden, a sort of gutless Kipling and the even feebler poets associated with him".<sup>8</sup>

Yet Orwell notes in the very next chapter that writers are becoming increasingly political in contrast to the opinion of the previous decade which declared politics too vulgar for words.<sup>9</sup> Orwell feared that the political awareness of writers would lead them to Fascist attitudes. The fear of Fascism led Orwell to advocate the Popular Front, which he regarded as a safe move as long as the essentials of Socialism were maintained. Orwell believed the Popular Front should recruit all who believed that tyranny must be overthrown but should avoid "the type of humbug who passes resolutions 'against Fascism and Communism', i.e. against rats and rat-poison".<sup>10</sup> The conclusion Orwell arrives at is that

"All that is needed is to hammer two facts home into the public consciousness. One that the interests of all exploited people are the same; the other

that Socialism is compatible with  
Common decency".<sup>11</sup>

Orwell's study of Socialism and the conditions of the unemployed in England's industrial North, presents the problems and the evils very clearly, but rarely gives suggestions to alleviate them. Where suggestions are given, as above when he suggests hammering two facts home, they are likely to be vague and exceedingly difficult to implement. This points up the often repeated charge that Orwell was really a reporter; he presents the situation, analyses it but does not give a definite suggestion to resolve it. The Road to Wigan Pier does not set out to be a novel and is an overt piece of social reporting, but the second part of the book, that concerned mainly with the analysis of Socialism, should contain suggestions whereby Socialism could alleviate the suffering depicted in the first part

It may be said that Orwell is concerned with increasing the appeal of Socialism so that it would be in a better position to attack poverty and mass unemployment, or that he assumes that Socialist policy will automatically improve the working man's lot in a manner that all readers would understand. This still does not remove the dissatisfaction caused by a very thorough investigation of the economic problems of the working class being left without any proposals for improving the situation. John Lehmann says that Orwell's style "is thoroughly typical of the thirties, where the boundary dividing creative writing from reporting becomes at times so difficult to define".<sup>12</sup> Raymond Williams also notes the quality of reporting in Orwell's early work,

finding it in two levels. The first level is a report on the curious or exotic, and to Orwell's middle-class reading public, the life of a miner was certainly curious, if not exotic. The second level is that of a perceptive critique and occurs when the class or society observed is near the reporter's own.<sup>13</sup>

The miners that Orwell investigates are perceptively studied and the whole society in which they (barely) exist is subject to a very perceptive critique. Orwell's other early works such as the novels Burmese Days and Coming Up for Air represent tentative steps towards the position developed in the Road to Wigan Pier.

In 1932 a collection of poems called New Signatures was published by the Hogarth Press. The contributors included W.H. Auden, Julian Bell, Cecil Day Lewis, John Lehmann and Stephen Spender. Some of the poets had had work published previously, but this volume caused them to be regarded as a group, expressing views in their poetry that differed from most other contemporary poets. The volume was introduced by Michael Roberts who said

"The poems in this book represent a clear reaction against esoteric poetry in which it is necessary for the reader to catch each recondite allusion".<sup>14</sup>

The imagery used by the poets was contemporary and frequently mechanical but the political interests ascribed to them were not very marked in the poetry of this volume. Roberts notes a feeling of personal unimportance that comes from a solidarity with others. He also expressed the hope that soon "it may be possible to write 'popular' poetry again",<sup>15</sup> poetry that would be

comprehensible to, and enjoyed by, all. Yet these feelings had not, at this time, been formulated into, or associated with, a particular political creed. The anthology which followed it a year later, New Country, was definitely political, even revolutionary. In the preface Michael Roberts argues a congruity of interests between the workers and the intellectuals and suggests that the intellectuals should work within the Communist Party of Great Britain. It contained prose works including some by Christopher Isherwood.

Leonard Woolf, owner of the Hogarth Press, said of them

"Despair has always been the occupational disease of young poets, but the poets of New Signatures, it must be admitted, had more reason than most for gloom and foreboding".<sup>16</sup>

David Daiches notices their divergence from the poets of the twenties, in particular from T.S.Eliot, by saying that the Wasteland was a symbol of spiritual dessication, while for the poets of the thirties the Wasteland was a real physical state, a geographical reality.<sup>17</sup> Yet while the young writers acknowledged the horrors of the England of the Depression, they did not sink into gloom or despair. They sought relief from spiritual dessication not, as Eliot had done, in Anglo-Catholicism but in some form of Socialism. Political issues in the thirties seemed very clear cut to the socialist-minded intellectual. Evil resided with Fascism and good with the Soviet Union. Thus Marxist theory

was espoused, the workers were idealized and much of the poetry produced was ruined by semi-digested lumps of propaganda and Marxist doctrine. Cyril Connolly says that

"Writers flourish in a state of political flux, on the eve of a crisis, rather than in the crisis itself, it is before a revolution that they are listened to and come into their own".<sup>18</sup>

This perhaps explains the impact of these young poets who were aware of the approaching crisis. The coherence of the group, even its unity was minimal. Its members shared some ideas for a short time and had just enough similarities for Michael Roberts' introduction to be feasible. Stylistically it held together largely due to the influence of W.H.Auden on many of the other poets.

W.H.Auden is undoubtedly the best poet of the group, he is also one of the least political. Although Monroe Spears' assertion that "Auden creates many of the modes of thought and feeling characteristic of his time",<sup>19</sup> is true, he rarely creates the thoughts and feelings themselves. The importance of Auden in the development of Stephen Spender is amply demonstrated in Spender's autobiography World within World in which Auden completely dominates the younger Spender, in minor matters such as frequency of composition and in major ones such as the relationship of the subject of a poem to the actual poetry. According to Spender, Auden believed that the subject of a poem was only a peg on which to hang the poetry.<sup>20</sup> This shows Auden's divergence from

the more political poets who felt that poetry should be propaganda, subjugated to politics, with the subject the most important part. Auden's attitude to propagandists is given in his introduction to an anthology he compiled in 1935, with James Garrett, called The Poet's Tongue. Auden writes

"The propagandist, whether moral or political, complains that the writer should use his powers over words to persuade people to a particular course of action, instead of fiddling while Rome burns. But poetry is not concerned with telling people what to do, but with extending our knowledge of good and evil, perhaps making the necessity for action more urgent and its nature more clear, but only leading us to the point where it is possible for us to make a rational and moral choice".<sup>21</sup>

Auden never accepted Communism, he refused to believe that political exigency ever justified lying. This marxism was unorthodox and personal. For a while he regarded Marxism as an inevitable historical process, but was, according to Spender, unable to take even his own Marxism seriously.<sup>22</sup> This is evident in his most doctrinaire work, the masque The Dance of Death. This is a facile and rather immature portrayal of the decline of a class through an inherent death-wish. The impact of the Marxist

doctrine in the work is lost among many divergencies and farcical high-spiritedness. The Marxist view of history is expressed in musical comedy doggerel such as

"The feudal barons did their part  
 Their virtues were not of the head but of the heart.  
 Their ways were suited to an agricultural land  
 But lending on interest they did not understand"

Marx himself enters at the end rather in the manner of a deus ex machina, to the chanting of the chorus

"Oh Mr.Marx, you've gathered  
 All the material facts  
 You know the economic  
 Reasons for our acts".

Such a treatment cannot but denigrate a doctrine of the high seriousness of Communism.

Auden combined with one of the prose contributors to New Country, Christopher Isherwood, to write other plays such as On the Frontier and the Ascent of F6, which were topical, symbolic representations of the modern world depicting the rise of Fascism, the threat of war and the evils of capitalism. Isherwood spent much of the early thirties in Berlin and his semi autobiographical novels such as Goodbye to Berlin and Mr Norris Changes Trains, depict many of the evils of life in the German capital, The commentary is always incidental to the main story, yet corruption and senseless violence pervade the books. The indirect approach probably makes them all the more effective as

anti-fascist propaganda. Isherwood was an advocate of armed resistance to Fascism and a supporter of the Popular Front but his novels do not even comment on the horror that provides their background, they merely present it as normal, but, of course, the reader sees, and is meant to see, how it diverges from accepted normalcy.

Auden's influence was more noticeable in Cecil Day Lewis' poetry than in that of the other New Signatures poets. Day Lewis' earlier poetry had been in the Georgian manner, therefore the change in style was more obvious. His political commitment was, however, much deeper than Auden's. Day Lewis was the first of the group to actually join the Communist Party. Although he was a conscientious party member, even his Communism was not orthodox. He says, in his autobiography, that it came from a heritage of romantic humanism "quite incompatible.... with the materialism and rigidity of Communist doctrines".<sup>23</sup> Day Lewis examines his motives for joining the Party and the satisfactions he obtained from it. His examination is useful in showing the needs of the writers which political activity satisfied. He says

"What attracted me most perhaps in the Communist philosophy was the concept that we discover reality by acting upon it, not thinking about it: to one whose grasp of reality seemed so insecure, and who at times craved for action as for a drug, this concept felt like salvation".<sup>24</sup>



He also says that local party membership gave him a sense of being part of a close community. The need to belong and to have faith was particularly strong among the young New Signatures poets. They had generally rejected traditional religion but needed something with which to replace it. Marxism became their creed but this separated them from their class. As they were all of middle class parentage they could not join the working class, and thus they were isolated between a class they rejected and a class they idealized but could not enter. This isolation Day Lewis expresses well in his poem "The Conflict"

"Yet living here

As one between two massing powers I live

Whom neutrality cannot save

Nor occupation cheer"

Day Lewis concludes that one has to join the workers, for

".... only ghosts can live

Between two fires."

Despite his Party membership and his decision to join with the workers, Day Lewis seemed, like Auden, not to take Marxism as seriously as the true political believer. In The Buried Day he says

"we tended to feel political action

and the writing of verse with a

social context, as temporary necessities;

and we treated the slogans and rigid

ideology of the extreme left with

considerable levity or scepticism".<sup>25</sup>

Some of the other poets of the day treated the Marxism of Auden and his friends with more than considerable levity. William Empson, who had been one of the contributors to New Signatures, later published a poem titled "Just a Smack at Auden", one verse of which contained the lines

"What was said by Marx, boys

What did he perpend?

No good being sparks, boys, waiting for the end.

Treason of the clerks, boys,

Curtains that descend,

Lights becoming darks, boys, waiting for the end."

The only other poet of the New Signatures group to join the Communist Party was Stephen Spender. He was, however, a member only for a period of weeks in 1936. Anthony Thwaite explains this very short period by saying that Spender

"was always too willing, from the Party's

point of view, to see both sides of the

question, and too self-centred ever to be

an adequate member of a revolutionary team".<sup>26</sup>

Spender describes the growth of his interest in Marxism in his autobiography World within World. In 1931 he was staying in Berlin near Christopher Isherwood when they received news that Edward Upward - a close friend of Isherwood's and influential on nearly all the group - had become a member of the Communist Party. At that time such an action appeared to them to be extraordinary and extremist. When, not long after, Upward himself arrived in

Berlin, Spender's thoughts began to be influenced by Marxist arguments. Spender could still not accept Communism at this time. He writes

"I still found in myself a core of resistance to the idea that if I was a Marxist my conception of freedom and truth must simply be behaviour dictated by Marxist expediency".<sup>27</sup>

(This was also one of the aspects of Marxism that Auden could not accept).

One of the poems Spender wrote while in Berlin was about the funeral of a Communist. "The Funeral" is written from a sympathetic, but external viewpoint. The poet does not enter the poem or, presumably, the mourning or dreaming, but the mourners are portrayed as strong, simple (and idealized) workers who

"...walk home remembering the straining red flags;  
And with pennons of song fluttering through their blood  
They dream of the World State  
With its towns like brain-centres and its pulsing  
arteries"

Another of his poems published in New Signatures is overtly Marxist and propagandist. This is the poem beginning

"Oh young men, oh young comrades  
it is too late now to stay in those houses  
your fathers built....."

and is the most political poem in the whole volume. Yet, while it is a direct call for rebellion, it still does not involve

participation in organized political activity.

Spender's poetry is nearly always more personal than that of his contemporaries. His best poetry usually describes his own emotions and he describes himself as an autobiographer. Consequently his interest in such an abstract and external phenomena as politics is unusual and needs explanation. Spender feels this himself for he examines why he, and other members of the non-political intelligentsia, became involved in politics during the early thirties. He notes that in a settled society, politics is the concern merely of the experts but that, at certain times, people have politically conscious roles forced on them. He cites as an example the Jew in Hitler's Germany. Hitler forced politics on the intellectuals as well, not only by persecution but by making some of the nihilistic fantasies of European literature come true. Particularly while living in Germany, the public horror of Fascism became part of Spender's personal life, dwarfing his own moral problems.<sup>28</sup>

While in Vienna in 1934, Spender became involved in the political activity that was in reaction to the suppression of the Socialists there. The long poem he wrote about this, called "Vienna", was literarily unsuccessful and internally disunited, probably due to Spender's own uncertainty at the time. He says that the anti-Fascist writers of the thirties were

"divided between our literary vocation and  
an urge to save the world from Fascism.

We were the Divided Generation of Hamlets"<sup>29</sup>

Spender was almost ready to join the Communist Party. In his critical work, The Destructive Element, he discusses the Communist writer saying that the writer who grasps anything of Marxist theory feels he is moving in a world of reality, a purposive world not merely of obstructive and oppressive things; he is concerned with realizing in his own work the ideas of a classless society. Spender continues

"The whole point of artists adopting a revolutionary position is that their interests may become social and not anti-social and that their criticism may help to shape a new society" 30

The need for artists to have some effect on society was emphasised by the reaction of one critic to The Destructive Element, who complained that if Spender did not travel abroad so much he (Spender) would realize that England could not possibly be affected by the chaos prevalent in other European countries.

Instrumental in the publication of New Signatures and of New Country, was another young poet, John Lehmann, who had become an apprentice-Manager of Hogarth Press. The influence of Leonard Woolf, the owner of the Press, had hastened Lehmann's conversion from Liberalism to Socialism. Lehmann's importance to the literary movement of the thirties is more as an entrepreneur - critic, editor and publisher - than as a writer. Lehmann says that he became a Socialist partly due to his "deep-seated horror at human injustice and cruelty",<sup>31</sup> Lehmann analyses the causes

of his later turn to Marxism in 1934 and concludes that there were three major factors that affected not only him, but also many of his contemporaries. The first factor was that capitalism would apparently stop at nothing to achieve its ends. This was particularly apparent to Lehmann as he was at that time in Vienna where reactionaries had taken over by force. Secondly Russia seemed to be the only country not subject to crises and it was assumed that this was due to its elimination of capitalism. Lastly the complete failure of the British government to make an effort to halt the spread of Fascism, and even in some cases, the collusion of Britain with the Fascists, caused Marxism to be seen as the only symbol of hope.<sup>32</sup>

Lehmann also served as the link between Julian Bell and the other New Signatures poets. Bell was a nephew of Virginia Woolf and the son of Vanessa and Clive Bell. Consequently he had been brought up surrounded by Bloomsbury and the beliefs of the literati of the twenties. His outlook on life, literature and politics thus differed from those of the other New Signatures poets, to such an extent that he was very wary of being published in the same volume. He wrote to Lehmann to emphasize his position and his difference from the other contributors, saying, about life, politics and poetry

"I believe most firmly that what is needed

is the most extreme eighteenth century

domination of the intellect over the emotions"<sup>33</sup>

Bell differed from the other contributors mainly in style; his

satire "Arms and the Man", typical of the style he developed after 1932, was stylistically related to Pope. The ideas expressed in it, however, are typical of the thirties and of the other poets of New Signatures. Bell too was affected by unemployment and the threat of war. He begins the final movement of "Arms and the Man" with

"Strike then, and swiftly; if the end must come  
 May war, like charity, begin at home:  
 Do what we can, and use what power we have,  
 Confront the ruin, if we cannot save;  
 Nor leave the politicians to their trade,  
 To spread the idiot tangle they have made."

Yet while Julian Bell saw the need for radical change in England, he disagreed with the attitudes Auden and his friends took in reaction to this need. Being brought up in the highly rational atmosphere of Bloomsbury, he could not follow their enthusiastic espousal of the workers. He agreed with their analysis but not with their solution. Nevertheless he was aware of the overwhelming importance of finding some solution, as he wrote to the New Statesman and Nation in December 1933

"It would be difficult to find anyone of any intellectual pretensions who would not accept the general Marxist analysis of the present crisis. There is a very general feeling...that we are personally and individually involved in the crisis, and that our business is rather

to find the least evil course of action  
that will solve our immediate problems  
than to argue about rival Utopias."<sup>34</sup>

This belief had become intensified by January 1936 when he writes, in "A Letter to Roger Fry", about the position of young Socialist intellectuals

"We think of the world first and foremost  
as the place where other people live, as  
the scene of crisis and poverty, the  
probable scene of revolution and war: we  
think more about the practical solution  
of the real contradictions of the real  
world than possible discoveries in some  
other world."<sup>35</sup>

Julian Bell's solution still did not involve Communism and he did not consider himself a part of the group of poets and writers surrounding Auden. He was at this time Professor of English at the National University of Wuhan in China. From China he wrote an open letter to Cecil Day Lewis, whom he regarded as the best of the poets friendly with and influenced by Auden. He attacked their faith in the proletariat and presented his own views.

"... we the intellectuals, are members of  
the governing classes. We have the choice  
of supporting or overthrowing the existing  
regime. The arguments for overthrowing it  
inexpugnable: let it be overthrown. But



before we do so, let us defend our class interests, preserve our own kind of good life and listen to no nonsense about the virtues produced in the proletariat by those very evils we are going to abolish."

"It seems to me that you and Auden are successful in the measure in which you deal with the complex position of the governing-class revolutionary and that your failures arise from simplistic applications of the red and white morality"<sup>36</sup>

Julian Bell still valued liberal beliefs, his socialism was more a means of removing obstacles to the realization of a truly liberal society, than a method of establishing an egalitarian Socialist Utopia.

Like the other young writers of the thirties, in the early years of the decade, Julian Bell was an advocate of pacifism; the disasters of the Great War must not recur. While campaigning for the Labour Party in the 1931 General Election, he wrote to John Lehmann

"I believe if one troubled one could get a strong pacifist party, or even get men to strike against a threatened war"<sup>37</sup>

As the decade progressed, his attitude began to change. In 1935 he edited a collection of pacifist essays entitled We Did Not

Fight: 1914-18 Experiences of War Resisters. In the introduction to this he wrote

"the attitude of the younger generation of war resisters has learned too much from its enemy, it has grown - even in peace-time - into a war mind: sometimes even into a war hysteria. Yet with all its defects, I believe that the war resistance movements of my generation will in the end succeed in <sup>tt</sup>putting down war - by force if necessary".<sup>38</sup>

This latter comment was very much like the militant approach to pacifism he deplored, yet it was precisely this attitude - the belief in the overwhelming importance of preventing war - that was to be instrumental in sending Julian Bell, and other writers, to Spain.

One of the prose contributors to New Country was the very doctrinaire young Communist Edward Upward, the effect of whose conversion to Communism on Stephen Spender has already been noted. Upward was more important as an influence on other writers than as a writer himself. He published one novel, Journey to the Border, in the thirties and one short story which was really part of the novel. He did, however, contribute an interesting and important essay to a book edited by Cecil Day Lewis and called The Mind in Chains. This book was a series of essays, most of them by Communists, on the position of creative work, whether artistic, educational, or scientific, under capitalism and socialism. Upward's

essay was entitled "Sketch for a Marxist Interpretation of Literature". The importance of this essay is primarily in the discussion of the place of politics in the life of a creative writer. According to Upward, the bourgeois writer

"must change his practical life, must go over to the progressive side of the conflict, to the side whose practice is destined to be successful; not until he has done this will it be possible for his writing to give a true picture of the world".<sup>39</sup>

Upward realized that doing this would be dangerous to the writers' literary output. He says

"joining the worker's movement does mean giving less time to imaginative writing but unless he the writer joins it his writing will increasingly become false, worthless as literature. Going over to socialism may prevent him, but failing to go over must prevent him from writing a good book"<sup>40</sup>

If Upward's very small output was the result of his Communist activities, it is perhaps as well that other members of the literary movement of the thirties did <sup>not</sup> become as involved as he did.

Another Marxist literary critic was Christopher Caudwell (real name Christopher St. John Spriggs) who showed interest in politics until 1934 when he was twenty-seven. § After reading

works of Marx, Engels and Lenin, he joined the Poplar Branch of the Communist Party. Unlike Upward his period as a Communist Party member was his most productive literarily. All five of his important books - three of literary criticism, one novel and a book on physics - were written between 1934 and January 1937, as well as quite a lot of poetry and some of the rather indifferent detective novels which, published under his real name, earned his living. A prominent theme in Caudwell's writing, noticeable particularly in Further Studies in a Dying Culture, is the unity of thinking and doing. Action was not a value in itself, but neither was philosophizing. This belief was reflected in his membership of a Communist Party Branch. If he accepted the theory of Marxism, it was necessary also to accept some form of action dictated by it. Therefore, belonging to a Communist Party branch, working with it for the worker's revolution, was an expression of a basic belief that would be demonstrated once again in regard to Spain.

Caudwell specifically denies that art is propaganda. Art has a social function. It must present truth, it must show men the nature of human liberty so that men's minds will be changed, and the truth presented in the work will be a guide to action. This is not propaganda for it does not seek to persuade man to follow a particular course but to make him see that a particular course is right. Caudwell illustrates this by saying

"We are not persuaded of the existance of  
Hamlet's confusion or Prufock's greedy  
world-weariness.... we feel so-and-so and

such-and-such" <sup>41</sup>

John Strachey, in his Introduction to Caudwell's Studies in a Dying Culture, says that part of Caudwell's intention was to make men realize that they will find liberty first by breaking down the unconscious set of social relations and coercions and then by building up new, conscious social relations which are called socialism. Liberty to Caudwell was the presence of opportunity and not the absence of constraint.<sup>42</sup> Raymond Williams says that Caudwell's notions of art and the interaction of reality and culture, are not purely Marxian but an interaction of Romanticism and Marxism.<sup>43</sup> If one accepts William's point, it merely pulls Caudwell more firmly into line with the majority of English Communist and fellow-traveller writers of the thirties and especially with Auden and his friends whose debt to Romanticism was considerable. Caudwell was occasionally guilty of the great literary sin of including unassimilated chunks of Marxist theory in his poetry. A glaring example of this is in the love poem No.XIV of his "Twenty Sonnets of Wm. Smith"

"... nor indeed are you unskilled  
In body's older dialectice  
Where thesis and antithesis achieve  
By friction a diviner synthesis"

Evidence that the sympathy for Marxism among young poets of the thirties was caused by the economic crises and the threat of Fascism and was not the result of being a certain age or undergoing common experiences, is given by the example of John Cornford.

Cornford was much younger than the other poets, but experienced the impact of Marxist ideas in the very early thirties. He joined the Communist Party, or at least the Young Communist League, in March 1933 when he was seventeen. While in London waiting to go up to Cambridge, he threw himself violently into political activity in student and communist groups and newspapers. he, like Caudwell and Upward~~s~~, was investigating the relationship between art and reality, like them he believed that art could not be divorced from man in relation to his material surroundings.<sup>44</sup>

Cornford differed from the older Marxist poets, though not from Caudwell, in the unromantic and uncompromising nature of his Communism. His experiences in London cleared all traces of ~~his~~ Romanticism from his beliefs and he was impatient of the gentility and restraint expected in University politics. A demonstration he helped to organize on Armistice Day 1933 gained much support and publicity for the Socialist movement and incidentally included among the demonstrators, out more for fun than for ideological reasons, Julian Bell. The demonstration was anti-war, for at that time it was still possible to be both anti-Fascist and pacifist. In the Spring of 1934 Cornford wrote an article on the younger poets for the Cambridge Left. In this he claimed that Auden and Spender wrote revolutionary poetry because it was a literary fashion and not as historical reality. His dismissal of these poets was not surprising as he demanded direct participation in revolutionary struggles as a prerequisite to the ability to write revolutionary poetry.<sup>45</sup> Cornford's own political work left little

time for his poetry. While at Cambridge he wrote only nine poems, including a very propagandist one ending

".... their day is over,

They can't be deaf to our shout, 'Red Front'"

In early 1936, Cornford wrote an essay on the reason for the swing of students to the Left. "It has come", he wrote, "because the actual conditions of their lives, the actual problems with which they are confronted, force them steadily though hesitatingly to a revolutionary position"<sup>46</sup> The conditions which he notes include lack of job opportunities for graduates, money spent on arms rather than on improving health services and the refusal of capitalists to spend part of their profits in improving working conditions.

Thus the first half of the 1930s witnessed a renewal of interest in politics among intellectuals generally, and among writers in particular. The Depression and mass unemployment, together with the overwhelming Labour party electoral defeat in 1931, at home and the growth of Fascism abroad forced people to become aware of the situation and search for explanations of it and also for possible solutions. When both answer and solution appeared to be given by Marxism, it was inevitable that it should be accepted as the new faith. The extremely miserable situation of the worker, especially in the industrial North of England, made the idealization of the worker - the oppressed victim of capitalism whose place in the future was celebrated in Marxist doctrine - follow the acceptance of Marxism. George Orwell developed a sane

but sympathetic view of the workers by detailed study and observation of them. The younger poets and writers, particularly those published together in New Signatures, had little contact with the workers and consequently had an unreal concept of them. They did, however, provide useful analyses of the situation of the bourgeois intellectual who, accepting the Marxist diagnosis of society, realizes he must join the side of the workers but is, through membership of the middle-class, unable to do so. Some of the bourgeois intellectuals did join the Communist Party and the workers, the most sincere and thorough being Christopher Caudwell and John Cornford. Julian Bell accepted the need for revolution and many Socialist beliefs, but retained a belief in the need for a governing class - of which he, naturally, would be a member.



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CHAPTER. 2.

THE WRITERS DURING THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR.

The Spanish Civil War began when a group of Spanish generals including Franco, issued a pronunciamiento on July 18, 1936 against the elected Popular Front Government. Spain had been almost a feudal country, ruled by the church and other landowners. The Coalition of centre and left-wing parties that formed the Popular Front Government was attempting to bring social reform to the country. Franco and the other generals were representatives of the old oppressive forces - landlords, the church, army officers and industrialists, local and foreign. These reactionary forces were backed by the Fascist powers Italy and Germany, despite these countries' token adherence to the Non-Intervention Agreement. It was largely this Agreement that caused the general furore over Spain. According to international law, Franco's force were rebels, and a nation giving them aid, or allowing aid to be supplied to them from or through its territory, was acting illegally. The Spanish Government were within their rights as a constitutionally elected government, in seeking to buy arms and in requesting aid from other nations in order to put down an internal revolt. The Non-Intervention Agreement, proposed by the French Popular Front Government under Leon Blum, after pressure had been applied to it to do so by the British Government and powerful right wing forces within France, was intended to prevent any aid or military supplies being provided to either side in Spain. The Agreement was intended to prevent the local Spanish War escalating into a general European or World War. The result of the Agreement was the crippling of the Republican (government) forces in Spain,

for although Germany and Italy signed the Agreement after much prevarication, they did not abide by it and soon were openly flaunting their intervention.

For a very short time, there was in Britain, tentative approval of the Non-Intervention Agreement by most of the people and even by most of the Labour Party. This approval was, however, conditional on total observation of the Agreement by all signatories. When it became evident that the Fascist countries were not only sending military supplies to the rebel forces but sending conscripted armies as well, the Non-Intervention Agreement lost the support of much of the British public and most of the Labour Party. The Communist Party of Great Britain at first adopted a mildly pro-Republican policy, as Stalin had, but when Stalin judged it opportune to intervene and send military aid, (but not sufficient aid for victory) to the Republicans, the C.P.G.B. became violently interventionist and recruited volunteers for the International Brigades. The local Communist Parties had in general been actively supporting the Republicans from the first, sending money, medical supplies and ambulances to them.

For the British writers of the thirties, already politically involved, but rarely committed to particular parties, the Spanish Civil War mobilized and directed their beliefs. The threat of Fascism, the cause of the worker and the socialization of private property were all elements of the Spanish situation which appealed to the writers. Furthermore, the Republicans were acting legally under international law. The Republicans were seen as

representatives of democracy, progress, freedom and the unity of the working class, while the rebels were the forces of reaction, Fascism exploitation and repressive feudalism. Spain was the place to stop the spread of Fascism, to halt the growing threat of world war. The Spanish Civil War presented the opportunity for the bourgeois intellectual to work with, and actually get to know, the ordinary working man. Attempts at the latter in England had not been successful, the class barriers would not be broken ~~de~~ down, but many of the writers felt that in Spain, in wartime, conditions would be different. Julian Symonds notes this hope and adds

"to many of the volunteers it seemed....

in these early months, that in Spain the  
classless society of which they had  
talked so much and which they reluctantly  
knew not to exist as yet in the Soviet Union,  
had been created here in one decisive stroke"<sup>1</sup>

The awareness among the informed British public of the interest among British writers in the Spanish Civil War and the importance of the war to the writers' development, was demonstrated in late 1937 by the distribution of a questionnaire on the war, to a large number of British writers. The questionnaire, compiled by editors of the journal Left Review, asked two questions: firstly "Are you for or against the legal government and the people of Republican Spain?" (The opinion of the questioners being clearly shown by the wording of this question) and secondly

"Are you for or against Franco and Fascism?". Approximately 12% of those who responded were either neutral or Fascist. The remainder were divided into the militants - the largest group consisting mainly of the younger and more political writers -, the Liberal individualists and anti-Fascists - largely those who had experienced the last war -, and the eccentrics such as George Bernard Shaw.<sup>2</sup>

In December 1936, George Orwell went to Spain intending to write some articles and a book, for which he had received an advance from his publishers, about the Spanish situation. According to Stanley Weintraub, Orwell enlisted in the militia in Barcelona, because it was suddenly more important to fight than to report on the fighting.<sup>3</sup> It seems unlikely, however, that Orwell went to Spain without any idea of fighting, for he mentions in an essay on Henry Miller, that he talked with Miller about the war on his way through Paris to Spain. Orwell reports Miller telling him that

"to mix oneself up in such things from a sense of obligation was sheer stupidity. In any case my ideas about combating Fascism, defending democracy, etc., etc., were all boloney"<sup>4</sup>.

From this it appears that Orwell had some thought of fighting before he reached Spain, even though he took his newly wed wife with him.

It is difficult to abstract a definite statement from Orwell's writings on why he went to Spain, on what particular



political motives he acted. This is perhaps indicative of Orwell's own lack of knowledge of his own motives. In the only discussion of his reasons for fighting in the book he wrote about Spain - Homage to Catalonia - he says

"When I came to Spain, and for some time afterwards, I was not only uninterested in the political situation, but unaware of it. I knew that there was a war on, but I had no notion what kind of a war. If you had asked me why I had joined the militia I should have answered: 'To fight against Fascism', and if you had asked me what I was fighting for, I should have answered: 'Common decency'." <sup>5</sup>

Presumably when Orwell says he had no notion of the kind of war he was joining in Spain, he means that he was not aware of the actual situation, of the rivalries and hostilities within the Popular Front and of the activities of the Communists. 'Common decency' was Orwell's term for all that he held good and worthwhile. It was his term for the real end of Socialism, for all that he valued in the working man and for all that he desired for every man. Orwell's reasons may be taken as representative of most of the writers who fought for or supported the Spanish Republic. They did not really understand the situation, but in their own view they fought for the good against the bad; the issues were clear-cut, black and white.

Orwell accepted the view of the war put forward by the New Statesman and the News Chronicle, according to which the defenders of civilization, the Republicans, were a united front fighting the Fascists. In reality, the Popular Front in Spain was composed of many different parties only held very loosely together by opposition to the right-wing. The Republican army was composed of various militias belonging to the different political groups. The best organized group was of the P.S.U.C. (Partido Socialista Unificado Catal  na) the Communist controlled Socialist Party. The Trade Union group associated with the P.S.U.C. was the U.G.T. (Union General del Trabajadores) also Communist controlled. Another important group was the P.O.U.M. (Partido Obrero de Unificaci  n Marxista) an anti-Stalinist group, held to be Trotskyist or semi-Trotskyist as its leader, Nin, has been at one time Trotsky's secretary. Other important groups were the C.N.T. (Confederaci  n Nacional del Trabajo) an Anarcho-Syndicalist Trades Union, and the F.A.I. (Federaci  n Anarquista Ib  rica) an Anarchist secret society. These groups all, more or less, directed their own actions against the enemy in the early stages of the war. Unified direction came after the Communists gained control and removed some of the uncooperative parties.

Orwell joined the P.O.U.M. militia because he arrived in ~~Barce~~ Barcelona with I.L.P. papers rather than the communist paper required for enlisting in the P.S.U.C. One of the first things he learned in Spain was that the workers were not fighting for a type of bourgeois democracy, as the Communist and liberal papers

of the West had declared, but were fighting for worker's control, for the revolution. Russia did not want a revolution in Spain, it would have gone against the Marxist view of history, according to which socialism is preceded by bourgeois democracy, not feudalism. A Communist Spain would also prejudice the recent Franco-Soviet Agreement. The workers could not gain complete control as they could not simultaneously fight Franco and their own government. The workers needed both the support of the middle class and of the government to attempt to defeat Franco. Soon after enlisting in the militia, Orwell discovered that there were intense arguments between the various parties on the relationship of the war and the social revolution. The P.O.U.M. and Anarchist parties believed that the war and the revolution must be pursued together, they were inseparable. The P.S.U.C. believed that the war must first be won and after victory, the revolution could be continued. Orwell's initial reaction to all the arguments was to say "Why can't we drop all this political nonsense and get on with the war"<sup>6</sup>

On joining the P.O.U.M. militia, Orwell was sent to the Lenin Barracks for instruction until a new 'centuria' was made ready. This period horrified him as there was no rifle practice - there being no rifles. There was not even any instruction on how to pull the pin out of a bomb. The only 'instruction' given was antiquated parade ground drill. The time was, however, valuable to Orwell as he was living among, and being accepted by, ordinary working class people. Orwell generalized his experience in the Statement

"Every foreigner who served in the militia spent his first few weeks in learning to love the Spaniards and in being exasperated by certain of their characteristics"<sup>7</sup>

Orwell was particularly exasperated by the Spanish unpunctuality, disorder and indiscipline. He spent the inactive periods listening to never-ending political discussions, and rapidly became hostile to the POUM viewpoint because it was the one he heard most about. The Communist viewpoint appealed to Orwell as the Communists had the practical policy of first winning the war, although they necessarily sacrificed the revolutionary purism that was so important to the POUM members.

Until the fall of Malaga early in February 1937, Orwell disregarded the rivalries between the parties, merely preferring the Communists for their more warlike tactics. The first doubts about the relationships between the parties that he records, come with the rumours of the fall of Malaga, which was said to be due to treachery and divided aims. The idea of the good Republicans fighting the evil Fascists was no longer sufficient explanation of the war. The fall of Malaga introduced another important aspect of war to Orwell - the complete fabrication of war news. On the night of the fall of Malaga, which the Republicans did not report for a few days, the Fascists in the position opposite Orwell's celebrated by machine gunning and attempting to bomb the Republican position. The Republicans suffered one casualty and the whole affair was little more than a noisy celebration by the

rebels. A few days later, however, Republican papers and radio reports published news

"of a tremendous attack with cavalry and tanks  
(up a perpendicular hill-side!) which had been  
beaten off by the heroic English"<sup>8</sup>

After 115 days in the line, Orwell went on leave. During all his time at the front he had hardly fought at all, yet his experience had impressed on him the necessity of establishing Socialism in Spain and throughout the world. He had been isolated from the world among a group of revolutionaries, highly politically aware, living in greater equality than he had imagined possible, where class divisions were virtually non-existent and where no man was the master of another. Orwell contrasts his experiences with his normal life.

"One had been in a community where hope was  
more normal than apathy or cynicism, where  
the word 'comrade' stood for comrade-ship  
and not humbug. One had breathed the air  
of equality"<sup>9</sup>

His return to Barcelona, however, was very disillusioning. The revolutionary atmosphere that had inspired him to join the militia had vanished, people were no longer interested in the war, only in when it would end, and class divisions were reasserting themselves.

On the 3rd of May, about a week before Orwell's leave was up, While he was negotiating his exchange to a Communist unit of the International Brigade, fighting broke out between the Communists

and the Anarchists. There had been threats of hostility between the C.N.T. and the U.G.T. for some time. At first it was thought that only the Civil Guards - a type of police - were fighting the Anarchists. The POUM had some influence in the CNT and the POUM militiamen were mostly CNT members, thus following the attacks on the CNT, the POUM had to be prepared to be attacked as well. On the evening of May 5, Orwell received news that the government was going to outlaw the POUM, which, as it was the weakest party, would provide the most suitable scapegoat for the Barcelona street fighting. This did not happen at the time, an armistice was called followed by virtual occupation of Barcelona by the Assault Guards - another type of police force. The fighting provided the excuse for the Valencia government to assume greater control in Catalonia and the PSUC papers began to depict the rising as a fifth column action of the POUM which was now said to be a disguised Fascist organization.<sup>10</sup> The reports of the Barcelona fighting in the Communist press intensified Orwell's distrust of newspaper reports, for the street fighting, which began with an attack on the CNT-held Telephone Exchange, was presented as a premeditated action of the POUM under Fascist orders. Orwell gives many reasons why the fighting could not have been a POUM plot as the papers had said.

Ten days after Orwell returned to the front he was shot through the neck by a Fascist sniper and sent back to Barcelona. While he was away at Saetamo getting a discharge, the POUM was declared an illegal organization and all the people connected with it began to be arrested. For a week Orwell had to dodge arrest

and finally he and his wife left Spain by train, escaping being searched in Spain by looking bourgeois. They escaped being arrested at the border by Spanish inefficiency, (the list on which he was given as a suspected Fascist not having reached the border control).

On returning to England, Orwell sent some articles on the Spanish situation as he saw it to the New Statesman, the editor, Kingsley Martin, refused to publish them. In his autobiography, Martin says he did this as he felt that so many other papers were attacking the Republicans that Orwell could have his work published in them without asking the New Statesman to join the anti-Republican camp.<sup>11</sup> On the 8th July 1937, Orwell wrote to Cyril Connolly of his Spanish experience "I have seen wonderful things and at last really believe in Socialism which I never did before"<sup>12</sup> Yet, as he started writing up his experiences, the 'wonderful things' seemed to diminish and the evils to become more evident. This process was accentuated by news from Spain and by December he was writing to Connolly again, complaining about the way the war was going

"nearly a million men dead in all, they say,  
and obviously it is going to be for nothing"<sup>13</sup>

Orwell's attitudes to the further development of the war and his feelings while writing Homage to Catalonia will be dealt with in the next chapter as they are reactions to his experiences in Spain.

W.H.Auden went to Spain in January 1937, intending to offer his services to a British ambulance unit. Soon after his arrival

he wrote an article, "Impressions of Valencia" for the New Statesman in which he was full of enthusiasm for the work of the ordinary people, especially in keeping such things as trams and trains running and

"doing all those things that the gentry cannot believe will be done unless they are there to keep an eye on them".<sup>14</sup>

He explains the attitudes of the workers by saying that the

"people have been learning about what it is to inherit their own country, and once a man has tasted freedom he will not lightly give it up; freedom to choose for himself and to organize his life"<sup>14</sup>

Yet Auden was back in England by March, refusing to talk of his experiences. He did not repudiate his commitment, however, for his reply to the Left Review questionnaire on the Spanish Civil War said that if Spain were lost, the spread of Fascism across Europe

"would create an atmosphere in which the creative artist and all who care for justice, liberty and culture would find impossible to work or even exist"<sup>15</sup>

As the pamphlet giving this opinion was published in June 1937, Auden must have answered the questionnaire very shortly after returning from Spain.

In May 1937, Auden published "Spain", one of the most important poems, both for literature and politics, written on the



Spanish Civil War. The poem opens with an examination of the past, of the development of history and of man's progress.

"... yesterday the invention

Of cartwheels and clocks, the taming of

horses. Yesterday the bustling world of navigators"

The last three verses of the first movement end with "... But today the struggle." The second section depicts the reaction of various people - the poet, the scientist and the poor - to the struggle, as yet unnamed. The people call to an external force which is termed merely 'life' and shown to have the power of instituting political and social phenomena for the invocation ~~etc.~~ starts

"Did you not found the city state of the sponge,

Raise the vast military empires of the shark

And the tiger, establish the robin's plucky canton?"

The people ask this force to

"Intervene. O descend as a dove or

a furious papa or mild engineer, but descend"

The life-force, however, gives the onus of decision-making back to the individual saying

"I am whatever you do ...

I am your choice, your decision, Yes, I am Spain"

Auden's third movement presents the situation in Spain as the acting out in real life of the thoughts and the fears of a person.

"Our thoughts have bodies; the menacing shapes of our  
fever

are precise and alive..."

The fears become the Fascist armies while the good thoughts are the Republicans

"Our moments of tenderness blossom

As the ambulance and the sandbag; Our hours of  
friendship into a people's army"

The poem ends with a vision of the future as a time of beauty, peace and harmony, but again, as with the view of the past, the future is contrast with the present, with

"The expending of powers

On the flat ephemeral pamphlett and the boring meeting"  
The last verse reaffirms the need for action now, for

"... the time is short and

History to the defeated

May say alas but cannot help or pardon"

This extended analysis of "Spain" is necessary not only because changes later made to it help to highlight Auden's changing ideas, but also because it demonstrates the belief in the necessity for action that was prevalent in the Thirties. Auden does not distance himself in this poem, the happenings in Spain are important personally, responsibility is personal. In this, "Spain" is representative of the poetry of the Thirties of which Robin Skelton says

"feelings of private and of communal insecurity  
are fixed together so that the personal lyrical  
anguish informs the political statement".<sup>16</sup>

Skelton's statement is more true of Stephen Spender than it is of Auden. Auden's poems were generally abstract investigations of

events and positions, whereas Spender produces his best poetry when he is writing of events and emotions that affect his personal life deeply. His experiences during the Spanish Civil War illustrate the overriding importance to Spender of his private life.

When the war broke out, Spender was living in Vienna working on his book Forward from Liberalism, a statement of his development towards Communism and the exact nature of his view of Communism. As the title suggests, he saw Communism as the direct descendant of liberalism (Spender was, it must be remembered, of an old-fashioned Liberal family, his uncle being the Liberal writer J.A.Spender) In the preface, Spender says he is writing the book in an attempt to clarify the opinions of like-minded people who he terms liberals, defining them as

"those who care for freedom more than for the privileges which have given freedom of intellect to individuals in one particular class; those who are prepared to work towards a classless communist society; if they are convinced that freedom will be enlarged in this way."<sup>17</sup>

Spender ends his book with a plea for support of the Spanish government, while recognizing that violence and repression in Spain are inevitable on both sides of the conflict. The excesses of a revolution are far more preferable to a war "which even the capitalist leaders ... say will lead to the utter collapse of our civilization".<sup>18</sup>

Spender's attitude to Communism is also revealed in the verse-play he wrote at the beginning of the Spanish Civil War - Trial of a judge. The play is set in Nazi Germany and depicts the impossibility of being a liberal in a decaying society threatened by Fascism. The central figure is the judge, a liberal who is persuaded for 'reasons of state' to find guilty of murder a group of Communists who killed a policeman in self defence, and to acquit a group of Nazis who murdered a Jew. When the Nazis come to power the judge is imprisoned for his belief that the sentences he gave were wrong. Although Spender attempted to follow a doctrinally 'correct' Communist position, it is obvious that his sympathies are with the Judge and his outmoded liberalism. The comparison of Fascism and Communism which the Judge gives to two Communist fellow prisoners is far more credible and sympathetic than the opinions of the Nazis or of the Communists. The Judge says

"Dear friend, your world is the antipodes  
Of the world of those  
Who seal us in this living tomb:  
And travelling there, where all seems opposite  
Yet all will be the same; only  
Those who are now oppressed will be the oppressors  
The oppressors the oppressed."

A young Communist who saw the play protested against Spender's apparent Liberal sympathies. Spender records her comment in his contribution to The God That Failed

"Now, she said, it is not Liberalism  
or mysticism which we want from our  
writers but militant Communism"<sup>19</sup>

Spender was, however, incapable of presenting, with any great conviction, emotions or opinions with which he did not fully sympathise. He felt that Communism was necessary to halt the spread of Fascism, but preferred the, to him, ineffectual Liberalism.

Soon after Forward From Liberalism was published he was invited by Harry Pollitt to join the C.P.G.B. to help the Spanish Republican cause. Pollitt said he was prepared to accept Spender's disagreement on certain points, and then asked if he would join the International Brigade. Spender replied that he did not feel he could be useful as a soldier but was willing to help in any other way. A close friend of Spender's, T.A.R. Hyndman, who appears in World Within World as Jimmy Younger, joined the party at the same time as Spender, but did go to Spain with the International Brigades. At first his letters to Spender were full of enthusiasm but after his first experience of battle he became disillusioned and Spender felt responsible for Hyndman getting into a situation in which he could be killed for a cause he did not believe in. Spender thus welcomed being sent to Spain by The Daily Worker to find out what had happened to the crew of a Russian ship sunk by the Italians, as it would enable him to attempt to negotiate Hyndman's discharge. The expedition for the Daily Worker was pointless as the answer - that the crew was interned at Cadiz - could have been gained without leaving London. (The information

was obtained by simply asking at the Italian Consulate). The trip did, however, inspire Spender to return to Spain, which he did after being offered a job as head of English broadcasting with a Socialist broadcasting station. This job had disappeared by the time Spender arrived in Valencia, as all broadcasting stations had been unified, under Communist control, no longer being run by the separate political parties. The rest of the time in Spain, Spender spent trying to obtain Hyndman's discharge. He managed to arrange for him to be kept on non-combatant duties. However, Hyndman was later sent up to the front during an emergency, he deserted, was recaptured and imprisoned. After much effort Spender obtained a discharge for Hyndman who was sent back to England. Thus Spender's first experience of Spain was overlaid with deep distress and anxiety for his friend. The division he felt over working against people committed, as he was, to the ~~Repub~~ Republican side, prevented Spender from being as enthusiastic towards the struggle as many other writers were initially.

On his return to England, Spender wrote an article denouncing dishonest recruitment for the International Brigade, which was presented as a Popular Front organization but was really Communist controlled. Spender felt that the Republican cause was sufficiently worthwhile to allow the truth to be told.<sup>20</sup> In the Summer of 1937, Spender returned to Spain for a writer's Congress that was being held in Madrid. Theoretically it was designed to show support for the Spanish Republic, but it developed into a concerted attack on André Gide whose recent book on the Soviet

Union had had the temerity to be critical. Spender found himself unable to take the Congress seriously it "had something about it of a Spoiled Children's Party, something which brought out the worst in many delegates"<sup>20</sup> The delegates, as Spender depicts them, certainly seem little interested in the war in Spain. Everyone seemed primarily concerned with himself, his own importance and comfort, and Spender extends this criticism to himself.

Most of the poetry that Spender wrote during and about the Spanish Civil War was published in 1939 in the volume, The Still Centre. In the Foreword to the volume Spender explains why, despite his support of the Republicans, he did not write more heroic poems about it. He says

"A poet can only write about what is true  
to his own experience, not about what he  
would like to be true to his experience"<sup>22</sup>

If this is true of poets in general, it is particularly true of Spender who could not write convincingly about subjects that were not personally important to himself. His best known poem about the Spanish Civil War "Ultima Ratio Regum" tends to be forced and artificial when it attempts to relate the young dead soldier to the larger world. The simile of the soldiers life "intangible as a Stock Exchange rumour" is particularly false and causes one to think that Spender must have made desperate efforts to bring the evil capitalists into his poem. The poem improves when Spender considers just the soldier and his death, and the final question

"Was so much expenditure justified

On the death of one so young and silly

Lying under the olive trees, O world, O death?"

has made more impact than the straining after wider referents in the first section. A far more natural poem, in that it did not appear artificial, forced or written because the subject seemed 'poetic', is "Thoughts During an Air Raid". This is an investigation of the unreality of the death of unknown people and the inability of a person, in this case the poet, to believe that his own death is possible. The poet also finds it difficult to believe that his own death would be as unimportant to the world as the deaths he is reading about in his paper, are to him.

The poem "Port Bou" tells of a day spent at Port Bou, the first day of Spender's second visit to Spain (the visit when he intended to broadcast on a Valencia radio station). Presumably this was written either on that day or soon after, for the mood is not that of the later poems written when he had experienced some of the horrors of war and the frustration of trying to extricate his friend from the International Brigades. The militia men of "Port Bou" have "warm waving flag-like faces", their carbines

"...brush against their trousers

almost as fragilely as reeds;

And wrapped in a cloth - old mother in a shawl -

The terrible machine gun rests."

War is not real to the writer of this poem, and the militia men are like the idealized workers of Spender's early work.



It is noticeable that Spender did not write an important general poem on the whole of the Spanish situation like Auden's "Spain" or parts of MacNeice's Autumn Journal or George Barker's "Elegy on Spain."

Poets such as Louis MacNeice, George Barker and Dylan Thomas will not be dealt with as, although they wrote about Spain or were committed to the Republican cause, they were not politically committed writers nor does their work often treat the political aspects of various situations. MacNeice was defiantly apolitical, George Barker identified with the decaying part of the Thirties society and Dylan Thomas was both politically incoherent and far more egocentric than Spender. One is unable to examine Christopher Isherwood's attitudes to the Spanish Civil War as for the early part of the war he was still involved with his German friends and in 1938 he departed with W.H.Auden to examine the war in China explaining that by 1938 the Spanish Civil War was overcrowded with celebrities.<sup>23</sup> John Lehmann also did not go to Spain as he wished to see the end of the Austrian Drama, but he realized that what happened in Spain would determine largely what happened in Austria. He was personally involved in Spain, however, as his brother-in-law, Wogan Phillips, had volunteered as an ambulance driver. Lehmann produced, with Spender, an anthology, Poems for Spain, and published much of the literature inspired by the Spanish Civil War, or written by combatants, in his biannual publication New Writing. Lehmann was strongly aware of the pull of Spain,

"the pull of an international crusade  
to the ideals and aims of which all  
intellectuals (except those of strong  
Catholic attachment) who had been  
stirred by the fascist danger, felt  
they could, in that hour of apocalypse,  
whole-heartedly assent"<sup>24</sup>

The pull of Spain had a slightly different effect on Cecil Day Lewis who, while participating in party activities to form an English Popular Front during the Spanish Civil War, observed the formation of the International Brigade and felt that he should volunteer but lacked the courage to do so.<sup>25</sup> He did, however, write poetry about the war including the rather trite "The Volunteer" which probably suffered through Day Lewis' inability to say, like the volunteers of the poem

"Tell them in England if they ask  
What brought us to these wars...  
We came because our open eyes  
Could see no other way."

Day Lewis published in the same volume as "The Volunteer" - Overtures to Death - "The Nabarra". This is ~~also~~ one of the best modern narrative poems. The poem is based on an actual incident when three fishing boats, including one called the 'Nabarra', attacked the rebel cruiser 'Canarias' which had intercepted a freighter carrying arms to the Republic. The Three fishing boats attempted to divert the 'Canarias' sufficiently to

allow the freighter to reach port, and were blown to pieces. The subject was eminently suited to a tragic treatment and Day Lewis does not fail his material. He ends his story of the doomed yet heroic action of the 'Nabarra' with an outcry against Non- intervention statesmen.

"Freedom was more than a word, more than the base coinage  
Of politicians who hiding behind the shirts of peace  
They had defiled, gave up that country to rack and carnage,  
For whom, indelibly stamped with history's contempt,  
Remains but to haunt the blackened shell of their  
policies"

When the Spanish Civil War broke out, Julian Bell was in China, becoming more mature and already moving away from the only tentatively pacifist attitude he had held under the influence of his pacifist parents. Since the time when he was very young, he had held his pacifist beliefs concurrently with a fascination for war and battles. In China he experienced life in a country where areas were unsafe or impenetrable as they were held by Communist rebels, or by bandits. This helped to condition his outlook, and the distance from Europe enabled him to view happenings there with greater detachment and objectivity than most of the young writers who lived closer to the European crises. While in China he had written hardly any poetry, but produced some interesting Open Letters, generally statements of his beliefs, nominally addressed to friends such as E.M.Forster or acquaintances like Cecil Day Lewis.

At first references to Spain in Julian Bell's letters home are patchy and he is obviously ill-informed, but by the beginning of October he is advocating an underhand policy of Machiavellian principles by which politicians, especially Léon Blum, should publicly support neutrality and non-intervention, while giving as much underhand assistance as possible.<sup>26</sup> On December the 5th 1936 he wrote to his friend Eddy Playfair

"I think I ought to go to Spain as a volunteer, both because I believe I could be more use than most other people [a reference to his knowledge of tactical aspects of warfare] and because I want military training and experience which can only be got if one has first hand knowledge."<sup>27</sup>

At about this time he was writing an Open Letter to E.M.Forster on "War and Peace". In this he gives his attitude to Fascism which is, he says

"an aggressive international creed, and it is clear enough that the first stage of Fascism in any country is the destruction of all culture and liberty, the decencies and amenities of the liberal life ... fascism is not a freak of human wickedness, but a natural consequence of an economic change, that it is the political expression of a

desperately squeezed and harassed middle class,  
just as socialism is the political expression  
of working class and oppression and idealism"<sup>28</sup>

Later in the same letter he defines his own position as

"a social democrat who is not a liberal,  
I am all for compromise and moderation  
and for avoiding a civil war at any cost.  
But I do not think you can have any  
compromise that will avoid civil war and  
yet does not settle the question of power  
in favour of somebody of convinced and  
organized socialists"<sup>29</sup>

Julian Bell was not aware, as very few people at that time were aware, that the civil war in Spain if won by the Republicans would give power to 'convinced and organized' Communists. Nevertheless he regarded even a Communist dictatorship as preferable to a barbaric Fascist one.

In January 1937 he writes, just before leaving for England, that he feels a moral obligation to fight in Spain for what he believes in, particularly as he approves of wars in principle. The only major problem in his joining the International Brigades was his mother's reaction. Vanessa Bell was very deeply attached to her son, and to her pacifism. The whole Bloomsbury ethos which put personal relations first in any decision, was against Julian going to Spain as it would upset his mother. While waiting in England to be accepted by the International Brigades, he spent

some time canvassing for the Labour Party in Birmingham from where he wrote to his mother that "the proletariat are just lumpish and dull"<sup>30</sup> He wrote no more poetry, but concentrated on polemical writing designed to attract attention at matters rather than to gain assent to his opinions. As a concession to his mother's fears, he agreed to stop trying to join the International Brigades and to go to Spain instead as an ambulance driver for Spanish Medical Aid.

Julian Bell's motives for going and wishing to fight in Spain were totally different from those of any other writer who fought or was emotionally committed to the Republican cause. He was opposed to Fascism, as they were, but does not seem to be very committed to the Republicans or even to know much about them. He was certainly ignorant of the internal politics of the Popular Front. He decided to go to Spain largely to gain experience of war at first hand. As children, he and his brother Quentin had evolved complex war games and the theoretical, tactical side of war still fascinated him. He had also developed a code of the soldier - detached, with a disinterested devotion to duty. No cause was pure, but the soldier could nevertheless maintain his integrity through obedience to an abstract duty rather than through adherence to a cause which would involve a modification of his principles. At the end of June, Julian Bell was sent to Madrid, where he was shocked by the military organization, before the July offensive towards Brunete began. Although a non-combatant, his position as ambulance driver was probably better

suited to his desire to experience war, for he was aware that he was being useful while being able to act on his own initiative and not have to wait for orders from above. Bell had joined Richard Rees who had already been in Spain some months, and they talked of Bell's idea of 'Socialism from above', which enabled him to combine his Socialism with his belief in the worth and position of the upper classes. On July 18th 1937, the anniversary of the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War, his ambulance was bombed and he died later that day in the Escorial hospital. As Stansky and Abrahams say of him

"He had never thought of Spain as the incarnation of an ideal, nor had he been swept up in a rush of ideological enthusiasm - he did not run the risk of being ~~dis~~<sup>s</sup>illusioned, only of being killed"<sup>31</sup>

The Poplar branch of the C.P.G.B. had been active in raising money for Spain from the outbreak of the Civil War. When in November they spent the money on an ambulance and equipment to send to Spain, Christopher Caudwell drove it, in a convoy of trucks and other ambulances, across France into Spain. Once in Spain he joined the International Brigades where with his aptitude for all things mechanical - he had published five books on aeronautics and invented an infinitely variable gear - he was soon made a machine gun instructor. John Strachey, in his Introduction to Caudwell's Studies in a Dying Culture, quotes from a letter in which Caudwell gives his reasons for joining the Inter-

# -national Brigades

"You know how I feel about the importance of democratic freedom. The Spanish People's Army needs help badly; their struggle, if they fail, will certainly be ours tomorrow, and, believing as I do, it seems clear where my duty lies"<sup>32</sup>

Once again the belief in the unity of thinking and action became important in his life, Caudwell could not sympathise and agree with the Republican's struggle, without joining it. Part of Caudwell's Illusion and Reality was written after the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War and an interesting part of it is a discussion of anarchists, who he believed were disgusted bourgeois. In practice the anarchist discovers that even the destruction of an outworn society requires organization. Caudwell cites the example of the anarchists in Barcelona who were forced to support the central government and to help organize militia, defense and supplies. He comments that the final irony of the position of the anarchist is contained in his newspaper report after the Fascist revolt that "the anarchists are keeping order in Barcelona".<sup>33</sup> Caudwell was sent to the Jamara front and on his first day in battle, February 12th 1937, he was killed while covering the retreat of his unit.

Edward Upward did not go to Spain, but his attitude to the situation, including the inter-party hostilities, would have been strictly in accordance with Party doctrine. This may be ascertained



by a comment Stephen Spender makes about Upward, at the time of the Moscow trial of Yagoda who had been important as a prosecutor in earlier trials. Spender asked Upward what he thought about the trials, Upward

"looked up, with his bright glance like  
a bird-watcher's, and said: 'What trials?  
I've given up thinking about such things  
ages ago'"<sup>34</sup>

To Upward whatever the Party said or did was right because the Party was right.

Just before the Spanish Civil War broke out, John Cornford had been planning to spend an August holiday with Margot Heinemann in France and then they intended to go to the inaugural conference of the International Peace Campaign in Brussels. When the Civil War started, however, Cornford decided to leave England a week earlier and spend the first week in Catalonia observing the attempts to transfer the Republic into a worker's state, while simultaneously fighting the Fascists. The idea of non-intervention was only just being considered, when Cornford arrived in Spain on August 7th 1936. Private volunteering for the Spanish Republican Forces had not effectively begun. A few British living or holidaying in or near Spain had already volunteered, but none were yet actually fighting. Cornford's intention was just to observe actual instances of the phenomena he had so often campaigned for, a revolt on the ✓ Left and a war against the Right. He obtained a press card from the News Chronicle. Arriving in

Barcelona on August 8, he wrote to Margot Heinemann

"In Barcelona one can understand physically what the dictatorship of the proletariat means. All the Fascist press has been taken over. The real rule is in the hands of the militia committees... It is genuinely a dictatorship of the majority supported by the overwhelming majority."<sup>35</sup>

Cornford remained in Barcelona as an accredited free-lance reporter just three days. On the third day he travelled to the front with a party of journalists including Franz Borkenau. On August 14 at the furthest point that the party was scheduled to visit, Lecinena, Cornford enlisted in the militia, and became thus the first Englishman to fight for Republican Spain. Strangely, for such an ardent Communist, he enlisted not in the P.S.U.C. militia but in the P.O.U.M. militia. Stansky and Abrahams say that this was purely fortuitous; the militia at Lecinena was POUM and this was where Cornford enlisted. If the party had been authorized to continue to Tardienta where the PSUC militia were fighting, he would have joined that group.<sup>36</sup> His decision to join followed recognition of his uselessness as a journalist, as he spoke no Spanish. It also appears to have been quite impulsive.

While waiting for action he wrote, over a period of weeks a long diary-letter and explanation of the political situation to Margot Heinemann. After nearly a week of seeing no fighting he had realized what he had done and writes in the diary-letter

"I came out with the intention of staying a few days, firing a few shots and then coming home. Sounded fine, but you can't do things like that. You can't play at civil war or fight with a reservation you don't mean to get killed... Having joined in, I am in whether I like it or not.

And I like it"<sup>37</sup>

He was critical of the activities of the Communists in Spain, believing they should concentrate on winning the Anarchists over, rather than trying to neutralize the petty bourgeoisie, but as he spoke neither Spanish nor German, he was unable to grasp much of the political conversation to thereby understand the situation.

After thirty-seven days in Spain, he was invalided back to England. He intended to recruit more Englishmen in an attempt to inspire by example, the Spanish militia to improve, and in some cases institute, discipline. Cornford was in England for three weeks and then went, with the small English group he had recruited, to Paris where the International Brigades were being formed. Together with another English group, they became a machine-gun section in the 'Commune de Paris' (or Dumont) Battalion. Their training was ended when they were moved to Madrid which was in danger of falling to the Fascists. Cornford and his group fought in the University City, were moved to Badilla and after that the five men remaining of the original twenty-one in the Machine-gun section, were attached to some new volunteers and formed into No.1

Company. This was an English-speaking company which was sent to the Cordoba front and there on December 28, 1936, his twenty-first birthday, John Cornford was killed.

Unlike most of the other writers, John Cornford's writing was greatly improved during his period in Spain. In the rather slack time in the POUM militia he wrote some quite exceptional poetry. His "Full Moon at Tierz: Before the Storming of Huesca," is a completely doctrinaire Communist poem, yet also is a moving portrayal of a young soldier on the night before a battle. It begins, as does Auden's "Spain", with a review of past, present and future according to the Marxist interpretation of history. He then examines his present situation alone with his faith

"Though Communism was my waking time  
Always before the lights of home  
Shone clear and steady and full in view -  
Here, if you fall, there's hope for you -  
Now, with my Party, I stand quite alone"

The poem ends by viewing England and the workers of the world and calling

"O understand before too late  
Freedom was never held without a fight....  
Raise the red flag triumphantly  
For Communism and for liberty"

He also wrote the beautiful and poignant lyric "To Margot Heinemann" and his last poem "A Letter from Aragon". This latter is a moving picture of the realities of war. The line "This is a quiet sector of a quiet front" recurs between descriptions of a funeral, of terr-

terrified women during an air raid and of the wounded in hospital. The poem ends with a statement, supposedly by an Anarchist worker, which is fitting as the last poetic statement of so dedicated a campaigner for Communism as John Cornford

"Tell the workers of England

This was a war not of our own making

We did not seek it.

But if ever the Fascists again rule Barcelona

It will be as a heap of ruins with us workers beneath it"

Thus the Spanish Civil War had provided the writers of the Thirties with the object to which they could attach their political opinions and their desire for action. That it had not been quite as they expected was not unusual - their political opinions were idealized even for the English situation and Spain was a totally different milieu. Julian Symonds notes

"that those who fought and died in Spain

with the bloom of their illusions untouched,

were the lucky ones"<sup>38</sup>

Of Those who survived either the Spanish fighting or merely the campaigning for Spain in England, few would continue to hold the opinions they had held before the Civil War.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 2.

1. Julian Symons: The Thirties, Cressett Press. London, 1960. p. 122
2. "Critic" (Kingsley Martin): "A London Diary", New Statesman and Nation, December 25, 1937. p. 1094.

Cyril Connolly's response, which belonged to the militant group of answers, is worth quoting in full as it gives a reasonably typical view of Fascism, of the place of the intellectual and of the role of Spain as a testing-ground for public opinion. Connolly replied "Fascism is the first process by which the cynical few exploit the idealism of the many, by violence and propaganda through the use of a dictator. Its aim is to maintain the status of the rich by using the poor to fight battles. This cannot be done until the whole nation is rendered both warlike and servile. Those who will not make soldiers are not required; those who are not required are eliminated. What we can learn from Spain is the order and extent of that elimination before the stultifying of the human race can proceed. Intellectuals come first, almost before women and children. It is impossible therefore to remain an intellectual and admire Fascism; for that is to admire the intellect's destruction, nor can one remain careless and indifferent. To ignore the present is to condone the future"

(quoted Cecil Woolf and John Bagguley (eds) Authors Take Sides on Vietnam, Peter Owen, London, 1967. p. 225.)

3. Stanley Weintraub: The Last Great Cause, W.H. Allen, London, 1968. p. 92.
4. George Orwell: Inside the Whale and other essays, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1966. p. 40-41.

5. George Orwell : Homage to Catalonia, Penguin, Harmondsworth,  
1966. p.46.
6. Ibid., p.47.
7. Ibid., p.16.
8. Ibid., p.45
9. Ibid., p.102
10. Ibid., chap.10. for the account of the Barcelona fighting.
11. Kingsley Martin : Editor, Hutchinson, London, 1968. p.216.
12. "Some letters of George Orwell" : Encounter, January 1962,  
pp.55-65. p. 58.
13. Ibid., p. 58.
14. W.H.Auden : Impressions of Valencia", New Statesman and  
Nation, January 30, 1967. p.159.
15. Stanley Weintraub, op.cit., p.13.
16. Robin Skelton : Poetry of the Thirties, Penguin,  
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17. Stephen Spender : Forward from Liberalism, Gollancz, London,  
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18. Ibid., p.295
19. R.H.S.Crossman (ed): The God that Failed, Hamish Hamilton,  
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20. Ibid., p.250
21. Stephen Spender : World within World, Readers Union, London,  
1953. p.208.
22. Stephen Spender : The Still Centre, Faber and Faber, London,  
1946. page 10.

23. Christopher Isherwood : Exhumations, Methuen, London,  
1966. p.11.
24. John Lehmann : The Whispering Gallery, Longmans Green and  
Co., London, 1956. p.274-5.
25. Cecil Day Lewis : Buried Day, Chatto and Windus, London,  
1960. p.219.
26. Quentin Bell (ed) : Julian Bell, Hogarth Press, London,  
1938. p.162
27. Ibid., p.172.
28. Ibid., p.358.
29. Ibid., p. 374.
30. P. Stansky and W. Abrahams : Journey to the Frontier,  
Constable, London, 1966. p.392.
31. Ibid., p.411.
32. Christopher Caudwell : Studies in a Dying Culture, John Lane,  
London. 1938. p VI.
33. Christopher Caudwell : Illusion and reality, Lawrence and  
Wishart, London, 1947. p.112-3.
34. Stephen Spender : World Within World, P. 153.
35. P. Stansky and W. Abrahams : op.cit., p. 316.
36. Ibid., p. 319
- 37 Ibid., p.334.
38. Julian Symons : op. cit., p.137.



### Chapter 3.

THE CHANGE IN THE WRITER'S ATTITUDES AFTER THE  
SPANISH CIVIL WAR.

Of the writers that have been treated in this study, none were alive in Spain after July 1937 - a year after the outbreak of civil war. In fact the last of the writers to be in Spain, Julian Bell, died on July 18, 1937, the first anniversary of the war. It is noticeable that, except for Julian Bell, who had been isolated from England, and the attitudes prevalent there, and who did not have idealistic reasons for going, no writer went to Spain as a politically committed observer or fighter after early February 1937. Cornford joined in August 1936, Caudwell left England in November 1936, Auden went in January 1937, Orwell in December 1936, Spender went first in early February 1937 and returned later that month. The only foreign volunteer fighters to stay longer were those in the International Brigades who had stayed alive. They were generally doctrinaire Communists, or workers tricked into the brigades by representation of them as Popular Front organizations. The International Brigades themselves were withdrawn in 1938. The effect of the war on the writers who survived was gradual, intensified by later events both personal and political, national and international. They were all affected by Munich and the Nazi-Soviet Pact; but Auden and Isherwood were further affected by their visit to the war in China, Spender by his separation from his first wife, Day Lewis by the pressure of his work. Yet for all these people, with the possible exception of Isherwood, the Spanish Civil War appears to be the experience which started the change in their attitudes.

The beginning of a change in George Orwell's attitudes in

late 1937 was noted in the previous chapter. In late '37 and early '38, he was writing up his experiences in Spain for the book that became Homage to Catalonia. At the end of this book, Orwell briefly touches on his attitudes saying that the war

"has left me with memories that are mostly evil, and yet I do not wish that I had missed it. When you have had a glimpse of such a disaster as this.... the result is not necessarily disillusionment and cynicism. Curiously enough the whole experience has left me with not less but more belief in the decency of human beings"<sup>1</sup>

Yet Orwell's belief in the decency of human beings was relevant to individuals only; Spain increased his fear and distrust of organized ideological groups. Orwell's socialism was continually thwarted by his individualism. He could ~~not~~ agree with the objects of socialism but not with its discipline nor with many of its practical forms.

This attitude is well illustrated in a letter Orwell wrote to Stephen Spender, in March 1938, in which he mentions the writing of Homage to Catalonia saying

"I hate writing that kind of stuff the political chapters of Homage to Catalonia and I am much more interested in my own experiences, but unfortunately in this bloody period we are living in, ones only experiences

are being mixed up in contraversies,  
 intrigues etc.. I sometimes feel as  
 if I hadn't been properly alive since  
 the beginning of 1937"<sup>2</sup>

It is very apt that this should be written to Stephen Spender whose attitude appears to be the same, in that he was more interested in, or at least wrote better poetry about, his own experiences than about political matters, be they controversies or intrigues. Orwell's comment also points up another reaction of many writers to their experiences of the Spanish Civil War, that of realizing that one had become unimportant. Before the war, Orwell's own experiences were sufficiently interesting to enable him to write influential books on them, books that people bought, read and talked about. The Road to Wigan Pier was of Orwell's experiences while observing the unemployed miners in England's industrial north. Down and Out in Paris and London was about his experiences while masquerading as a tramp. When Orwell went to Spain, he no longer controlled his experiences. He says when discussing the political side of Spain

"When I dodged the Communist Machine-guns  
 in the Barcelona riots when I finally fled  
 from Spain with the police one jump behind  
 me - all these things happened to me in that  
 particular way because I was serving in the  
 POUM militia and not in the PSUC."<sup>3</sup>

Orwell could no longer maintain even a moderate amount of control

over what happened to him. Having made the decision to enlist in the POUM militia, he was sent to the front, where he remained for 115 days. When the POUM was declared an illegal organization, he became virtually a hunted criminal. Truly his experiences were mixed up on controversies and intrigues. Since the beginning of 1937, when he was sent to the front near Saragossa, Orwell had not directed his own life. Since leaving the Indian Imperial Police, Orwell had been in control of his own actions and decisions and consequently in Spain he had not felt properly alive.

This, however, was Orwell's personal reaction to the Spanish Civil War. The war had important impacts on his political thought as well. The experiences in the POUM which affected his outlook on Communism had not converted him to either the Trotskyism that POUM members were alleged to profess, nor the Anarchism which seemed to reign. The pro-POUM line taken in his book is explained in a letter he wrote to Frank Jellinek in late 1938

"the whole business about the POUM has had far too much fuss made about it and the net result of this kind of thing is to prejudice people against the Spanish Republic...

In my book ... I've given a more sympathetic picture of the POUM line than I naturally felt, because I always told them they were wrong and refused to join the party. But I had to put it as sympathetically as possible, because it has had no hearing in the capitalist Press and nothing but libels in the Left Wing Press" <sup>4</sup>

Orwell makes this very point, about his lack of sympathy with the POUM line, strongly in his book. Consequently the effect of this double denial of sympathy is to give the impression that Orwell was violently against their concepts, the most prominent of which was the need for revolution and the necessity of carrying on the revolution regardless of any other considerations. Orwell did continue to believe that revolution was desirable but only if the revolution brought the ordinary common man to the top, without a political demagogue to rule him. By the time of Dunkirk, Orwell believed that revolution in England was possible. He saw in Dunkirk an example of patriotism and intelligence combined, and believed that this combination could bring the oppressed members of English society into control of that society. He says in The Lion and the Unicorn "By revolution we become more ourselves not less" 5

The faith in the socialist revolution that Orwell gained from his experiences in worker-controlled Barcelona was possibly the only positive influence the Spanish Civil War had on him. The civil war intensified his distrust of Communism, of political leaders, of the intellectuals, above all of the power of the controllers of the Press over the news reported. When, in 1941, he wrote the essay "Looking Back on the Spanish War", he devoted one whole chapter (number four) of the seven chapter essay to the study of the falsification of history and news. He says

"In Spain for the first time, I saw newspaper reports which did not bear any relation to

the facts, not even the relationship that is implied in the ordinary lie... I saw, in fact, history being written not in terms of what happened but what ought to have happened according to various party lines"<sup>6</sup>

The most frightening aspect of this for Orwell was the feeling he gained that objective truth was disappearing. It is easy to verify how much Orwell was justified in his fear by comments made by Communist writers on their activities during the war. Claude Cockburn argues very convincingly that a cause worth fighting for should be worth lying for. Cockburn instituted one of the most persistent fabrications about the Spanish Civil War, in his reports of an anti-Franco revolt in Tetuan (Spanish Morocco).<sup>7</sup> Arthur Koestler also comments in his autobiography, that much of his reporting of the Spanish Civil War was created or coloured by the European Agitprop head, Willie Münzenberg. Cockburn, as 'Frank Pitcairn' is the object of an attack by Orwell for his false reporting of the activities of the POUM during the Barcelona fighting.

Orwell's reactions to the Spanish Civil War were important for his later writings and the natural extrapolation of his fear of the loss of objective truth is shown in his statement

"The implied objective of this line of thought is a nightmare world in which the Leader, or some ruling clique, controls not only the future but the past"

The nightmare world Orwell envisages here (in Homage to Catalonia), he creates in his last book 1984. The hero of the novel, Winston Smith, is employed in rewriting history in order to make it agree with even day-to-day changes in party policy. Many of the horrors of 1984 seemed to have developed directly from Orwell's time in Spain. His description, in Homage to Catalonia, of his reaction to the banning of the POUM and his probable arrest could be transferred to 1984 with few changes. He writes

"I was not guilty of any definite act,  
but I was guilty of Trotskyism....

It was no use hanging on to the English  
notion that you are safe as long as you  
keep to the law. Practically the law was  
what the police chose to make it"<sup>9</sup>

This was Orwell's first experience of being guilty of a supposed state of mind.

The banning of the POUM also lead to another important theme in Orwell's later work. The POUM was banned partly to provide a scapegoat for the Barcelona street fighting. For the purposes of the Communists it was effective to charge the POUM members with spying for the Fascists. This helped to explain some Republican defeats. In Orwell's Animal Farm, the pig, Snowball's, position is derived from the position of the POUM. Immediately after the revolution, Snowball had been one of the leaders, but following his enforced flight he was held to be league with the enemy. Snowball's history is a parallel of Trotsky's and the POUM were



to be Trotskyist. Trotsky's role in the Spanish Civil War - that of the almost mythical. all-powerful enemy is nearly the same as Goldstein's in 1984. Goldstein, Snowball and Trotsky were, in their own situations, supposedly the institutors of all evil, the scapegoats for all failures. Lack of credibility is never considered in the portrayal of Snowball and, after all, if the POUM could be held to be Fascist spies, why could not a pig sell himself to a farmer? Spain taught Orwell not only to fear for the loss of objective truth, but to realize the power of completely incredible statements and terminology. Orwell had always had a tendency to sweeping generalizations, and he realized that the ordinary reader would not question them. He thus used the term "Fascist" to describe many things he disliked, from dictators to dogs.

One of Orwell's most important essays is "Inside the Whale". This was being written when World War II broke out. Although it is primarily an investigation of the place and value of Henry Miller and his novel Tropic of Cancer, it contains an explanation of many of Orwell's reactions to politics, literature and their relationship to the real world and the events in it. Orwell examines the development of literature from the beginning of the twentieth century. First he notes the Georgian poets with their interest in nature, choosing Housman as an example. He then examines the change in the post-war writers such as Eliot and Joyce, discussing their hostility to progress and commenting

"When one looks back on the twenties,  
 nothing is queerer than the way in which  
 every important event in Europe escaped  
 the notice of the English intelligentsia"<sup>10</sup>

Observing the changes in literary outlook in the early Thirties,  
 Orwell says

"Suddenly we have got out of the twilight  
 of the Gods into a sort of Boy Scout  
 atmosphere of bare knees and community  
 singing. The typical literary man ceases  
 to be a cultured expatriate with a leaning  
 towards the Church, and becomes an eager-  
 minded school boy with a leaning towards  
 Communism"<sup>11</sup>

Orwell's concern is with the Communist influence on English  
 literature, and he contends that for three years the central  
 stream of English literature was Communist controlled. Although  
 this is patently an exaggeration - even those who were merely  
 influenced by Communism never comprised anything but a small part  
 of the central stream of English literature -, it does lead Orwell  
 into an examination of Communism. Communism in Western Europe, he  
 declares, is an instrument of Russian foreign policy, and thus  
 alters with Stalin's changes of opinion. Communism is thus " a  
 form of socialism that makes mental honesty impossible"<sup>12</sup> Orwell  
 wonders how this could attract the intellectuals, and decides that  
 Communism provided something to believe in, after one had rejected

patriotism and religion. It was "the patriotism of the deracinated 13" Orwell's experience of the Popular Front in Spain caused an abrupt reversal of his earlier acceptance of it. He became one of its most vehement opposers, believing that one of the partners of a Popular Front would inevitably swallow the others and fearing that the Communists would be the eventual victors and rulers of the Popular Front.

When the need for adherence to the party line demanded accepting divergencies from objective truth and acceptance of abrupt changes of policy, most of the writers of the Thirties left their political positions. Orwell says this was because

"any writer who accepts or partially accepts  
the discipline of a political party is  
sooner or later faced with the alternative:  
toe the line or shut up" 14

Orwell thus concludes that a writer should keep out of politics. This decision must be understood to mean keeping out of party politics. Orwell had not changed his mind in 1947 when he listed political purposes as one of the reasons for writing. In the essay "Why I write", politics is said to mean a

"desire to push the world in a certain direction  
to alter other people's idea of the kind of  
society that they should strive after. Once  
again, no book is genuinely free from political  
bias. The opinion that art should have nothing  
to do with politics is itself a political attitude" 15

The argument Orwell advances in "Inside the Whale" is that Miller's attitude to life will become the prevailing attitude adopted by writers in the time remaining before the age of totalitarianism. Orwell believed that the age of liberalism was drawing to an end and that the age of totalitarianism would soon arrive in which the writer in his present form would be an anachronism. While waiting for the totalitarian age, the writers will adopt a passive attitude, will, as the title says, get "Inside the Whale". The reason Orwell gives for this is that

"the whale's belly is simply a womb big enough for an adult. There you are, in the dark, cushioned space that exactly fits you, with yards of blubber between yourself and reality, able to keep up an attitude of the completest indifference, no matter what happens.... Short of being dead, it is the final, unsurpassable stage of irresponsibility".<sup>16</sup>

He predicts

"the passive attitude will come back, and it will be more consciously passive than before. Progress and reaction have both turned out to be swindles. Seemingly there is nothing left but quietism - robbing reality of its terrors by simply submitting to it".<sup>17</sup>

The mood of the essay is very bitter and pessimistic. His

belief in the inevitability of the coming of the totalitarian age and the coming end of literature in its present forms is expressed in a despairing tone that signifies a complete absence of hope, No doubt the outbreak of the Second World War, following close on his disappointments about the Spanish Civil War made Orwell feel that hope was futile. Nevertheless his pessimism leads him to some sweeping generalizations, which are effective for promoting the arguments in his essay but which hinder an objective evaluation of them. His comment about the Communist control of English literature has already been noted, and most of his exaggerations are concerned with Communism. At the time the essay was written, Hitler had not attacked Russia and consequently Communism was allied with Fascism and thus was the enemy, so the exaggerations, such as the unquestioning obedience by English Communists of Russian directions, are understandable. The persistence of this pessimism and the assurance that totalitarianism was inevitable did not vanish after the war. The most terrifying part of 1984 is not so much the descriptions of a totalitarian world but the date itself. It is not set in the distant future, and from internal evidence ( a mention of the ninth three year plan), it is possible to date the beginning of that way of life as 1957. Orwell has been quoted as saying that he did not feel as pessimistic as the book would seem to suggest. "It wouldn't have been so gloomy", he said, "if I hadn't been so ill"<sup>18</sup> It is hard to imagine, however, given the basic outline of the plot, or the situation, how it could have been other than gloomy.

E.P.Thompson has written an essay entitled "Outside the Whale", for a collection of essays by members of the British 'New Left' of the fifties, called Out of Apathy. In the essay he examines further Orwell's thesis of the withdrawal of the writer from social responsibility into the belly of the whale. Thompson uses Orwell and W.H.Auden as his major examples, declaring that Orwell was himself guilty of the quietism and passive attitude he discerned in Henry Miller.

The study of Auden is based mainly on changes made by the poet to his poem "Spain". When it was republished in 1940 (it had first been issued as a pamphlet in 1937), Auden had made a significant number of alterations to the original. He was to continue this practice of altering poems before reissuing them. Editions of his Collected Poems are most unhelpful, and even at times totally useless, for a study of his early poems, as most are revised, all are undated and the arrangement is in alphabetical order of the first word of the poem. The title Collected Poems is also misleading as they are selected poems. The changes made to Auden's earlier poem are not merely in order to improve their structural form or imagery, at times they seem intended to remove evidence of an earlier state of mind. In "A Note on the texts used" in Poetry of the Thirties, Robin Skelton says that although Auden permitted him to print the original versions of some of his poems

"Mr.W.H.Auden considers these five poems

"Sir, No Man's Enemy", "Spain", "A Communist  
to Others", To a Writer on his Birthday" and

"Sept.1.1939" to be trash which he is  
ashamed to have written"<sup>19</sup>

The initial two movements of "Spain" are only slightly altered, apparently to improve the style or form. The third movement, however, that which depicted Spain as the embodiment of the hopes and fears of the poet's society, has been drastically altered. In the 1937 version it consisted of three verses, the first of which ended and continued into the second with

"On that tableland scored by rivers,  
Our thoughts have bodies, and the menacing shape  
of our fever

Are precise and alive."

The second and third verses of this movement are used to present specific thoughts and fears being transformed into specific actions or objects in Spain. The 1940 version reduced the third movement to one verse which ends

"On that tableland scored by rivers,  
Our fever's menacing shapes are precise and alive"

There is no explanation of how they are made precise and alive, nor just what the "menacing shapes" are. The implication of the two excised verses is that in Spain it was possible for the fears and joys, the anxiety and neuroses of the people of the nations of the world, to be resolved. Commitment in Spain would lead to the future envisaged in the last movement. When Auden originally wrote "Spain" he believed that the evils of the world could be

cured, but as the Spanish Civil War drew to its ignoble end, as World War 11 became increasingly inevitable, and following its outbreak, all the horrors of the world seemed to be unleashed, Auden came to adopt a doctrine of original sin. Sin exists, it is inevitable, it must be accepted. This view is not compatible with the thoughts expressed in the early version of "Spain" and so the poem had to be altered.

In 1938, Auden left with Christopher Isherwood to visit the war in China. This visit was more important for Isherwood's development than for Auden's. It was, after all, the second war Auden had visited in two years. For Isherwood, however, it was the first time he had seen people involved in a war and he began to have doubts about his earlier opinion that Fascism should be resisted with force. By the time of Munich, Isherwood was a pacifist and wrote

"I am certain of this now: as far as I am concerned

- nothing, nothing, nothing is worth a war"<sup>20</sup>

This visit had another important outcome in that following a stop in America on the way back to England, both Isherwood and Auden decided to go to America to live after they had first returned to England.

Auden left for America early in 1939 and one of his first poems written there was "Sept.1.1939" written just before the outbreak of the Second World War. It begins

"I sit in one of the dives

On fifty-Second Street



Uncertain and afraid  
 As the clever hopes expire  
 Of a low dishonest decade"

The poem presents no possibility of a resolution of the hopes, or fears, of the decade, as "Spain" had done. Yet there is some measure of hope in the poem, Auden still had some faith in the power of the poet.

"All I have is a voice  
 To undo the folded lie...  
 And no one exists alone...  
 We must love one another or die"

The poem ends with the suggestion that the 'Just', who appear to be the writers, still exchange messages to break the stupor and darkness of the world, and Auden expresses the hope that he may continue to witness in this way. It is significant that most of the hope expressed in this poem was removed by the later excision of the verse ending "We must love one another or die".

Auden went to America because he believed the poet should disassociate himself from traditional society, and the European cultural milieu. The poet should have as near to complete anonymity as possible. This is another change from his pre-Spanish Civil War opinion of the writer as an integral and important part of society, able to influence the opinions of many people. Auden's beliefs changed so greatly and he indulged in such drastic rewriting of his poems that, say Rodway and Cook, unless a reader had compared early and recent editions of Auden's early poems

"he would have remained unaware that  
 the rebellious social commentator of...  
 the pre-war period had become transformed  
 by brilliant verbal legerdemain into the  
 regenerate sinner of today"<sup>21</sup>

The ultimate sign of Auden's change of belief and attitude is given in his reply to a questionnaire on Vietnam, of the same form as the Left Review questionnaire on the Spanish Civil War. His reply is even more interesting as Auden signed the original Spanish Civil War questionnaires. To the Vietnam question he replies

"Why writers should be canvassed for their  
 opinions on controversial political issues,  
 I cannot imagine. Indeed when read in bulk,  
 the statements made by writers, including  
 the greatest, would seem to indicate that  
 literary talent and political common sense  
 are rarely found together. It goes without  
 saying that war is an atrocious business  
 but it is dishonest of those who demand the  
 immediate withdrawal of all American troops  
 to pretend that their motives are purely  
 humanitarian. They believe, rightly or  
 wrongly, that it would be better if the  
 Communists won"<sup>22</sup>

Stephen Spender's poems on Spain were published in book form

in may 1939 (two months after the Civil War ended) in the volume, mentioned in the previous chapter, The Still Centre. In the foreword to this collection, Spender says that the violence of the times is such as to dwarf the poet and to make him attempt to write of matters beyond his experience. Believing that a poet should not write about matters which he has not experienced, Spender says

"in my most recent poems, I have deliberately turned back to a kind of writing which is more personal, and I have included within my subjects, weakness and fantasy and illusion"<sup>23</sup>

From this it appears that Spender has joined Auden, Orwell and Henry Miller in the belly of the whale. This opinion is backed up by Spender's own statement that

"After my return from Spain, I reacted from the attempt to achieve Communist self-righteousness towards an extreme preoccupation with the problems of self. I wrote poems in which I took as my theme the sense of being isolated within my personal existence."<sup>24</sup>

Like Auden, Spender no longer felt the need for communion with the workers, nor are his poems aimed at creating some reaction among his public. This turn inward was beneficial for Spender's poetry, as he no longer felt the obligation to write poems of public statement which he rarely did very successfully.

Spender's retreat from the world was intensified by his

separation from his wife and in a poem about this, called "The Separation" he describes his situation in terms, though related to mining, very similar to Orwell's description of the belly of the whale.

"Here where I lie is the hot pit  
Crowding on the mind with coal  
And the will turned against it  
Only drills new seams of darkness  
Through the Dark-surrounding whole"

Far more coincidental than this is an extract from his diary for September 1939 (the time that Orwell was writing "Inside the Whale") given in Spender's autobiography. He writes, the

"passive attitude towards life, the tendency to consider oneself a product of circumstances and environment beyond one's control, gives the connection between the breakdown of external standards and the private values of a people"<sup>25</sup>

This is precisely what had happened with the Spanish Civil War. The private values of the writers involved had at first been congruent with Communist teachings and the view of the Spanish Civil War presented in the New Statesman and the News Chronicle. The external standards applied during the civil war by the Communists did not agree with the private values of the writers, nor did the news reported by the papers agree with what the writers knew to be happening; thus they retreated to a passive attitude.

Writing of people's attitudes to World War 11, Spender says

that, for the first time, individuals seemed totally unimportant and unable to control their own affairs, a public fate controlled everything but nothing seemed to control or direct the public fate.

"Everyone had shrunk in his own mind  
as well as in the minds of his fellow-  
beings because his attention was diverted  
to events dwarfing individuals....  
Personal misfortune seemed of minor  
importance compared with the universal  
nature of the disaster overtaking  
civilization"<sup>26</sup>

This feeling affected many writers and Spender examines which writers survived the experience unscathed and how they managed to do so. Presenting T.S.Eliot, Edith Sitwell and Edwin Muir as undeterred by the feelings of victimization and individual unimportance, he decides that they were not time-bound and thus their poetic attitudes were not dependent on external events, The left-wing writers of the thirties who Spender calls the Divided Generation, were time-bound

"They had taken a bet that a world order  
of peace and social justice would emerge  
in their time... they lost... and were  
forced to spend their next phase searching  
for an attitude which would be independent  
of external events"<sup>27</sup>

The attitude Spender finally adopted is, to some extent, inde-

-pendent of external events, but he did not turn away from politics as completely as Auden had done. Spender did not repudiate his earlier work as Auden had done, nor did he regret the involvement of the writers of the thirties in politics. Spender states in his critical work The Creative Element, published in 1953, that the events of the early thirties caused young writers to reject belief in the isolated individual and accept Communist orthodoxy. He adds that given the events of the thirties the early acceptance of Communism was inevitable.<sup>28</sup> Events since then have caused Communism to be rejected in its turn, but Spender does not believe that his past acceptance was sufficiently reprehensible to demand revision of his early work in an attempt to tone his commitment down.

In the middle of the war, Spender had written that

"Poetry is the attempt to imagine the universal nature of man's being, the poet cannot take sides without abandoning poetry"<sup>29</sup>

This is the first acknowledgement of his new position which he elaborated in his contribution to The God that Failed. In the latter book he states that his duty as a writer is to indicate what he supports, without taking sides, as neither side represents his views. He ends his essay by giving his solution for the world's problems, which is

"for the peoples and nations who love liberty to lead a movement throughout the world to improve the conditions of the millions of people

who care more for bread than for freedom;  
 thus raising them to a level of existence  
 where they can care for freedom. The  
 interests of the very few people in the  
 world who care for freedom must be identified  
 with those of the many who need bread, or  
 freedom will be lost" <sup>30</sup>

The Second World War enables Spender to come into close contact, and establish a sense of companionship, with the workers. During the war Spender was in the Fire Service, and the knowledge of the workers he gained there, enabled him to correct his false notion of the worker as an ideal (a notion he had obtained from Communist theory). He concluded that the worker will not automatically create a virtuous society when he gains control, for he will adopt the superficiality that Spender finds so reprehensible in other successful groups.

Spender has recently expanded his view of politics and the place of the poet in relation to them. Writing in the London Magazine in 1962 he says

"there is no obligation on any poet to write about public issues, in fact if there is any question of obligation it is to be as private and personal as possible (I have always thought this, and so I think have most of the thirties poets. The public poetry of the thirties was a kind of

conscripted poetry, conscripted by the  
conscience on behalf of the victims"<sup>31</sup>

This last comment is very interesting, particularly in light of the feeling aroused by some of Spender's poetry of the Spanish Civil War, that he was writing more because he felt that he should than because he wanted to write poetry. This opinion is not contrary to Spender's comment in the Foreword to The Still Centre about poetry being true to one's experience. A sensation or belief may be true to one's experience without causing one to write poetry on it. This appears to be what Spender means. The events of the thirties were so demanding of expression (poetic or otherwise) that the poets forsook what they would normally have written about, to write as their consciences dictated. In the same London Magazine article, Spender elaborates his use of the term 'politics'.

"What I mean by politics are things like  
freedom, justice and peace, but these are  
hardly realized by political parties. If  
politics as practised are an illusion, one  
might, nevertheless, in philosophy and in  
poetry, delineate ideal causes"<sup>31</sup>

The effect of the Spanish Civil War on the politics of Cecil Day Lewis was completely different from its effect on any other writer. Day Lewis was in a different situation, having been a Communist Party member for some time, not having visited Spain, but having felt an obligation to join the International Brigades.



The direct effect of the Spanish Civil War on Cecil Day Lewis was to increase his political work, adding campaigning for an English Popular Front and for aid to Spain, to his existing party duties. This increase in non-poetic work meant that Day Lewis had less time to devote to his poetry. Following a review of his Noah and the Waters, which pointed out the deterioration of his verse, he realized that he must choose between his poetry and his politics. In his autobiography, Day Lewis records the exact circumstances which led to his retirement from political activities. He had delivered an anti-Fascist speech to a large audience in the Queen's Hall when

"I distinctly heard above the applause  
a small voice saying three or four times  
inside my head, "It won't do.  
It just won't do!"<sup>32</sup>

The political tasks he had previously been involved in, became unimportant in relation to his poetic activities. He moved to a house in the country which was not near any Party group and records "I felt no antipathy yet for Communist theory, and not much for Communist practice"<sup>33</sup> The autobiography does not disclose when Day Lewis did feel the antipathy to Communist theory suggested by the 'yet' in the sentence quoted.

Looking back on the politically-committed writers of the thirties, Day Lewis denies that he regrets his past political involvement. He says "of the thirties that it

"was a period when it seemed possible to

hope, to choose, to act, as individuals  
but for a common end; possible for us, as  
writers, to bridge the old romantic charm  
between the artist and the man of action,  
the poet and the ordinary man"<sup>34</sup>

He denies, however, that the writers were taken in by politics,  
saying

"we tended to feel political action, and the  
writing of verse with social context, as  
temporary necessities; and we treated the  
slogans and rigid ideology of the extreme  
Left with considerable levity or scepticism."<sup>34</sup>

This seems more true of Day Lewis' attitude after the Spanish  
Civil War than during or before it. By 1940, Day Lewis seems to  
have fallen victim to the sorrowful pessimism which had already  
engulfed Auden and, for a time, Spender. In a poem "Where are  
the War Poets?", written in 1940, Day Lewis says

"It is the logic of our times  
No subject for immortal verse  
That we who lived by honest dreams  
Defend the bad against the worse"

In the issue of London Magazine already mentioned with  
regard to Stephen Spender, Cecil Day Lewis reflects on the poetry  
of the Thirties, and on one aspect of it not commented on by many  
writers - its affect on its audience. He says

"Social and political issues during the  
thirties gave certain poets a subject

and a point of view: but I doubt if the audience for poetry was numerically increased as a result, or more deeply responsive"<sup>35</sup>

Day Lewis' poetry did not appear to be improved by his departure from the Communist Party and it was perhaps the loss of subjects entailed in his retreat from politics that caused him to adopt an at-times-appalling tendency to write commemorative poems for public occasions. This tendency of his has been frequently deplored but was no doubt the instrumental reason for the ultimate sign of Cecil Day Lewis' retreat from his earlier position and belief - his acceptance of the Poet Laureateship.

For John Lehmann the Spanish Civil War was not of major importance as he was living in, and therefore more concerned with events in, Vienna. He left there a short while after the Anschluss, convinced that the typical left-wing portrayal of Fascism and fascists was incorrect. His doubts that Fascism was a mask hiding the capitalist intent on invading the Soviet Union, which was the typical left-wing opinion, was confirmed by his experience during his short time in Nazi-occupied Austria. He realized that the Fascists believed the doctrine they expounded and were irrational fanatics, not dissembling cool-headed financiers. Nevertheless, it was the experiences of the various volunteers and observers in Spain that made Lehmann realize that Communism, like Fascism, was not as it was depicted by contemporary left wing thought. Books like Orwell's Homage to Catalonia,

preceeding novels like Koestler's Darkness at Noon showed the "menacing evils that fanatical left-wing idealism could lead to".<sup>36</sup>

Louis Macneice, the young apolitical poet, who was often linked with Auden, Spender and Day Lewis, due to his style, summed up the effect of the Spanish Civil War on the young writers of the thirties in his autobiography The Strings are False, when he wrote

"The Spanish tragedy ended in fiasco... the young men for whom the Spanish War had been a crusade in white armour, a Quest of the Grail open only to the pure in heart, felt as if their world had burst; there was nothing left but a handful of limp rubber rag; it was no good trying any more,"<sup>37</sup>

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## CHAPTER 4.

### CONCLUSION



The Thirties in Great Britain saw the revival of political interest among the writers of poetry, novels, drama and criticism. No longer were they willing to dismiss politics as an inartistic concern, irrelevant to the pursuit of literature. Not all the writers who preceded them were indifferent to politics ( George Bernard Shaw and H.G.Wells certainly were not) yet among the fashionable and influential writers, in particular the Bloomsbury group, politics tended to be disregarded. The Bloomsbury group were staunch pacifists, and their work combined with such anti-war material as Siegfried Sassoon's poetry, Robert Graves' Goodbye to All That, and films like "All Quiet on the Western Front", to maintain among the public the reaction of disgust with war which had followed the armistice. The new writers, who started publishing in the very late Twenties and early Thirties, were confronted with a world in which the attitude which left politics to the politicians appeared irresponsible, as the society controlled by these politicians was so obviously unsatisfactory. The growth of Fascism and mass unemployment were the most blatant signs of the decay of society. Some, but not all, of these later writers reacted against their elders' indifference by becoming intensely involved in politics, but they maintained their pacifist views. In the early thirties, anti-Fascism was believed to be compatible with desires for disarmament.

A strange anomaly among the anti-war sentiments, was the adulation of T.E.Lawrence. Lawrence was the nearest approach to a live English hero and was virtually worshipped as such and yet his heroism and fame sprang from war exploits. This reverence for

Lawrence involved some acceptance of a belief in the glory of war. The war that Lawrence had been involved in, was not the same as the muddy trench warfare depicted by the anti-war campaigners. No glamour could be attributed to the European War, but Arabs on camels led by a strange Englishman seemed to show that war could still be glorious. Thus the writers of the Thirties had a mixed heritage of attitudes to war. They were certainly aware of Lawrence, even though he died in 1935, for Isherwood remarks that T.E. Lawrence was the myth-hero of the Thirties<sup>1</sup> and Lawrence wrote to Cecil Day Lewis after the publication of the latter's critical work A Hope for Poetry. Lawrence's letter is worth quoting for his comment on poets and their politics is very apt. He writes

"Poets are always (and have been always) savagely political... Poets hope too much and their politics like their sciences, usually stink after twenty years".<sup>2</sup>

Christopher Caudwell also wrote to Lawrence. The influence of Lawrence combined with their pacifism to give the writers of the Thirties a very equivocal attitude to war.

As well as the growth of Fascism and mass unemployment, the beginning of the Thirties witnessed other important political events, including the 1931 election, which led politically-aware people to conclude that politicians were not competent to direct society. The disappointment at the overwhelming Labour defeat in 1931 and the disgust at J.R. Macdonald's "defection", affected

both Julian Bell and John Lehmann deeply. After the disastrous electoral defeat, Lehmann wrote to Julian Bell

"some of us must make a stand against the  
old gang and shake off the clutch of the  
drowning before they pull us down"<sup>3</sup>

At this early stage of the decade, the main cry was for disarmament, so that the money spent on preparation for war could be spent on improving the situation of the poor and the unemployed. The Labour Party was so demoralized by the 1931 defeat that it provided only a very ineffective parliamentary opposition. Official opposition having minimal impact, unofficial opposition to the government was thrown into prominence, and the writers became overtly political. Previously, writers had presented their views on society more indirectly. Dickens, for instance, showed up many evils of Victorian England in his novels, but he did not present political programmes for their alleviation. In the Thirties the writers were enabled to comment directly on the political situation, as the public was not being effectively presented with differing opinions from the different parties in Parliament.

As the decade progressed and the ills of the nation, of society, and of the world, showed no signs of improvement and did, in fact, give evidence of deterioration, the writers became more committed to and convinced of the value of action. This belief joined with the increasing attraction of Marxism which explained the current crises and predicted a brighter future, the key to

which was held by the workers. To some, this combination led to the adoption of the Communist creed, even to joining the party, John Cornford and Christopher Caudwell both joined because they felt that by so doing, their actions would be on the right side of the historical process. There was also a widespread belief that class barriers must be broken down. This sprang largely from the Marxist view of the worker. Unfortunately, it proved almost impossible for the writers to get to know the workers, for the class barriers would not be broken down. George Orwell studied the workers and lived among them, but never felt at one with them. Cecil Day Lewis joined the Communist Party largely to gain a sense of communion with the workers; but it appears that the other members of his Communist Party branch were not really typical workers. Christopher Caudwell was accepted by the dockers and other workers who lived in Poplar and belonged to the Communist Party branch there, but seems to have been regarded by them as somewhat of an oddity.

Stephen Spender in The Creative Element, published in 1953, argues that it was not a belief that the writers derived from Communism but a bad conscience. As most of these young writers were of the middle-class, their growing awareness of mass unemployment was joined by a realization that the economic system which enabled them to be relatively independent was the direct cause of the misfortunes of the workers. The young writers who became thus politically-aware, or thus conscience-stricken, was, according to Spender

"as guilty as the rest of the middle-class in the eyes of the proletariat, and at the same time persecuted by the fascists on account of his supposedly revolutionary sympathies"<sup>4</sup>

The wish to be disassociated from the middle class resulted in a need to belong to something else. This need seemed to be filled by Communism or the Communist Party. In the same book, Spender says that the literature of the young writers of the thirties represented "a shift from the individualist vision towards an ideological orthodoxy based on a political creed"<sup>5</sup> This comment must not be taken as meaning that all these young writers had the same orthodox ideological outlook. They shared a similar interpretation of the causes of their situation which they derived from Marxist theory and most of them believed that the future would be controlled by the workers. Apart from these their common attitudes were negative ones - anti-Fascism, anti-imperialism, anti-capitalism and, initially, anti-war.

Until mid-July 1936, most of the writers studied evolved more or less separately, developing personal versions of Marxism. W.H.Auden influenced many of the poets but his impact was more Stylistic than political. George Orwell had never shared more than the bare minimum of belief with the other writers. His approach to his work was individual. Again Spender's comment is worth quoting

"Compared with most writers, Orwell was like an activist broker who really

carried out deals which most of them  
dealt with at the end of a telephone line"<sup>6</sup>

Here Spender is thinking mainly of Orwell's life among the down and outs and his exploration of the effects of mass unemployment among the miners of England's industrial North. Julian Bell combined a Marxian diagnosis of society with an aristocratic belief in the necessity of power residing with the ruling classes, who would direct society for the benefit of all, not just of themselves.

The outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in mid-July 1936, and the subsequent declaration of the Non-Intervention Agreement, provided a concrete cause to which the various writers could attach their beliefs and sympathies, and through which they could express their solidarity with the workers, with other writers, and with international movements. Activities to provide aid for Spain took up much of the writers time. Very soon volunteering to fight for Republican Spain became a commonly accepted practice. The war in Spain was seen in the light of a crusade. The equivocal attitude to war that was the legacy of the reaction against World War 1 and the reverence for T.E. Lawrence, was shown in the attitude towards the Spanish Civil War. It was necessary to fight in Spain to save the world from another war like the Great War.

Thus one could reconcile fighting in Spain with anti-war sentiments. The war in Spain was also thought to be glorious, issues clear cut and no doubt there were thoughts of gallant Englishmen leading bands of Spaniards as Lawrence had led his Arabs. In Spain

the individual still counted. Julian Bell, John Cornford and Christopher Caudwell all went to fight and were killed. Cornford and Caudwell were the two most doctrinaire Communists among the writers studied. Julian Bell was inspired by the convictions that in Spain he could fight for the ideas he believed in while gaining useful experience of warfare for the showdown between England and the Fascists which he expected to come in a short time. Other writers, less doctrinally committed or less courageous went to observe the fighting and the life in Spain, or to help in propaganda work.

The importance of the commitment of the writers of the Thirties is discussed in Robin Skelton's introduction to The Poetry of the Thirties where his remarks refer only to poets but hold true for all writers. Discussing the horrified reaction to T.S.Eliot's visit to Portugal (which supported Franco) during the Spanish Civil War, Skelton says the outcry caused by this essentially personal action "illustrates the way in which a poet was regarded as a person whose actions were as publicly important as his poems"<sup>7</sup> This was also demonstrated by the reaction to W.H. Auden's acceptance of the King's Medal and Cecil Day Lewis' decision to become one of the selectors for the Book Society. Furore of this kind was generally in existence only among fellow writers and the politically - and literarily - aware. Yet the numbers of the aware or at least of the concerned were steadily growing during the Thirties. Particularly with the outbreak of The Spanish Civil War, the general public began to realize the gravity of both the international and the national situations.

They also realized that concern with this and suggestions for the alleviation of the crisis were being expressed by young writers, especially the poets. Ifor Evans explains the success of the literary talents of the Thirties as due to the way in which

"for their own contemporaries in the Thirties they were a voice interpreting its need, voicing, if never explaining, its perplexity, and using a new, colloquial, and supremely unacademic verse to figure out the phantasms of uncertainty and horror that lay ahead"<sup>8</sup>

It is very doubtful, however, if this verse had much impact on the working class, despite its unacademic quality. Stephen Spender tells in his autobiography, how during the Second World War he read one of his poems to his fellow members of the Fire Service. These men were definitely working class and after he had read the poem, to which he expected some snide comments, one of the men said that they could understand the poem when read by the poet, but not when they read it themselves.<sup>9</sup>

Of the writers studied, only one who fought in Spain survived to tell of his experiences there, other than by letters from the battlefield. George Orwell's development from impassioned enthusiasm to sorrowful disillusionment is nevertheless representative of many who were not as involved in the war as he was. The inactivity, the squalor, the essential horror and the futility of fighting for a cause which was undermined from within



and given no help from without, are shown in Orwell's writings and reflected in those of other writers. Stephen Spender who went to Spain to broadcast from a Socialist radio station, arrived to find the position no longer in existence. All three of his visits to Spain were mockeries of the seriousness of the war. Spain not only demonstrated to the writers that their importance was illusory and their assistance worth no more than that of any other volunteer or conscript for the slaughter, but also that the idealism and purity of heart with which they had approached politics was out of accord with the reality of political practice. The equality and workers' control that had existed in the early days of the civil war soon disappeared and the accord and co-operation that theoretically existed within the Popular Front was soon driven out by Communist attempts to gain complete control. The writers who returned to England, retreated from their political positions with speeds varying with the intensity of their Spanish experience. Orwell developed his new attitudes about six months after leaving Spain, they were certainly dominant in Homage to Catalonia. Spender's poetry became more personal from 1937, but he continued to write, albeit very sadly, about Spain until the war ended in March 1939.

To investigate the importance of these literary figures and their writings to political movements and beliefs, and to the Spanish Civil War in particular, it is necessary to investigate the place of literature in politics, and politics in literature, generally. Almost all worthwhile literature has some political content, if literature is judged to be worthwhile when it is other

than purely escapist. Literature is generally written with regard to some set of values, values which reflect the beliefs of the author either directly or by his attitude to the values he uses. Thus Jane Austin's work is an accurate reflection of the value systems of the restricted society in which she moved, while Meredith's work shows up the shallowness and hypocrisy of his characters and their value systems. The reader may obtain from Jane Austin's values and hence her outlook on life directly from her work, by her comments on actions and attitudes which gain her approbation and are therefore deemed desirable. Meredith on the other hand presents his value system by satirizing the actions and attitudes of which he disapproves, rarely does he comment on attitudes of which he does approve. This is the most basic occurrence of politics in literature. At this level the approach tends to be more correctly regarded as moral than as political.

The next level at which politics is important to literature is often termed the 'prepolitical'. This level also tends to be the most influential in creating or changing political opinions. One of the most important of pre-political writers is D.H. Lawrence. Lawrence depicts the effects of industrialism on man and in particular on the working man. Originally the son of a miner, Lawrence does not idealize his workers in the same way as many of the middle class writers tended to, but his characters are still at times unreal. This may be due to the weight of imagery that they carry. The pre-political writer writes of situations which have been changed by political action, or of ones which could be

changed by political action. Pre-political work is, according to T.S.Eliot, the stratum from which political writing draws its nourishment.<sup>10</sup> Another important aspect of pre-political writing is that it can present situations, which the writer feels to be in need of correction, to a wider audience than would be obtained by purely political writing. It also prepares the way for political messages. A public which has been presented with the effects of industrialization and vivid descriptions of its abuses, is more likely to be receptive to calls for the alleviation of these abuses, than one which hears of them in a more theoretical way.

Politics becomes more important in the writing of such authors as Charles Dickens or George Orwell, both of whom tend to become at times almost journalistic. Anthony Hartley says that Orwell's comment about Dickens is applicable to both of them, each being

"a man who is fighting against something,  
but who fights in the open and is not  
frightened, ... a man who is generously  
angry" <sup>11</sup>

Both writers present their beliefs and opinions openly and forcefully. They do not aim at presenting their ideas indirectly to the reader, nor at showing the results of social evils without comment as Lawrence does. They depict in detail the horror they observe and their treatment differs, largely due to the time and atmosphere in which they wrote. Thus Dickens does not attack the class system, although he does attack unwarranted prejudice,

as the system was an accepted part of society. By Orwell's time, however, social and political opinion was beginning to reject the notion that society was naturally divided into classes, and consequently Orwell attacks the system itself. Dicken's range of style is not as great as Orwell's, though his undoubted superiority as an author gave him a possibly greater impact than Orwell. Dickens appealed to a wider spectrum of society, making people aware of some of the disgraces of their society. Orwell had more impact on the intellectuals and the politically aware. The Road to Wigan Pier and Homage to Catalonia did not appeal as general literature, and much of the force of Animal Farm and 1984 was lost by some readers accepting them as rather gruesome fairytales, of the same type as some of H.G.Wells' stories. Wells provides a link between Dickens and Orwell, with his early novels of contemporary society, like Kipps being clearly related to Dickens, while his novels of political, social and scientific prediction share some of the attitudes of Orwell's last two books. Orwell's approach in The Road to Wigan Pier and Homage to Catalonia is overtly journalistic, he is reporting what he has seen and heard. <sup>In</sup> Animal Farm and 1984 he uses the information he has gained to depict the situation that could be created if some of the prevailing attitudes and ideologies were extrapolated in a chillingly convincing manner.

This usage of existing ideologies leads to the most political form of literature, which occurs when the ideologies and political beliefs are used as the primary material for the

literary work. This is what happened in the Thirties, primarily to the poets. Rex Warner could say in his much quoted "Hymn", written in 1933

"...All power

to lovers of life, to workers, to the hammer, the sickle,  
the blood.

Come then, companions. This is the spring of blood,  
hearts heyday, movement of masses, beginning of good"

The theme of this poem is a call to the workers and the poets who support them, to rise, for the workers' movement will be successful and good. In works such as this, literature becomes propaganda. All literature may be termed propagandist in that it presents as favourable or unfavourable some views in accordance with the beliefs of its author, yet such literature is not generally regarded as being propaganda. When writings are accused of being, or described as, propaganda, they are generally held to be advancing a political doctrine or body of thought especially one which is associated with a political party or pressure group. Thus much of the poetry and most of the experimental drama of the Thirties can be termed propaganda in that it presents the views of Marxist theory, in varying shades of doctrinal conformity.

Drama probably had greater impact as propaganda, due mainly to its greater suitability as a propagandist medium. The Unity Theatre was formed specifically for propagandist and publicity ends rather than as a theatrical venture. It did not produce

any plays by Auden and Isherwood or by Spender, as these were held to show insufficient seriousness of treatment for the theatre's policy. The most influential play put on by the Unity group was Clifford Odets' Waiting for Lefty. It is interesting to note that of the important dramatists whose work was presented by Unity, most were not English - Odets was American, Sean O'Casey was Irish, and Bertolt Brecht German. This suggests another reason for the widespread popular support of Spain. The middle-class sympathisers with the workers found it very hard to express this sympathy in the English context without seeming to display middle-class superiority. In a foreign situation they were faced with no standardized reaction patterns and, as Anthony Hartley points out,

"a Catalan militia man or an Asturian could far more easily be romanticized and admired than a Lancashire cotton worker or a North-umbrian ship-builder"<sup>12</sup>

The unknown and foreign were romantic, while the known were not. Orwell had noted in The Road to Wigan Pier that the middle-class automatically turned away from the working class as the result of almost automatic childhood training.

Cyril Connolly devotes considerable space in his critical and autobiographical book, Enemies of Promise, to a study of political writing. Connolly believes that the writer

"must in his serious writing, avoid propaganda and the presence in his work of lumps of unassimilated political material."<sup>13</sup>

The important point of this statement is that it refers to the writer's serious writing, for Connolly believed, when the book was published in 1938, that writers should do all that was possible to halt the spread of Fascism and the likelihood of war, but should avoid becoming too idealistically involved in politics for this would inevitably lead to disillusionment. Above all, Connolly warned

"Political writing is dangerous writing, it deals not in words, but in words that affect lives, and is a weapon that should be entrusted to those qualified to use it. Thus a burst of felicitous militancy with the pen may send three young men to be killed in Spain; for whose deaths the author is responsible. If human beings have any right, they have the right to know what they are dying for."<sup>14</sup>

Thus it appears that Connolly, who is and was a very shrewd critic and writer, believed that the effect of writers on the public was considerable, that writers could influence the actions of people, could in fact be effective propagandists, or recruiters, for political causes. Connolly also comments that while the writer may have a direct influence on politics, politics can only be of indirect value to him, for good literature is very rarely directly political, but more often what has been earlier termed pre-political.

Much of the political importance of literature for the reading public lies in the portrait given by the writer of society or his view of it. The influential and popular writer can make his readers see their society, or another society, as he wishes them to see it and consequently, his importance to a political movement can be very great. It is for this reason that there is such concern in Marxist theory with the 'correct' concerns of Socialist literature. The Czech Communist writer Jiri Hajek says

"Literature is, and has to be, a critique of reality from the standpoint of the chief condition for man's self-realization. It casts doubt on supposedly universal conceptions of reality, destroys false myths, dispels self-deception... Its central concern is to criticize the state of humanity's basic values... Its aim is to stimulate awareness of human responsibility in the widest sense"<sup>15</sup>

In other words, to be valuable, or even viable, for a Marxist, a work of literature has to be overtly propagandist, promoting the Marxist cause and exposing the fallacies of capitalism.

In presenting a picture of his version of reality, the writer is performing a political task, whether in accord with Marxist theory or not. Most of the public must rely on others to give them a broader view of even their own society. In this task the journalist is more important than the literary figure but the latter more often presents a more complete picture, for the



journalist is concerned with events within society, rather than with society itself. The novelist and dramatist are more effective in presenting accurate versions of society or reality than the poet for the poet has the artificiality of his medium to remove his subject matter from reality even before he treats it. The various poetic conventions also tend to decrease the reality of the poet's presentation and it was no doubt in an attempt to increase the realism of their poetry that the poets of the Thirties developed the stark verse forms that they used, rejecting the florid imagery of the Georgians and the erudite allusions of T.S.Eliot.

George Orwell comments in "Inside the Whale" that there were very few novels written by the politically committed during the Thirties as

"the atmosphere of orthodoxy is always  
damaging to prose and above all it is  
completely ruinous to the novel the  
most anarchical of all forms of literature"<sup>16</sup>

It is noticeable that the two books Orwell wrote during his time of political involvement (he was an inactive member of the I.L.P. for eighteen months) were Homage to Catalonia and The Road to Wigan Pier, neither of the novels. Isherwood was far from being committed to political orthodoxy, yet his books tended to be semi-autobiographical short stories rather than novels.

The novels written by the politically committed of the Thirties seem to have been mainly allegories like Upward's Journey to the Border and Rex Warner's The Wild Goose Chase. This is due

not merely to the influence of Franz Kafka but also to the nature of the allegorical form itself. Writing in the guise of allegory, the author does not need to present an existing value system, nor does he have to give an accurate portrayal of a reality with which he may be unfamiliar. The middle-class writer, despite his rejection of his own class background, was rarely able to describe a working class family or outlook convincingly, yet if he wanted to write in accordance with his Marxist beliefs, he had to portray the victory of the working class. Allegory enabled him to translate his theory into a world of unreality, yet still portray by the happenings in his unreal world, the reality of the historical process as he, with his Marxist beliefs saw it.

It is unlikely, however, that this allegorical writing had much effect on the working class who were unlikely to grasp the meaning even if they read the books. Thus it seems that when G.S.Fraser says

"that in the long run the practical importance of the poetry of Auden and his group was rather in awakening a sense of social responsibility among young men of their own class than in stirring up the consciousness of the working class"<sup>17</sup>

this statement can be extended to include most of the political writings of the Thirties.

The writers of the Thirties had been effective in bringing

political matters to the attention of part of the public. If they failed in their attempts to join or demonstrate solidarity with the workers through their literature, they nevertheless made many of their own class and of such members of the working class as were trying to upgrade themselves in the class structure, aware that there was some value and truth in the socialist doctrines and interpretations of world events. They helped to show the British public that Fascism was a danger to Britain and to Europe, and that the British government had not developed an adequate policy towards the Fascists. Before the Spanish Civil War and in the early months of it they were influential, if only in reinforcing the ideas of the newspaper writers who moulded public opinion. When the writers discovered that despite this apparent influence nothing they did would alter matters in Spain, or the attitude of the British Government towards Fascism, they became disillusioned with the politics they had embraced so idealistically and began to deal with more personal themes in their work. The importance of the politically-aware writers in the early Thirties and the influence they were able to exert is largely explainable as being due to the virtual absence of an official opposition following the crushing Labour Party defeat in 1931. By the end of the decade the Labour Party was rallying and becoming once again the voice of opposition to the Government and its actions.

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