Reconciling Image and Ideology
in British Surrealist Writing of the 1930s

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Reconciling Image and Ideology in British Surrealist Writing of the 1930s

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Para Manolo

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

After a winter long drawn out into bitterness and petulance,

a month of torrid heat, of sudden efflorescence, of clarifying storms.

Herbert Read, *Surrealism* (1936): 19.

The time has come for poets to proclaim their right and duty

to maintain that they are deeply involved in the

life of other men, in communal life.

Paul Éluard, "Poetic Evidence" (1936): 171.

1. Image and Ideology in British Surrealist Writing.

On or about July 1936 British consciousness changed. If the appropriation, and perversion, of Virginia Woolf's oft-quoted statement be allowed, then the summer of 1936 may be said to have marked a decisive turning point in the development of British consciousness and of British literature. Woolf's audacious declaration that "on or about December 1910 human character changed" (Woolf 2008: 38) is generally associated with Britain's overture to continental influences (thanks to Roger Fry's 1910 Post-Impressionist exhibition in London) and the beginning of British Modernism.[1] This being so, the events of July 1936 may be then seen as yet another cultural milestone in Britain, which implied both a dialectical development of Bloomsbury Modernism and an opposition to it: they were indeed crucial in the development of new aesthetic formulations and of new ideological positions in Britain, for it was precisely around this time that the overtly *formalist* aesthetics of High Modernism was abandoned in favour of more *engagé* attitudes in art and literature, something which consequently brought about the decentralisation of Bloomsbury as the *hotspot* of literary experimentation in London.[2] And this is so not only because the summer of 1936 was the time of the official emergence of British Surrealism, a movement founded and led by writers, with the International Surrealist Exhibition at the New Burlington Galleries in London (the final step in that process of gradual permeability to European trends initiated by Fry), but also because this event was tragically followed by the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War, which for many set off the countdown to a second international conflict and established the need for artists and writers to adopt a definite stance regarding world affairs and the

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[1] The quotation is from Woolf's Modernist manifesto "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown" (1924). Christine Froula offers a detailed account of the socio-political context and the literary and artistic repercussions of the year 1910 in her study *Virginia Woolf and the Bloomsbury Avant-Garde* (2005): 22-24.

[2] This evolution had already been somehow anticipated by the successive publications of two poetry anthologies edited by Michael Roberts, *New Signatures* (1932) and *New Country* (1933).

socio-political situation in Britain, that is, to re-position their work in relation to society.[3] Certainly, Peter Bürger's original positing of an aesthetic formalism in Modernism against the radical engagement of the *historical* or *revolutionary* Avant-Garde in his now classic study *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (1974) may serve as a starting point for this discussion.[4] According to his theory, Modernism seeks the elaboration of unifying myths in the *autonomous* work of art, a notion which carries with it a sort of ideological compliance with the current social order, because accepting that art may be autonomous seems to necessarily imply that this social order is good enough for art to retain its autonomy; on the other hand, the Avant-Garde rejects the concept of art and literature as both self-contained and autonomous, developing a more dynamic, also less hierarchical, notion of art as a transformative force in society. Indeed, in his 1936 speech at the Conway Hall, Herbert Read, British Surrealism's foremost theoretician, asseverated that

> The Surrealist is profoundly conscious of that lack of organic connection between art
> and society which is characteristic of the modern world. He sees that fundamentally
> the fault lies in the economic structure of society, and he believes that no satisfactory
> basis for art can be found within the existing form of society. (in The Surrealist Group
> in England 1936b: 9)

As has been stated, Roger Fry contributed notably to consolidating the roots of a formalist Modernism in Britain, and it was Clive Bell who, in his seminal book *Art* (1914), put forth the notion of *significant form* as the quality that is common to all works of art in a way that promoted form over content as the main trigger of *aesthetic emotion*. However, there is already a sort of essential doubt lingering in Bell's arguments which the criticism has generally failed to acknowledged, and this is related to his (tentative) proposition that there might be some "ultimate reality" which the work of art aspires to make known, suggesting that, even if it is only through form that the artist's emotion can be expressed and only through form that

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[3] Raymond Mortimer in fact compared the uproar caused by the Surrealist Exhibition (which took place from 11 June to 4 July 1936) to that of the 1910 Post-Impressionist show (Mortimer 1936: 1152). For a detailed and hilarious account of the Surrealist *adventures* during the Exhibition, see Paul C. Ray's *The Surrealist Movement in England* (1971): 134-166.

[4] And this, in spite of the fact that, as Michael Saler argues, "In recent decades, [. . .] more nuanced definitions of modernism as a general phenomenon have arisen, challenging the elegant simplicity of the formalist paradigm. These acknowledge modernism's contradictory impulses: that modernism could embrace such antinomies as primitivism and futurism, objectivism and subjectivism, expressionism and rationalism, classicism and romanticism, elitism and populism, progressivism and degeneration, and so on" (Saler 2001: 6). Nevertheless, these all-encompassing definitions tend to incorporate notions of the Avant-Garde within the umbrella concept of Modernism, something which, even if legitimate in a discussion of British literary tendencies, may not be maintained when dealing with the continental Avant-Garde, and certainly presents difficulties for the study of British Surrealism, which partakes of both native and foreign trends, as will be seen.

the observer's aesthetic emotion is moved, it remains uncertain whether the ultimate object of the artist's emotion is form or, indeed, reality (Bell 1914: 60). In spite of the early influence of Fry's and Bell's views on a group of young Cambridge University artists and writers (notably, Roland Penrose and Hugh Sykes Davies, who later became the core of the British Surrealist Group in the 1930s), these formalist theses were soon transcended in favour of more politically engaged attitudes regarding the role of art and literature in society, and maybe Bell's tentative suggestions, together with the new socio-political scenario (the rise and expansion of Fascism in Europe and the hunger marches in Britain) account for this development.[5] It was indeed through socially aware forms of art and writing such as the Socialist Realism advocated in the pages of the Writers' International's periodical *Left Review* (1934-1938) and, above all, through Surrealism, that the formalism of Bloomsbury finally gave way to the radical political and poetic experimentation of Parton Street, the new London Avant-Garde and bohemian quarter.[6]

With these preliminary considerations in mind, it seems straightforward enough to postulate a reconciliation between image and ideology, that is, between aesthetic form and ideological significance, in British Surrealist writing. However, this has been far from the case in the criticism, where the automatic and irrational element typically associated with early (pre-1930s) French Surrealism has been privileged over the ideological element in Surrealist experimentation in Britain.[7] Certainly, the criticism has generally failed to go beyond the noted (but only apparent) discrepancy between Surrealism's claims for the liberation of repressed desires through the exploration of the unconscious in dreams and other trance-like states, and the actual effect that its own political philosophy may have had on *material* reality. For

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[5] Despite the fact that it was precisely Fry who, in 1922, encouraged Penrose to study art in Paris, Penrose soon realised the myopic vision of the scholar who had struggled to make the Cubist works of Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque known in Britain in the Post-Impressionist shows of 1910 and 1912. Once a prominent Surrealist, Penrose would defy Fry's formalist view, which had "failed to follow the significance of [Picasso's and Braque's] work. This can be judged from the preface to the catalogue [of the 1912 Exhibition], in which [Fry] says: 'The logical extreme of such a method would undoubtedly be the attempt to give up all resemblance to natural form –a visual music; and the later work of Picasso shows this clearly enough...' With the advantage of knowing what followed we can now see that this was never Picasso's logical or illogical aim" (Penrose 1958: 187). Other early (Cambridge) influences which were soon transcended by the Surrealists included John Maynard Keynes's economic liberalism, abandoned in favour of Marxism, and I.A. Richards's formalist approach to literary criticism.

[6] This was the place where the experimental poetics of Surrealists such as David Gascoyne, George Barker, Charles Madge, Roger Roughton and Julian Trevelyan merged with the radical politics of *Left Review* and the Artists' International Association. For an account of the literary and political activity at Parton Street, see Rosalind Wade's "The Parton Street Poets" (1963-1964); Trevor Tolley's *The Poetry of the Thirties* (1975): 222-230; and Michel Remy's *Surrealism in Britain* (1999): 73.

[7] With the remarkable exception of Michel Remy's *Surrealism in Britain* (1999), which at all times acknowledges the political dimension of British Surrealism, even if it does not directly suggest reconciliation of image and ideology in Surrealist writing.

example, Francis Scarfe, who was himself mildly involved in Surrealism in the 1930s, writes of Surrealism as an escapist alternative to Marxism and Fascism in view of "the two million unemployed and the rapid disintegration of the European system", and only considers the merits of Surrealism as a "weapon of unrestricted satire" (Scarfe 1942: 145, 151). Another contemporary of the movement, the editor of the journal *Twentieth Century Verse* (1937-1939), Julian Symons, declared himself "Against Surrealism" in a somewhat confused and self-contradictory 1937 editorial because he sees Surrealism as both "a political movement" and a type of art dictated by "automatic standards [. . .] made by individuals and not by groups" (Symons 1937: n.p.).[8] J.H. Matthews goes even further when he asserts that "in England surrealism proved to be no more than a recipe", dismissing Hugh Sykes Davies's Surrealist masterpiece *Petron* (1935) as a form of "verbal exercise" and the images of David Gascoyne (Britain's foremost Surrealist poet) as merely automatic (Matthews 1964: 65-66).[9] Yet another critic who has failed to acknowledge the achievements of Surrealist writing beyond its own *rationale* (a combination of Freudian psychoanalysis and Marxist materialism) is Trevor Tolley, who also underscores the incongruous juxtaposition of automatic images in Surrealism and considers British Surrealist writing as a formal experiment closer to Imagism (Tolley 1975: 226-235). Only one year after Tolley's *The Poetry of the Thirties* (1975) was published, Samuel Hynes's *The Auden Generation: Literature and Politics* (1976) tried to make sense of the poems of another British Surrealist, Roger Roughton, and of his dual commitment to both Surrealism and a staunch line of Communism which, as the present study will demonstrate, was not so staunch at all, but more tolerant than it is generally granted. However, Hynes denies that there is "any sign of politics or revolution" in Surrealist poetry, arguing that "Surrealism provided a means of expressing not political ideas, but the emotions behind 'thirties politics –the fears and anxieties, the sense of unknown and terrible dangers, and of possible violence and outrage beyond the projections of reason" (Hynes 1976: 222, 226), a reading which, by presenting Surrealism as an apocalyptic movement, obfuscates the issue further. Finally, more recently, Peter Nicholls has argued that, whereas dream imagery and automatism in French Surrealism serve to liberate the individual from otherwise accepted ideas of reality, "This aspect of Surrealism rarely seems to travel into English writing, with the result that surrealistic effects are here often associated with madness and oppression rather than with the open, visionary world conjured up by Breton and his colleagues" and he declares that "In the

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[8] Similar arguments are also used in Symons's *The Thirthies: a Dream Revolved* (1960): 90-98.
[9] Matthews later changed his mind, and classified the British Surrealists as "authentic surrealists", setting them in opposition to Dylan Thomas because, as he states, "Calling Dylan Thomas a surrealist has never succeeded in transforming him into one" (in Walker et al. 1986: 4).

absence of a self-conscious avant-garde, the Surrealist fusion of politics and aesthetics seemed impossible to achieve" (Nicholls 2004: 407-408, 409), reducing Surrealist practice in Britain to what Leo Mellor has called "the organicist turn" (Mellor 2011: 92), a neo-Romantic turn to natural and organic images of no consequence in modern society.

In spite of these readings, which have greatly contributed to perpetuating the idea that British Surrealism achieved little in terms of bringing together aesthetic and ethical concerns, something which automatically (and unjustifiably) places British Surrealism below the standards set by its French counterpart, the present study proves otherwise, for it does not only posit British Surrealist writing as a paradigmatic example of the ways in which poetic expression contributed to developing new (and radical) ideological positions in Britain, but also that it was exceptional in this achievement. It is true that the Surrealists were (still are, in conservative circles) criticised for their frivolity, or ridiculed for their depravity, but this is due to a misunderstanding and a lack of awareness of the serious intent underlying their work. However, this sort of criticism presents a slanted view of Surrealism which more often than not originates precisely in that section of society whose moral and ideological outlook Surrealism disparages. Indeed, at a time of political convulsion and social upheaval such as the 1930s, no other coherently instituted or organised group of artists and writers managed to bring together poetic and political experimentation under a common banner which was to expand consciousness of reality (of the mechanisms of repression and ideological control inherent in modern societies) through the liberation of desire (liberation from logic and from rational, moral and aesthetic constraints). Surrealism in Britain in the 1930s opened the path to new forms of consciousness and was already, in Paul Éluard terms, "a state of mind" (in Read 1971: 174). This was in fact the only Avant-Garde movement in Britain to take up seriously Freudian notions of the unconscious, with a definite Marxist programme and a collective pursuit. Furthermore, for the main exponents of British Surrealist writing of the 1930s, this process of expanding awareness was an essential step towards social transformation, as Herbert Read contended in his introduction to the catalogue of the 1936 London Surrealist Exhibition: "The philosophers, said Marx, have only *interpreted* the world in different ways; the point, however, is to *change* it. The artists, too, have only interpreted the world; the point, however, is to transform it" (The Surrealist Group in England 1936c: 13). Also, the practices of the British Surrealist writers were inserted within a much broader definition of automatism than the criticism has been willing to acknowledge. Indeed, they made use of a variety of Surrealist techniques and procedures (such as recurrent patterns, self-induced trance states, unconscious associations, objective chance, myth, code, parody, humour,

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linguistic games, collective writing, discourse appropriation and textual collage) in order to favour the emergence of automatic images. The degree to which all these partake of André Breton's understanding of automatism as a principle underlying composition, rather than as a technique, will be discussed here, and it must not be forgotten that, by the time Surrealist practice started in Britain, automatism was no longer confined to automatic writing.

These issues, and a discussion of the nature of the poetic image in British Surrealist writing is precisely the starting point of this study, which bears out that there are two main tendencies in British Surrealist writing, which only roughly coincide with Breton's marking of an "intuitive" and a "reasoning" epoch in Surrealism (Breton 1936b: 50-52). These two tendencies rather respond to the poetic material of which these authors make use: on the one hand, it is the aesthetic or formal element (the image) that is uppermost in the highly oneiric texts of Hugh Sykes Davies, David Gascoyne and George Barker; on the other, a clear political intent underlies the poetic experiments of Roland Penrose, Roger Roughton and the poets associated with the Mass-Observation movement, Charles Madge and Humphrey Jennings. All of them have in common an interest in the interrelation of form and content, of image and ideology, through Surrealist writing, the only difference lying in emphasis: whereas the former present cases in which the use of images (metamorphosing, convulsive and excremental images) eventually develops ideological significance (what is called here *politicised poetry*), the latter explore the possibilities of image-making mechanisms in Surrealism as part of a definite political agenda (*poeticised politics*). The techniques that they use for the creation of their automatic images are varied, and they range from Hugh Sykes Davies's recovery of formal patterns from the oral tradition, Gascoyne's self-induced trance states and Barker's exploration of unconscious associations, to Penrose's deployment of myth and camouflage, Roughton's use of satire and puns and Madge's and Jennings's exercises in literary collage. Furthermore, the very eclectic nature of 1930s Surrealist writing in Britain attests to its richness, and this study highlights its development from more personal or subjective poetic modes to the creation of a collective poetics.

Of all the writers who have been associated with the Surrealist movement in Britain, this study focuses on those that best exemplify this evolution, and the works of these seven authors represent the central and most influential corpus of British Surrealist writing of the 1930s. Some of these texts were published in book form at the time, forming what can be considered the three *chefs-d'ouvre* of British Surrealism: Hugh Sykes Davies's *Petron* (1935), David Gascoyne's *Man's Life is this Meat* (1937) and Roland Penrose's *The Road is Wider than Long* (1939). However, this study does not only concentrate on these *canonical* works: one of

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its most innovative aspects is that it recovers texts that appeared in periodical publications throughout the 1930s, most of which remain uncollected, and also materials that were never published, and are now kept in several archives, such as the Roland Penrose Archive in Edinburgh, St. John's College Archive in Cambridge and the Tate Archive in London. Moreover, the inclusion of texts by George Barker and Charles Madge, who were never official members of the Surrealist Group themselves, is justified, not only by the fact that these authors were closely allied with the Surrealists, but mainly because, as this study will show, the process of composition which underlies some of their texts is indisputably Surrealist. Thus, the centrality of George Barker's *Calamiterror* (1937) and of Charles Madge's Surrealist collages in the context of a developing Surrealist aesthetic and ideology in Britain will be made clear. However, the work of writers considered, then and now, as *satellites* of the British Surrealist Group (such as Dylan Thomas, George Reavey or Kenneth Allot) or of other *minor* Surrealist writers (Ruthven Todd, Philip O'Connor or Herbert Read –a notable theoretician, but a deficient poet), is not considered at length, although references to them and their work are sometimes unavoidable. The reasons for this exclusion is that their use of Surrealist techniques is not systematic unlike the Surrealists with whom this study engages, and, therefore, their embracing of Surrealist tenets seems only tentative: although there are indeed *surrealising* elements which can be singled out in some of their work, these are only of tangential importance for a study of the evolution of British Surrealism's dual commitment to poetic and political experimentation. For the purposes of clarity, pragmatism and scientific rigour, it is necessary to make it clear that the term "Surrealism" and its cognates are used here to refer to the artistic movement which, having emerged in the 1920s as part of what is known today as the historical Avant-Garde, reached its peak in the 1930s and was then continued in either joint or isolated practices by some of its exponents even up to the 21st century (Leonora Carrington died in 2011, Dorothea Tanning in 2012 and Desmond Morris, who came to the movement in the 1940s, is 85 now). Although all this depicts a compartmentalised view that contradicts its exponents' claims that Surrealism is a state of mind, a philosophy of life or a worldview, a study of this kind requires the adoption of such theoretical propositions. Also, it must be said that, in a rather deliberate way, little attention is paid here to the possible distinctions between poetry, prose, poetic prose and prose poetry, because the boundaries between such conventional paradigms are easily blurred in Surrealism; even so, the epithet "poetic" is generally applied to any form of Surrealist activity or its product.

To begin with, this study considers preliminary critical approaches to the concepts of image and ideology, proposing a theory of the Surrealist image that shows that the image in

British Surrealist writing is not only a poetic trope, a sort of extreme metaphor where two distant realities collide, but a mechanism of cognitive and ideological disruption: by breaking the conventions imposed by rational thought, the Surrealist image opens a fissure in the ideological *continuum* fostered by official discourses of power and allows for a deeper apprehension of reality. Drawing on Freudian criticism, I argue that in the Surrealist image the distance between signifier and signified is obliterated, because the signifier is not the expression of the unconscious, but the unconscious itself, and therefore meaning is always deferred or, rather, constantly reactivated as new contexts, new associations, appear, through which it is made *significant*. This theory also reconciles notions of the Surrealist image as both an automatic creation and a *found* object, a tension which is resolved in the writings of the British Surrealists through the series of compositional techniques and procedures mentioned above. Most importantly, what this demonstrates is the ways in which the two principles and aims of British Surrealism, to liberate desire and to expand consciousness, are brought together in the Surrealist image.

Then, because the image in Surrealism is considered a form of consciousness, the argument continues with an analysis of the concept of ideology in Marxist theories, drawing on Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels' concept of ideology as *false consciousness*, then moving on to Theodor Adorno's concept of the work of art as *totality* and to a discussion of the tensions created between fragment and whole (which are tensions between image and ideology too) in British Surrealist writing. I also trace the changes and evolution of the ideological stance of the British Surrealist Group, and analyse the different systems of thought which converged in the development of a Surrealist ideology in Britain (mainly, Socialism, Marxism, Communism, pacifism, Trotskyism and Anarchism), the socio-political events that shaped this development and the ways in which the Surrealist writers reacted to these. Special attention is paid to the Spanish Civil War, which became, it has already been anticipated, the ideological axis of the movement. Taking all this into consideration, it will be argued that the reconciliation of image and ideology in British Surrealist writing lies in the disruptive nature of both, in their capacity to unveil the gaps in the false continuities of dominant ideologies, and to incorporate change and contradiction into their own configuration.

In the case of Hugh Sykes Davies, forever concerned with form, this reconciliation is achieved through the use of recurrent structures of the oral tradition. As will be seen, for him poetic expression responds to a human biological necessity and in his texts he presents a search for a natural and instinctive form of poetry. These patterns allow the exploration of paranoid images which present a protean and metamorphic reality that resists rational grasp

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and that, therefore, cannot be assimilated into bourgeois notions of the real. His manipulation of literary conventions and his elaboration of a dissident canon is for him a way to sidestep authority (literary, moral, ideological) and to rewrite reality: as formal stability and semantic coherence are constantly unsettled and disrupted in his texts, the new reality that they put forward is one in constant transformation which offers, not a totalising worldview, but a series of fragmentary and ambiguous images.

David Gascoyne's images are seen here as belonging to the *intuitive* phase of Surrealism and they respond much more clearly than those of any other British Surrealist to what in this study is called the *automatic image*: an unconscious creation of the mind intended to liberate repressed desires and fears. In Gascoyne's collection *Man's Life is this Meat* (1936), images are convulsive, reached in intense climaxes, such as mystic ecstasies, hysteric fits and in moments of orgasmic consummation, in which the distance between the conscious and the unconscious is obliterated. In his poetry, sensory perception, rational thinking and morality are deprecated in favour of a transcendental contact with a reality that lies beyond the material, and his visions of the new world are apocalyptic and redemptive at once: these are not the promise of a future and stable reconciliation, but rather the presage of an ongoing struggle and the sign that there is never an end to the problem of the individual's freedom in a society where power threatens to assimilate all subversive discourse. As will be seen, Gascoyne struggles to reconcile his idealistic conception of the role of poetic creation in society with his incipient embracing of a materialist stance, and this is the reason why his poetry is so central to the development of Surrealism in Britain: because it shows all the blessings and the shortcomings of this automatic line of Surrealist practice.

The reconciliation of image and ideology which is the centre of this study is clearly achieved in George Barker's only Surrealist text, *Calamiterror* (1937), a pre-eminent example of the point of transition from an intuitive exploration of unconscious associations to more consciously engaged positions, and also of the kind of *dissident* Surrealism that had been initiated in France by Georges Bataille and Salvador Dalí. The image-making mechanisms that take part in the process of composition of this text are legitimately Surrealist, for they emerge from the liberation of unconscious fears and desires, giving rise to a series of subjective and interrelated images (of sight and blindness, of birth and death, of consumption and excretion) which eventually develop ideological significance. It is through these images, not devoid of a significant degree of ambiguity, that Barker brings together highly personal obsessions and more collective concerns.

It becomes clear that, as British Surrealist writing develops, it enters a more *conscious* phase of direct engagement with material reality. The poeticised politics of Roland Penrose, Roger Roughton and the early works of the writers associated with Mass-Observation show that, even if there is a political programme behind poetic creation, this is carried out by means of Surrealist techniques through which the unconscious is explored and automatic images are obtained. In this sense, Roland Penrose's poetry is fascinating, and it directly opposes the movement performed in Barker's poem for, while the Spanish Civil War is central to the poetry of both authors, Barker makes use of it in order to present political content explicitly, that is, to politicise an otherwise non-political content, something which, it will be argued, has prevented a fuller apprehension of the Surrealist nature of the text. On the other hand, in *The Road is Wider than Long* (1939), for instance, Penrose makes use of code precisely to mask his political intent and the ideological significance of this text. His search for the poetic truth is a response to the political lies of his time, and his use of the myth of the nomad serves him to expose the *savage* customs of civilisation: to the *false ideology* of bourgeois imperialist capitalism, he opposes the truth and purity of a new society in which there is no private property, no written regulations, no state bureaucracy and no war. However, these visions of bliss are constantly counteracted by the fear of persecution, the increasing restriction of liberties and the sense of impending doom which Penrose's poems also reproduce. His images do not impose a view of reality, but rather open up the paths (because "the road is wider than long") to new realities and new possibilities: the truth that he seeks is only realised in this constant process of search and expanding awareness.

Following this study of Penrose's work, a consideration of the poetry of Roger Roughton, a devoted Surrealist and Communist at once, shows that it provides a different form of reconciliation of image and ideology in British Surrealist writing. In this section, it will be argued that Roughton's notion of Communism is much more in the line Marx's Socialism than in that of Stalin's dictatorial and highly regimented system. In this sense, it is also closer to the kind of dynamic and tolerant ideology of British Surrealism. His poetry fluctuates between a sort of proletarian *Romanticism* (which advocates a world of revolution which is still to come) and what is termed here a form of *Socialist Surrealism* (a call for wider consciousness which evinces notions of the revolution as an ongoing struggle). As will be seen, both forms of discourse leave ample space for self-disruption, doubt and ambiguity: whereas his bombastic announcements are always undermined by some kind of irony, pun or parody which downplay the sincerity of the vision that is presented and, indeed, preclude future resolution, his injunctions to engage in political action are not devoid of a certain degree of mysticism or

idealism. It is in these spaces left for doubt and uncertainty that the reader is asked to engage in the interpretation of the meaning and ideological significance of Roughton's images.

Finally, Charles Madge and Humphrey Jennings's involvement in the movement for anthropological research Mass-Observation is analysed in the context of British Surrealism and, in its initial stages, as an offshoot of Surrealist practice in Britain. Through the use of textual collage, these writers endeavour to democratise thought and poetic expression in their search for a truly collective poetics. They both place great emphasis on the exploration of unconscious ideas, as they seek images of collective significance, coincidences and that element of chance which is also central to Surrealist practice. But this element of chance is not purely arbitrary, but rather, as the Surrealists defend, *objective*, because it objectively reveals how the mechanisms of repression and ideological control work in the collective consciousness, a necessary step towards social revolution. In their collages, the tensions between the material fragments (of which these texts are made) and the *significant* wholes (which these texts seek) are constantly reactivated in the process of reading, a process which eventually shows that the irreducible nature of those fragments leads to further disruptions of textual coherence. It is also through collage that they create texts in which there is no authoritative voice that establishes the connections between those fragments, but rather that it is the reader who is responsible for creating new associations and new links. This does not only allow them to democratise thought and expression, but also it reveals the gaps in the official narratives of power, dismantles hierarchical notions of artistic, ideological and social structures, and resists assimilation into the totalising discourse of dominant ideologies.

2. Surrealism Begins.

Although continental Surrealism was made known to a *select* British audience from as early as 1924, the year of publication of André Breton's "Manifesto of Surrealism", it did not reach the wider public until the mid thirties. In this regard, it is interesting to note that news of Surrealism reached Britain rather promptly, if in a rather unsystematic manner too, whereas little was known of its nihilistic predecessor on the continent, the Dada movement.[10] The reasons for Surrealism's belated arrival given in the *International Surrealist Bulletin 4*, issued by the Surrealist Group in England in September 1936, focus on the "moral, ideological and political irresponsibility" as the basis of English individualism in both social and artistic matters,

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[10] Early news of French Surrealism reached Britain via Ford Madox Ford's journal *Transatlantic Review* and the Oxford magazine *The Oxford Outlook*, where Edouard Roditi's pseudo-Surrealist manifesto "The New Reality" was published in 1929. Also, Edward Upward and Christopher Isherwood, Cambridge undergraduates in the 1920s and associated with the Auden group, claimed to be writing *Surrealistically* by 1928 with the Mortmere stories.

and on the long tradition of capitalist democracy in Britain, which had prevented people from realising the crisis of consciousness which Breton had announced in the "Second Manifesto of Surrealism" (1924). British capitalism, the Surrealists stated,

> is older than any other, more highly organized, more deeply rooted in our national life, and above all richer. It is rich enough to be philanthropic, to set aside vast sums every year for petty alleviations of the social ills which it creates -every sort of kindly, patronising, comforting, soup-for-the-poor charity. (The Surrealist Group in England 1936b: 5-6)

Statements like this one, which crowd the pages of the British Surrealist Group's programmatic texts, clearly manifest the strong ideological factor which underlay the emergence of Surrealism in Britain. Before that, two Paris journals addressed to an Anglophone readership, Eugene Jolas's *transition* (1927-1938) and Edward W. Titus's *This Quarter* (1929-1932) contributed to making Surrealism more accessible in Britain.[11] It was precisely in *transition* that the theoretical manifestoes and poetic texts of a group of Cambridge students, the Experiment group were published. Its members included the later Surrealists Hugh Sykes Davies, Humphrey Jennings and Julian Trevelyan, who also took part in the group's eponymous magazine, published between 1928 and 1931.[12] In the long feature devoted to Experiment in *transition*, proto-Surrealist statements are common, of the type of Trevelyan's rather simplistic "TO DREAM IS TO CREATE" and his rejection of symbolism in favour of a more dynamic form of engagement between the particular and the absolute, or between the conscious and the unconscious, which already anticipates the configuration of the Surrealist image in British literature (Trevelyan 1930: 120, 122).

Despite these early Surrealist tendencies in *Experiment*, which were duly criticised in another Cambridge journal, Anthony Blunt and Michael Redgrave's *The Venture* (1928-1930), and the radical novelty of its propositions, these writers found it difficult (or did not want to) transcend the formalist concerns of more conventional Modernist groupings and, especially in the case of William Empson, the influence of I.A. Richards.[13] In this regard, it is significant that the first texts written by the young British Surrealists appeared within this more conventional

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[11] *This Quarter* published a Surrealist issue in September 1932 which made a large number of theoretical and poetic texts available in English.

[12] For a study of Experiment's role in the development of the British Avant-Garde, see Jason Harding's "Experiment in Cambridge: 'A Manifesto of Young England'" (1998). Details about the formation of the group have been provided by one of its most prominent members, Jacob Bronowski, in "Recollections of Humphrey Jennings" (1959).

[13] For a discussion of the ways in which Experiment attempted to distance itself from High Modernism while simultaneously drawing on it, see Scott McCracken's "Cambridge Magazines and Unfinished Business" (2009).

milieu, dominated by established Modernists, in publications such as T.S. Eliot's *The Criterion* (1922-1939), and also in journals which, like Geoffrey Grigson's *New Verse* (1933-1939), insisted on the separation of poetry and politics (Grigson 1933: 1-2). Regarding the particular case of *New Verse*, David Ayers has rightly suggested that the mere inclusion of W.H. Auden, Cecil Day-Lewis and Louis MacNeice in its first issue is indicative of the political orientation of the journal; nevertheless, Grigson reiterated its independence from ideological creeds, and the international political situation was certainly scarcely reflected in its pages (Ayers 2004: 386). There are indeed few references to any ideological stance in *New Verse*, and these are reduced to Grigson's "Enquiry" (1934), addressed to a series of poets which included the Surrealists Herbert Read (who denied party affiliation) and David Gascoyne (who declared himself a left-wing revolutionary); W.H. Auden's "Honest Doubt" (1936), where he posed several questions to the Surrealists concerning the nature of their aesthetic and political stance which never obtained any answer (at least not in the pages of *New Verse*, and reasonably so because, by asking the questions, Auden seemed to be replying to them too); and, finally, the most clearly political issue, the last one, tellingly entitled "Commitments" (1938), which included Stephen Spender's "The Left Wing Orthodoxy", an indictment to bring poetry and politics together, something which the British Surrealists were already doing: why, asks Spender, "when a book like *Poetry and Anarchism*, by Herbert Read, is published, is it not discussed by writers?" (Spender 1938: 16).[14] It must be acknowledged that neither Grigson nor Eliot were particularly sympathetic to Surrealism, and Grigson himself sent "A Letter from England" to Harriet Monroe's *Poetry (Chicago)* in 1936, where he doubted the capacity of the newly-formed British Surrealist Group to fulfil the movement's radical political claims and to "create a minim of revolutionary excitement" (Grigson 1936: 102). However, and maybe in spite of themselves, both Grigson and Eliot played central roles in the promotion and development of Surrealist writing in Britain, with the publication of texts by Hugh Sykes Davies, David Gascoyne, George Barker and Charles Madge, even if no serious attempts were made to analyse the ways in which experimental aesthetics and revolutionary ideology are brought together in their works.[15]

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[14] Auden's questions in "Honest Doubt" indeed reveal, not a genuine interest, but rather a desire to discredit Surrealism's revolutionary claims by reducing its arguments to self-contradictory remarks. Questions like "What is the peculiar revolutionary value in the automatic presentation of this repressed material?" (Auden 1936: 16), when followed by a sort of multiple choice in which prepared answers are provided, can hardly be described as *honest*.

[15] Also, under the editorship of Eliot, Faber published several books which furthered Surrealist experimentation in Britain, such as George Barker's *Calamiterror* (1937) and Charles Madge's *The*

Certainly, it would not be until the foundation of the more ideologically committed Avant-Garde and Surrealist periodicals, Roger Roughton's *Contemporary Poetry and Prose* (1936-1937) and the Surrealist Group's official organ, E.L.T. Mesens's *London Bulletin* (1938-1940), that the Surrealists found a welcoming place where their engagement in the reconciliation of image and ideology could be systematically approached and widely publicised.[16] This period of expansion, which was timidly initiated by David Gascoyne's "Premier Manifeste Anglais du Surréalisme" and his concise history of Surrealism *A Short Survey of Surrealism* (both 1935), coincided with the publication, throughout 1936, of a series of theoretical texts in which the main tenets of the movement were outlined, and with the delivery of several illuminating lectures on the occasion of the London Surrealist Exhibition.[17] In both of Gascoyne's foundational texts (the first of which was published in French in Christian Zervos's magazine *Cahiers d'Art*), the ideological dimension of Surrealist practice is emphasised, with enthusiastic comments on how liberation from rational constraints leads to the realisation of the mechanisms of repression at work in society, and how the dismantling of the old symbols of power and the creation of new collective mythologies activate the possibility and conception of new social structures (Gascoyne 1935j: 106). In this regard, however, what is probably most interesting about a text like *Survey* is the way in which it attests to British Surrealism being a movement born, so to speak, in *medias res*. Indeed, by the time Surrealism emerged in Britain, it was already a highly politicised movement with a strong ideological import, attempting to bring about the collapse of capitalist bourgeois ideology, to make visible this crisis of consciousness, to make an assault on the world of *objective* reality as a form of social action, and to contribute to the creation of a new order. It is remarkable that, at this point, the project and aims of Surrealism were already closer to Trotskyist notions of total and permanent revolution, something which is implicit in Gascoyne's words:

Disappearing Castle (1937), and also David Gascoyne's translation of André Breton's *What is Surrealism?* (1936).

[16] For an analysis of Roughton's poetic militancy in *Contemporary Poetry and Prose*, see pages 469-480. Rod Mengham has recently discussed the role of little magazines in the development of a Surrealist aesthetic and ideology in Britain in "'National Papers Please Reprint': Surrealist Magazines in Britain" (2009).

[17] The lectures delivered during the exhibition were André Breton's "Limites non frontières du surréalisme" (16 June), Herbert Read's "Art and the Unconscious" (19 June), Paul Eluard's "La Poésie surréaliste" (24 June); Hugh Sykes Davies's "Biology and Surrealism" (26 June); and Salvador Dalí's "Fantômes paranoïaques authentiques" (1 July). The programmatic and theoretical texts published throughout 1936 included the *International Surrealist Exhibition Catalogue*, the *International Surrealist Bulletin 4* (numbers 1, 2 and 3 were published in Prague, Tenerife and Brussels respectively) and Herbert Read's *Surrealism*, with essays by Read, André Breton, Hugh Sykes Davies, Paul Éluard and Georges Hugnet.

The great task of this century is that of revising the old scales of value in every field, of destroying worn-out customs and institutions and of constructing a form of society in which men may be able to make full use of all their faculties. Few poets –and poets, though still unacknowledged, continue to be the legislators of the world- have set about this task with so great a thoroughness as have the Surrealists. Already they have succeeded in widening and deepening the total of human experience. (Gascoyne 1935a: 95).

These are arguments which also appeared in the volume *Surrealism* (1936), edited by Herbert Read on the occasion of the International Surrealist Exhibition, and in the fourth issue of the *International Surrealist Bulletin* (1936), and which were later reiterated in a series of theoretical texts to which this study will come to as the different authors are analysed. For the time being, suffice it to say that, in Breton's programmatic writings, the passivity of automatism through dream and trance, although not altogether abandoned, had gradually receded in favour of active involvement with external reality: it was around this time that the Marxist philosophy of dialectical materialism was officially adopted (even if a certain idealism or mysticism was never given up completely), that the alliance with Communism was sought and then discarded, that Salvador Dalí's paranoiac-critical method acquired prominence as a Surrealist technique, and that the manipulation of the *materials* of reality through Surrealist objects and collages became a foremost Surrealist activity. Precisely, in Gascoyne's *Survey*, Surrealism is described, for the first time in English, not as "a recipe, or 'specific method of creation.' Rather it is a starting-point for works of the most striking diversity, capable of almost infinite variation and development" (Gascoyne 1935a: 66), and it is significant that the British Surrealists adopted and adapted these different trends in Surrealist activity in their search for an adequate form that would contribute to the process of expanding awareness advocated in their theoretical writings.

Certainly, British Surrealist texts resound with two principles which reveal the true nature of the Surrealist enterprise in Britain: to liberate desire and to broaden consciousness, two maxims which also recur in these writers' theoretical texts. This study shows that, through the deployment of different techniques, British Surrealism managed, even if only for the period between the publication of the first Surrealist poem in 1933 (Gascoyne's "And the Seventh Dream is the Dream of Isis") to the outbreak of the Second World War, to reconcile image and ideology, something which was not always achieved in 1930s French Surrealism (marked as it was by internal dissensions and the desertion of poets for whom the reconciliation of Surrealism and Marxism was impracticable, such as Louis Aragon), or by the

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British Surrealists' generational fellows (i.e. the Auden circle). Regarding thirties' writers such as Auden, Day-Lewis, Edward Upward and Christopher Isherwood, David Lodge has stated that the most successful efforts in the direction of producing literature that was both *modern* and *committed* "were ideologically ambiguous, while the felt obligation to deliver a politically 'orthodox' message was apt to deprive the [work] of imaginative life" (Lodge 1977: 207). On the contrary, for the British Surrealists, poetry was part of the revolution which they advocated, and their experimentation with the poetic image was on a par with their subversive political stance. However, as this study will also show, Breton's claims in his lecture "Limits not Frontiers of Surrealism" (1936), that in the Surrealist image all contradictions are resolved, "contradictions [. . .] of reality and dream, of reason and madness, of objectivity and subjectivity, of perception and representation, of past and future, of the collective sense and individual love" (in Read 1971: 105) must be concretised, for this reconciliation, which is also a reconciliation between image and ideology, is not to be taken, certainly not in British Surrealist writing, as a form of predetermined union which leaves no space for self-disruption, contradiction or evolution. Positing the relationship between image and ideology as static and stable in Surrealism, rather than as fluid and evolving, amounts to turning the Surrealist image into a tool for ideological indoctrination, an idea that is challenged by the subversive and elusive nature of these authors' texts. Indeed, Surrealist texts are very rarely explicitly political and their most potent ideological message comes not so much from their content, but rather from the multiple possibilities (semantic and cognitive) opened up by these writers' deployment of form and image, because for them the image is a form of expanding knowledge. It is through the Surrealist image that Surrealism brings about the collapse of the myths of the existing order (of capitalism and imperialism, and of their most extreme expression, Fascism) and puts forward visions of a new society, a freer society in which desire is not repressed, conventions are deprecated as savage customs, the unconscious is acknowledged, and the distance between the individual and reality is bridged through awareness. As Éluard asserts in his essay "Poetic Evidence", published in Herbert Read's *Surrealism* (1936),

> Surrealism, which is an instrument of knowledge, and therefore an instrument of conquest as well as of defence, strives to bring to light man's profound consciousness. Surrealist strives to demonstrate that thought is common to all, it strives to reduce the differences existing between men, and, with this end in view, it refuses to serve an absurd order based upon inequality, deceit and cowardice. (in Read 1971: 180)

However, what the Surrealist image offers as an alternative to the ideological *totalities* of bourgeois capitalism is not an *absolute* reality, because it is precisely the fallacy of absolutes that the image, by making manifest the need for wider consciousness, sets itself to reveal: whereas the old myths reproduce monolithic and totalising visions of reality set to preserve the current order, the Surrealist image constantly opens up new possibilities, new perspectives and new interpretations of the world, and of itself. And this is so because, through the acknowledgement of the image, not as a totalising whole, but rather as a fragment, some space is always left for ambiguity, uncertainty and doubt in British Surrealist writing. These are gaps left for the reader to create new meanings, to take part in the process of meaning-construction and to extract the ideological significance of the Surrealist experience, something which is beautifully expressed by Éluard:

> Poems always have great white margins, great margins of silence where eager memory consumes itself in order to re-create an ecstasy without a past. Their principal quality is, I insist again, not to invoke but to inspire. So many love poems without an immediate object will, one fine day, bring lovers together. (in Read 1971: 173)

As will be seen in the sections devoted to these Surrealist writers, their texts' resistance to analysis and univocal interpretation (because of their unstable form and their ambivalent images) reflects their resistance to accommodation to normalised views of reality, to assimilation into the authoritative discourse of power and to appropriation by established ideological systems. Not in vain, as this study demonstrates, the ideological stance of the British Surrealist Group was in constant evolution, incorporating change, contradiction and new propositions as part of its own configuration. Similarly, the texts of British Surrealism are the expression of an unflinching non-conformity and an unrelenting self-questioning (probably the only aspects that are stable about them), which persistently defer or, in Lodge's terms, *displace* meaning (Lodge 1977: 206) and thwart the attainment of a sense of closure or unity. These are texts in which there is no authorial voice and no unifying principle, but a potentially infinite and non-hierarchical series of images, because the unconscious itself is infinite. Thus, the world of revolution advocated by British Surrealist writers through their images is not one of happy pantheism, but rather one in which the struggle to break down new barriers (linguistic, aesthetic, moral, ideological and political) is forever ongoing, because they were *wide aware* that new ideologies, new worldviews, are always liable to become new *totalities*.

CHAPTER 2

CRITICAL APPROACHES I: THE SURREALIST IMAGE

Without the Surrealist image, there would be no Surrealism at all. Furthermore, in the context of 1930s British Surrealist writing, the concept of the poetic image was not only central to Surrealist theories of poetic creation, but it also led to other forms of experimentation, especially in the fields of ideological postulation and political action as image and ideology were gradually brought together in response to the social and political upheaval of the thirties' decade. In this regard, André Breton's theory of the Surrealist image as a poetic entity of autonomous artistic value is central to the Surrealist aesthetic in Britain: the main theoretical principles of the Surrealist image stem from his definition of the image as the juxtaposition of dissimilar realities (Breton 1972: 20) and from his exposition of the *first* Surrealist image (Breton 1972: 21), presented as both a visual and a linguistic entity in the "Manifesto of Surrealism" (1924). Breton's first Surrealist image already evinces a tension between the image conceived as an automatic creation of the mind and the image as revelation or ready-made, a tension which this study intends to resolve by focusing on the images created in British Surrealism.

Nevertheless, Breton's theory is not the only source on which British Surrealist writing draws. The beginning of this chapter focuses on a series of critical trends and literary movements which help shape a theory of the Surrealist image in Britain, and which had a decisive influence on the development of a distinct Surrealist poetics there; these influences range from the British Romantic and Gothic traditions to French Symbolism and, in the twentieth century, Ezra Pound's Imagism and Wyndham Lewis's Vorticism. Moreover, concepts such as Wilhelm Worringer's "abstraction" and "empathy", which were made available to the Surrealists through T.E. Hulme and Herbert Read, as well as T.S. Eliot's notion of "tradition", contribute to enlightening the discussion regarding what can be termed an *autochthonous* form of Surrealism in Britain. It is, nevertheless, inevitable to resort to more *canonical*, more *universal*, Surrealist sources too: Sigmund Freud's propositions on creative writing in its relation to the dream-work; Carl Jung's "collective unconscious"; and Salvador

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Dalí's notion of simultaneity in his paranoiac-critical method. Post-Surrealist theories will be helpful too: Jacques Lacan's "metaphoric spark" and Jacques Derrida's *différance* are also central to this discussion.

In the light of these theories, it becomes clear that what the image eventually does in British Surrealist writing is to reconcile signifier and signified: by liberating language from external referentiality, it also frees desires and fears previously repressed by moral, social and linguistic conventions. In doing so, the image becomes, not the expression of the unconscious, but the unconscious itself. But there is an ethical (ideological, political) dimension to this process too: in Surrealism, the image, being prior to the idea, creates new mythologies, new ideas, in order to debunk the dominant ideology of the bourgeoisie. The liberation of unconscious fears and desires necessarily entails a broadening of consciousness of the self and of external reality whose aim is the transformation of the material conditions of society. In Surrealist theory, a change in the linguistic paradigm brings about a change in the ideological sphere which eventually has consequences in the real. In Surrealist practice, image-formation is then not only a poetic activity, not even only a psychical activity, but a performative act in itself, as it acts on reality, transforming it.

The discussion of the Surrealist image that ensues is complex, for it encompasses both the rhetorical and the philosophical, the purely formal and the ideological, the linguistic and the psychosocial. It is for this reason that a study of this kind should concern itself with notions of the image as trope, as a psychological formation (the fulfilment of a wish or the resolution of a conflict), as a visual entity (a dream image), as a linguistic construct (a verbal image), as a form of knowledge (a break with accepted ideology which brings about awareness of the material) and as a hermeneutic tool (a method of interpretation of the world, and of itself). This panoptical and virtually all-encompassing perspective contributes to establishing a definite theory of the Surrealist image in Britain, which is necessary for a study of the poetics of British Surrealism in the 1930s.[18]

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[18] Studies on the image in continental Surrealist writing can be found in Anna Balakian's *Surrealism: the Road to the Absolute* (1986) and Willard Bohn's *The Rise of Surrealism: Cubism, Dada and the Pursuit of the Marvellous* (2002). For an interdisciplinary analysis of the relation between the literary and the cinematographic image, see Linda Williams's *Figures of Desire: a Theory and Analysis of Surrealist Film* (1992). For a stylistic study of the Surrealist image, see Gerald Mead's *The Surrealist Image: a Stylistic Study* (1978).

1. Predecessors of the Surrealist Image in Britain.

The British Surrealists tended to deny the influence of modern British poets (especially the Modernists, Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot, but also their generational fellows, W.H. Auden and the Auden circle), and looked to France and the French poets in search of creative stimulation. In spite of its idiosyncrasies and particularities, and even its often marginal and unorthodox position, British Surrealism was in fact an offshoot of Bretonian Surrealism and, as such, its criteria were for the most part also Breton's. However, this does not mean that the Surrealists in Britain completely disregarded the British tradition, or that Breton's guidelines remained unchallenged there. Quite on the contrary, they used Breton's predilection for English letters, especially for the very fertile British Romantic tradition, to establish a lineage for the Surrealist element in British literature and thus initiate a sort of theory of *autochthonous* Surrealism in Britain. Furthermore, the Surrealist image in Britain was also influenced by literary trends and theories disregarded in Breton's writings, namely Imagism and Vorticism. All these elements converged in the emergence of Surrealism in Britain, where it became a syncretic movement, catalysing trends already present in the national literary tradition and finding correspondences between these and those to which Breton pointed as Surrealist ancestors. The richness of the British Surrealists' approach is attested to by their being well versed in both British and French literary theories, from Isidore Ducasse, Comte de Lautréamont, and Charles Baudelaire to T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound, notwithstanding their explicit rejection of the last two. To these one might add a series of literary influences which stretch in time and space, and which are also peculiar to the British Surrealists: these range from the Spanish Baroque tradition of the grotesque (especially in Hugh Sykes Davies) to literary mysticism (David Gascoyne), Bataillean symbolism (George Barker) and Soviet Realism (Roger Roughton). These will be studied in the sections devoted to each author.

For now, I will focus on Romanticism, Symbolism, Imagism and Vorticism as the four main literary movements in which the Aristotelian concept of metaphor as "the application of an alien name by transference from species to species" (Aristotle 1951: 41) is transcended.[19] They are also the aesthetic predecessors of Surrealism in Britain, and from them it partially draws its own theory of the image, for the image (the symbol, the vortex) is a central element in their poetics too. However, in British Surrealism, the image is not (or at least not only) a medium of poetic expression or, in Formalist terms, a mechanism of discursive

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[19] This is in fact the definition for Aristotle's metaphor of the third type. According to Umberto Eco, this is the archetypal kind of metaphor, and the one which has been incorporated in subsequent semiotic theories (Eco 1986: 92).

defamiliarisation, but an autonomous poetic entity in itself. Now, while Surrealist poetics inherits these movements' conceptualisation of the literary image, it departs from them in a series of aspects: namely, its systematic use of specific psychological processes in order to instigate poetic creation (a Freudian influence), and the ultimate social import of those processes (a Marxist orientation). Less preoccupied with emotional, intellectual or aesthetic concerns than the Romantics, Symbolists, Imagists and Vorticists, the Surrealists place psychology, that is, the exploration of the unconscious, at the centre of their quest for an image which is only beautiful insofar as it is illuminating: a revelation of previously repressed desires and fears and of undiscovered associations and, ultimately, a distinct form of awareness. It is in this sense that Surrealism surpasses the speculative and idealistic conceptions of the image put forward by the movements that preceded it, recovering the psychological and ideological components inherent in the linguistic sign, components which had been lost in excessively aestheticised and intellectualised articulations of the poetic act.

1.1. Romanticism.

In the Romantic concept of the symbol the Surrealist image has its earliest predecessor. The symbol as an autonomous poetic entity emerged in German Romanticism through figures such as Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and Friedrich Schelling; from them, it was then transferred to the English Romantics, especially Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and, eventually, in the twentieth century, to W.B. Yeats and the Surrealists. Freudian and Jungian psychoanalysis also contributed to further developing the concept, especially in its relation to dream imagery and mystic symbolism respectively. For Coleridge, the symbol must be distinguished from the allegory in that the former includes some element of what the Surrealists would later call the *marvellous*: a *je ne sais quoi* which lies beyond pure correspondence between word and idea.[20] Also, the Romantic symbol possesses the inherent quality of referring to nothing other than itself (what Coleridge called the *tautegorical* quality of the symbol), an idea which underliess the concepts of self-referentiality and literalness, the identification of signifier and signified, in Surrealism. Although these formulations found their way into the Surrealist concept of the image, Surrealism transcended in many ways the Romantic stance, first, by demystifying the excessively obscure notion of the symbol: in Surrealism, this *je ne sais quoi* is simply an objective manifestation of the unconscious. As such,

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[20] A very enlightening and fresh study of the symbol as a theoretical construct in Romanticism is offered by Nicholas Halmi in *The Genealogy of the Romantic Symbol* (2007): 1-26. Paraphrasing Umberto Eco, Halmi states that "the symbolic is supposed to be identifiable in Neoplatonic negative philosophy, Kabbalistic hermeneutics, German Romantic philosophy, French *symboliste* poetry, and deconstructive literary criticism: a mode of producing or interpreting a text so as to preserve its literal meaning while suggesting its possession of another, indeterminate meaning" (Halmi 2007: 6).

it abandons the field of speculation and idealism and enters the realm of the psychological and the scientific. Second, by adopting a materialist position, it also opposes Romantic idealism. This implies a rejection of subjective emotion in favour of collective expression, as Herbert Read asserted in his "Introduction" to *Surrealism* (1936): "Surrealism is anti-rational, but it is equally anti-emotional" (Read 1971: 37).

In this regard, in his "Manifesto of Surrealism" (1924), Breton established a genealogy of Surrealism in which he placed writers of the French tradition (Sade, Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Saint-Pol-Roux, Reverdy) next to prominent figures of Romanticism in Britain such as Matthew Lewis and Edward Young. Moreover, in the "Second Manifesto" (1930), he declared Surrealism to be the only true inheritor to the Romantic spirit in modern times, its "amazingly prehensile tail" (Breton 1972: 153). Later, in Britain, David Gascoyne established a similar genealogy in *A Short Survey of Surrealism* (1935), and Hugh Sykes Davies recovered Breton's statement in his essay "Surrealism at this Time and Place" (1936), making of it a specifically British claim: "[We are] a direct continuation of Coleridge's work –we are its prehensile tail" (Sykes Davies 1936c: 139). His essay appeared in Herbert Read's book *Surrealism* (1936), whose publication followed the closure of the London International Surrealist Exhibition. However, his are not the only claims of this sort that appear in Read's book.[21] In fact, Read's "Introduction" offers a remarkable theoretical approach to Surrealism as an international phenomenon, while it simultaneously establishes a lineage of Surrealist ("superrealist", he says) tendencies in the British literary tradition. Because of his work, Herbert Read became the most important theoretician of British Surrealism. He was an art and poetry critic and champion of modern art, especially Abstract art, in Britain, who became involved in Surrealism late in 1935 when the Surrealists began the preparations for the 1936 London Exhibition. Although his contribution to Surrealism has been debated, he is undeniably one of the most prominent supporters of Surrealism in Britain in the 1930s, and his Anarchist position crucially determined the movement's ideological evolution, as will be seen.[22]

Read identifies the Surrealist element in literature with some sort of irrationality which he associates, not with a certain mysticism of the poetic act, which he rejects, but with an outright disavowal of the role of reason in the creative process. He discards notions of order, proportion, symmetry, equilibrium and harmony in favour of the role of the unconscious in

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[21] For an analysis of the Romantic element in Hugh Sykes Davies's poetry, see pages 211-218.
[22] Michel Remy has criticised Read and Sykes Davies for "neutralizing the transgressive and revolutionary nature of surrealist protest" by attempting to Anglicise the movement (Remy 1986: 28).

poetic creation. This irrationality inherent in the Surrealist image is, he contends, primarily a Romantic heritage. By resorting to Romantic irrationality, he is able to assert that

> every authentic image is conceived in the unconscious. [. . .] An unconscious impulse creates the poem no less than the dream [. . .]. That impulse seeks in the poem, no less and no otherwise than in the dream, its desired satisfaction. The latent ideas or thoughts are turned into visual images, are dramatised and illustrated, are finally liberated in the hallucinatory reality of the poem. (Read 1971: 77)

According to Read, this unconscious (Surrealist) element was present in the Middle Ages, in Shakespeare, in Edward Lear, Lewis Carroll and, above all, in the Gothic writers (Horace Walpole, Ann Radcliffe, Matthew Lewis and Charles Maturin) and the Romantics (William Blake, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Percy Bysshe Shelley, Algernon Swinburne and Lord Byron). He asserts that "Surrealism is a reaffirmation of the romantic principle" (Read 1971: 28), and also defends the revaluation of modern art and poetry according to Romantic standards, what he calls the "rehabilitation of romantic values" (Read 1971: 51). In fact, several of these Romantic values can be appreciated in the works of the British Surrealists. For example, Read's demand for "a fuller acknowledgement of the supreme poetic quality of our ballads and anonymous literature" (Read 1971: 46) was met by Hugh Sykes Davies's attempts to recover the patterns of oral literature in his texts, Roger Roughton's publication of several anonymous ballads in his journal *Contemporary Poetry and Prose* (1936-1937), and Charles Madge's and Humphrey Jennings's efforts towards a collective poetics by means of textual collage. In this regard, the British Surrealists contributed notably to restoring the poetic worth which Romanticism assigned to anonymous and collective creations. Also, Read observes the need for an equilibrium "between metaphysics and poetry" (Ready 1971: 49), that is, between thought and image, between the conscious and the unconscious, a reconciliation which is central to British Surrealist writing. Earlier, in a 1908 essay on Shelley, A.C. Bradley stated:

> Although poets often have unusual power of reflective thought the specific genius of a poet does not lie there, but in the imagination. Therefore his deepest and most original interpretation is likely to come by way of the imagination. And the specific way of imagination is not to clothe in imagery consciously held ideas; it is to produce half-consciously a matter from which, when produced, the reader may, if he chooses, extract ideas. (in Read 1971: 50-51)

Bradley's statement, used to describe Romantic imagination, in fact anticipates Surrealist concerns about the nature of poetic inspiration, although the Surrealists replace the Romantic concept of imagination and place the exploration of the unconscious at the centre of the

process of creation.[23] Bradley's text also prefigures the relation between image and idea in Surrealism: for the Surrealists, too, the image is prior to the idea.

As well as this, further parallelisms can be established between Read's configuration of the Romantic spirit in literature and Surrealism. Read contends that the judgement of a poet's work must not rest on ethical criteria and defends the Romantic amorality of Byron: "Byron is not, in any obvious degree, a superrealist poet; but he is a superrealist personality" (Read 1971: 51). A case in point is Humphrey Jennings, who was in fact influenced by Byron's rebellious spirit as much as by his revolutionary politics, and some of his images contributed to the elaboration of a myth of the Romantic poet as a misanthrope and a modern Oedipus. Byron is nevertheless ennobled by these abject and immoral traits. As Read states, in their advocation of Romantic amorality, the Surrealists do not "encourage vice as such" (Read 1971: 53), but rather the liberation of repressed desire. It is in this sense that Breton's statement that "the simplest Surrealist act consists of dashing down into the street, pistol in hand, and firing blindly, as fast as you can pull the trigger, into the crowd" (Breton 1972: 125) must be understood. But it is in the images of George Barker's *Calamiterror* (1937) that the poetic nature of the immoral act is conspicuously made manifest: Barker's blinding of his brother during a mock fencing game would become a rite of initiation for the poet into the Surrealist image.

Several other predecessors of the Surrealist image can be found in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: the agonising images of the Gothic tradition (present in Hugh Sykes Davies and George Barker); Blake's prophetic visions (an influence on David Gascoyne); William Wordsworth's "humanising imagery" (an influence on Hugh Sykes Davies); and Edward Lear's and Lewis Carroll's nonsensical images (which find correspondences in the works of Roland Penrose and Roger Roughton). In his essay "Surrealism at this Time and Place" (1936), Sykes Davies defends that one of the most characteristic aspects of the Gothic-Romantic tradition is its erotic sensibility. But this sensibility is, he contends, "profoundly algolagnic, [. . .] it is obsessed with the idea of pleasure obtained through cruelty, inflicted or received, sadistic or masochistic" (Sykes Davies 1971: 160).[24] The algolagnic sensibility of Gothic writers informs, not only Sykes Davies's theoretical assessment of Surrealist practice in Britain, but also a not insignificant number of images produced by the British Surrealists: from Sykes Davies's use of objective chance as a form of experiencing the connections between desire and fate; to David

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[23] This was, in a way, also a form of reappraisal of what Coleridge termed mere "fancy" in his *Biographia Literaria* (1817).
[24] In this assertion Sykes Davies is following Mario Praz's claims in his study *The Romantic Agony* (1933).

Gascoyne's images of gratifying martyrdom; and George Barker's complex exploration of the life and death instincts. In Gascoyne's "Purified Disgust" (1935), the speaker is transformed into a modern queer Saint Sebastian who masochistically embraces victimization (Gascoyne 1936d: 16); in Barker's *Calamiterror* (1937), the sex and death drives (Eros and Thanatos) become identified as the speaker exhorts "My swallow salamander, rise and burn, / Render me martyr in my breast's flame, / Immolate me upon my own desire" (Barker 1937b: 29). But pain is not only suffered in British Surrealist writing, it is also inflicted: much of the action in Sykes Davies's *Petron* (1935) involves the causing of pain, either physical or psychological; in Barker's poetics, the creative impulse is associated with a desire to consume and excrete. This type of images belongs in what Sykes Davies calls the tradition of the "black writers" in Britain (Sykes Davies 1971: 161): Radcliffe, Matthew Lewis, Maturin, but also Byron, Shelley and Swinburne. The British Surrealists did not only resort to French authors, such as the Marquis de Sade or Pétrus Borel, but were also aware of the British role in the development of an algolagnic mythology to respond to the crisis of the *mal du siècle*, and of Surrealism as a continuation of such a tradition.

On a slightly different note, commenting on Wordsworth's *The Prelude* (1850), Sykes Davies states that it "conforms with the fundamental mythologies of the human race; it is a systematic animation of the inanimate" (Sykes Davies 1971: 143). However, a further insight into what would become the Surrealist image comes from elsewhere. In 1919, Freud had described the uncanny as an old and familiar reality, well-established in the mind, which becomes alienated from itself through a process of repression (Freud 1955: 241).[25] For Freud, the uncanny emerges when an infantile complex which has been repressed is revived by some impression, or when a primitive belief which has been surmounted is then confirmed by some experience. Processes of animation (bringing to life inanimate matter) are forms of regression in which the familiar is defamiliarised, creating uncanny effects which reveal an unconscious content. Likewise, British Surrealist writing transcends the anthropomorphic treatment and personification of nature typical of the Romantics (what T.S. Eliot called the "objective correlative" of the poet) by transforming it into a source of the uncanny.[26] Sykes Davies's *Petron* (1935) is full of this type of uncanny animations: in it the natural world does not acquire human characteristics in order to convey the poet's emotion, but it is rather transformed into an autonomous entity that springs from the character's unconscious and has an effect on his

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[25] "The Uncanny" was first published under the title "Das Unheimliche" in the Austrian periodical *Imago*. The first English translation of the text appeared in 1925.

[26] The term "objective correlative" was first used by Eliot in his essay "Hamlet and his Problems" (1919).

conscious actions. Thus, Petron is relentlessly assaulted by fears, anxieties and desires in the form of marching trees, cavernous giants or natural omens which condition the decisions that he makes. Similarly, in Humphrey Jennings's texts, the machine becomes alive through the projection of human desire.

Continuing with Surrealism's links with the past, Hugh Sykes Davies elaborates further on this concept of the Romantic mythologising imagination by resorting to Coleridge's epistemological system. For Coleridge, he states "this mythology was the maniac system, the paranoia, upon which poetry was based, which was implicit in all truly imaginative images" (Sykes Davies 1971: 144). Concerned with the exploration and dissolution of the antithesis of subject and object, Coleridge's system calls for a process of self-duplication through which subject and object become reconciled: "knowledge and experience [are] built up by self-duplication into the dialectical antithesis of subject and object, and the aim of all true perception is to unify these antitheses once more into their original principle, the one synthesis of self-consciousness" (Sykes Davies 1971: 146). Freud too referred to the uncanny effect of the double image, and also in this the Surrealists surpass the Romantics, for the double image becomes infinitely expanded in Dalí's paranoiac-critical method, a method of knowledge and interpretation of reality based on multiple and simultaneous transformation.[27]

Following the Romantics, the British Surrealists were engaged in the creation of new mythologies, and the recovery of ancient ones, through which the unconscious could be accessed. Hugh Sykes Davies and Herbert Read agreed on the premise that scientific and technological advancement does not substitute mythopoeic activity in the historical process of knowing and understanding reality. Regarding this, in an article published in *transition*, "Myth, Dream and Poem" (1938), Read states that

> the farther science penetrates into the mystery of life, the more it reverts to a mythological world. I refer more particularly to the science of the individual psyche, where all science culminates; for we know nothing unless we know ourselves. And the more we learn about ourselves by the objective methods of observation and analysis, the more we realize that our knowledge is already crystallized in the ancient myths. (Read 1938d: 176)

For Sykes Davies, the mythologies of Coleridge and Wordsworth offer a way to solve emotional inner conflicts; mythology is for him a byway for expanding our knowledge and awareness of reality: "Mythology may still be said to conquer nature in and through imagination, but by nature we mean that aspect of nature which is human feeling –and there can be no reason

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[27] See pages 82-83 below.

whatsoever why human feeling should not be regarded as a part of nature" (Sykes Davies 1971: 157). Similarly, the image in Surrealism is a myth-making mechanism: "The myth persists by virtue of its imagery" (Read 1938d: 178), sustains Read, through which psychical conflicts are resolved (i.e. through which repressed desires and fears are liberated). However, these are not personal or individual conflicts, but collective: the Surrealist image creates new ideologies which vanquish obsolete ones that have ceased to represent the collective unconscious. Moreover, as will be seen in the following chapter, the concept of ideology is inevitably linked to that of class structure. "The poet is a man who creates his own myths" (Read 1938d: 177) and, in so doing, the Surrealist writer does away with the myths that support the dominant ideology of capitalism (and, by extension, of imperialism and Fascism) in favour of a truly collective (i.e. classless) mythology. Even a poet like Charles Madge, for whom science in the materialist era would put a stop to poetic activity as a form of knowledge (Madge 1937b: 32), endeavoured to create a collective mythology in his Surrealist texts. Herein lies the performative capacity of Surrealist writing as the idealistic mythologies of the Romantics are thus given a materialist basis in the Surrealist image.

Furthermore, the emphasis that the British Surrealists placed on the Romantic element, far from minimising the movement's revolutionary stance, served to highlight the psychic complexities inherent in the Surrealist image, its amoral aesthetics and its materialist basis. In fact, the Surrealists helped trace and revalue the irrational and unconscious component of what can be called the unorthodox or non-canonical side of the British literary tradition. In this regard, it is necessary to stress that Breton, forever preoccupied that his beloved offspring, Surrealism, might go astray, supervised the edition of the official texts produced by the different Surrealist groups in Europe; also, being himself a contributor to Read's *Surrealism*, he must have agreed with the tenets contained in it. So far, no document has been found that might contradict this assertion and therefore critical efforts to question or discredit Read's and Sykes Davies's contribution to Surrealist theory, or even this particular aspect of British Surrealist writing, remain necessarily unfounded.

As has been shown, the British Surrealists, while drawing on Romantic concepts such as the symbol and imagination, transcended the Romantic stance in every way by applying Freud's theories to their concept of the image and of poetic inspiration: they approached tradition only to depart from it, in theory and in practice. This approach also contributed to establishing a clear theoretical line within British literary criticism which allowed them to reject the Classical canon and aesthetics of High Modernism: of T.S. Eliot's conception of literary tradition and history, Sykes Davies complained of its disregard for the continuity of historical

processes by going back to seventeenth-century Classical propositions and deliberately ignoring more immediate theses, especially those of the nineteenth century (Sykes Davies 1971: 123).[28] Both Read and Sykes Davies deplored the effect that this faulty historical perspective had in Eliot's political and ethical stance (Sykes Davies 1971: 123; Read 1971: 51). Nevertheless, the question remains as to why the opposition between Classicism and Romanticism came to be such a central issue in the British Group's programmatic texts, when this was certainly not the case on the continent. In order to understand this, it is necessary to see the British position, not in the context in which Surrealism emerged in France, but within the critical panorama which gave rise to Modernism in Britain.[29] For, even if it is already commonplace to state that in Britain there was not such a nihilistic and iconoclastic movement as Dada, Surrealism's most immediate predecessor, the criticism generally fails to acknowledge that in France there was no T.S. Eliot and, certainly, no T.E. Hulme and no Herbert Read.[30]

Curiously, it is precisely through Eliot, Hulme and Read that one of the most influential studies in art history and Modernist criticism reached Britain. I am referring to Wilhelm Worringer's *Abstraction and Empathy* (1908), whose ideas on the "tendency to abstraction", which underlies both primitive (i.e. prehistoric) and modern art, were introduced to an English audience by Hulme in a lecture delivered in London on "Modern Art and its Philosophy" (1914).[31] Later, Read edited and published Hulme's essays in *Speculations: Essays on Humanism and the Philosophy of Art* (1924) and he also translated Worringer's *Form in Gothic* (1927). Both publications were in a way further elaborations of theories first formulated in *Abstraction and Empathy*. In this study, Worringer offered critics the opportunity to reassess contemporary Abstract art from a perspective that differed notably from humanist theories of the modern. In it he establishes that, diachronically, the history of artistic expression in its

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[28] A recent and exhaustive appraisal of the concept of tradition in T.S. Eliot's writings is Giovanni Cianci and Jason Harding's *T.S. Eliot and the Idea of Tradition* (2007).

[29] In spite of the British Surrealists' antagonising of Eliot's Classicist stance, resonances of Eliot are found every now and then in their texts, as will be seen. Furthermore, Eliot's journal *The Criterion* (1922-1939), in which several early Surrealist texts by British authors were published, and his patronage of George Barker were crucial for the development of a Surrealist aesthetics in Britain. In "A Look at Modernism as a Possible Influence on English Surrealism" (1977), Rob Jackaman has attempted to trace parallels between Modernism and Surrealism in Britain by suggesting commonalities in elements such as oneiric trance in Yeats, the image in Pound and the mythic pattern in Eliot. However, his failure to analyse these in the wider context of British critical theory, and to produce actual examples by British Surrealists (he resorts once and again to French texts), means that his study remains rather tentative.

[30] Not without difficulty, Alan Young has traced certain Dadaistic elements in pre-Surrealist literary production in England in his *Dada and After: Extremist Modernism and English Literature* (1981): 34-107.

[31] Hulme's ideas on art were also crucial in the shaping of Imagism and Vorticism. See Flemming Olsen's *Between Positivism and T.S. Eliot: Imagism and T.E. Hulme* (2008).

relation to external reality has been marked by an oscillation between two stylistic poles. These he identifies, on the one hand, with a tendency to empathy and, on the other, with a tendency to abstraction, both of which he understands as psychic attitudes adopted by the artist. The former implies engagement with reality, which Worringer defines, not in the sense of political engagement, but as "a happy pantheistic relationship of confidence between man and the external world" and the latter "is the outcome of a great inner unrest inspired in man by the phenomena of the outside world [. . .] an immense spiritual dread of space" (Worringer 1997: 15). In Worringer's system, Classicism (the Renaissance and the Enlightenment) would be empathic, since it asserts a humanist confidence in reason, in the historical and technical progress of humankind; and Romanticism (primitive, Romantic, folk and modern art) would be abstract, for it expresses the uncertainty and vulnerability of the individual in the world. From this perspective, Modernist offshoots in British poetry, eminently, Eliot's Modernism, Pound's Imagism and Lewis's Vorticism, are Classicist and empathic. British Surrealism, very much in connection with abstract art (its pictorial origins in Britain are found in the abstract experiments of the Unit One Group, and many Surrealist paintings betray a noticeable urge to abstraction), belongs within the second tendency. This idea was explored by Roland Penrose in his 1936 lecture "Exuberance is Beauty" (a title which he fittingly borrowed from William Blake):

> Forms, even geometrical forms, have an uncanny way of drawing round themselves a mantle which reflects a thousand memories. In consequence the term abstract when applied to form becomes a contradiction in itself. Even the simplest of forms the circle or the triangle have associations from which we cannot escape even if we desire to.[32]
> (Penrose 1936c: n.p.)

Contradictorily, Hulme somehow adopted and adapted Worringer's thesis (it was in fact his doctoral dissertation) in ways that are not always faithful to the original text. In fact, he transformed Worringer's opposition of empathy and abstraction into a crux between the organic and the geometric, and altered his canon to favour his own interests: for Hulme, the organic included Romanticism because, like Classicism, it placed the individual at the centre of nature; the geometric, on the other hand, was modern, abstract, a total separation between

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[32] Indeed, in a review of the 1936 London Surrealist Exhibition for the *Architectural Review*, Francis Watson stated that "the concepts of Abstraction and Surrealism are complementary rather than mutually exclusive" (Watson 1936: 252). In spite of this, not everybody understood the link between Abstract art and Surrealism at the time: as Eileen Agar recalled in her lecture "Surrealism in England in the 1930s" (1988), the abstract artists Ben Nicholson and Naum Gabo were initially outraged by Herbert Read's capacity to write convincingly on both Abstraction and Surrealism. Nevertheless, it soon became clear that both were not "opposite poles" (Agar 1988: 129).

the individual and nature which characterised the kind of Modernist poetry that he championed.[33] With regard to the relation between Romanticism and Surrealism, in 1935, Hugh Sykes Davies published an article on T.E. Hulme which, although it did not question the validity of Hulme's propositions, it used them to a different end:

> Anyone interested in the condition of the arts from about 1906 till 1926 will find Hulme by far the best guide to an understanding of the remarkable and certainly important 'movement' which took place during those years. And since the movement was important, Hulme is still important to the historian. But, it should be added, only to the historian. That movement is now at an end, lingering only in a few odd places like England where, except for a few people like Hulme himself, we are customarily twenty years out of date. There is now a new and, I think, much more important tendency in painting and poetry, which will, in another ten years, be as well known in England as Epstein and cubism are now. (Sykes Davies 1935b: 87)

Thus Sykes Davies announced Surrealism's incipient emergence in Britain as the ultimate expression of the Romantic spirit. Although he did not explicitly oppose Hulme's system, Hugh Sykes Davies's programmatic texts reveal that, for him, Romanticism, even if humanistic in the sense that it draws attention to the *human*, could in no way be identified with Classicism. Furthermore, his Surrealist texts show that, by way of Hulme, Sykes Davies returned to a Worringerian position: he conceived of Surrealism as a form of primitive abstraction, and his Surrealist poetics was, for the most part, an exercise on abstract forms and patterns derived from the folk and oral tradition, which he filled with Surrealist automatic images, new mythologies and new meanings. Similarly, Charles Madge and Humphrey Jennings, by means of textual collage, would create new meanings by re-arranging pre-existing structures. Hence, through automatism and the liberation of repressed desires and fears within those formal frames, the British Surrealist poets connected with the collective unconscious in their attempt to come to terms with a terrifying world.

Although not all the British Surrealists were as concerned with form as Sykes Davies was, or resorted as systematically as he did to this form-content dynamics in their compositions, a certain *dread of space* does underlie their works. Worringer had associated this dread of space with the poet's capacity to experience beauty "in the life-denying inorganic" (Worringer 1997: 4), something which is clearly seen in the self-annihilating, suicidal

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[33] In an early study, *Form in Modern Poetry* (1932), Herbert Read confused the issue further by using the terms "organic" and "abstract" to designate the Romantic and the Classical tendencies respectively (Read 1938b: 19). Nevertheless, he soon adopted Worringer's original proposition about the *primitive* nature of modern art when he became a champion of Abstract art and, later, of Surrealism too.

and masochistic accounts of Romantic and Gothic tales. Moreover, in this regard, Hal Foster has noted the inherent paradox contained in the proposition that the impulse of self-preservation (preserving oneself from death), "has driven the modern toward the abstract and the inorganic" (Foster 2004: 135). From this, it can be seen that Worringer in a way was anticipating Freud's psychoanalytical thesis on the interaction of the impulse of self-preservation and the death drive, as explained in his essay *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920). Freud defends that "*The goal of all life is death*, and, casting back, *the inanimate was there before the animate*" (Freud 1922: 47) and that every living organism seeks to die "only in its own way" (i.e. not by external forces). From this Freud concludes that the instinct of self-preservation (mainly the sexual instinct, ruled by the pleasure principle) is in fact also a death instinct, a desire to return to the primordial state which is lifelessness. This desire materialises in a *compulsion to repeat*, to re-enact painful experiences either through recollection or in dreams. So, it is through Freud's theory, but through Worringer's too, that we can understand why British Surrealist writing, while trying to liberate desire and fulfil repressed wishes, simultaneously indulges in the reiteration of images that relive and revive unconscious fears and anxieties, in images that, in short, reproduce that *dread of space*. Thus, David Gascoyne's images are the product of a yearning for an unknown which might not exist, and whose bewildered search is as excruciating as it is ecstatic: this is a lack that is constantly performed in the very act of image-formation. Similarly, by means of repetitive and spiralling structures, Sykes Davies's texts indulge in metamorphosing images in which temptation is always associated with the desire to satisfy a self-annihilating drive, while in *Calamiterror*, George Barker once and again goes back to the moment in which he blinded his brother. This moment is relived through images in which the pleasure principle and the death drive collide: sex and death become identified at the exact instant in which the eye socket is penetrated. In the poem, destruction (of the eye, of Spain) and creation (of the poem) are inextricably linked in the act of reliving that moment.

As has been shown, the conflict between Romanticism and Classicism was central to the critical context in which Surrealism emerged in Britain. Especially through Hulme, but also through T.S. Eliot and Herbert Read, it shaped the directions that the British Avant-Garde movements and Modernism itself took in Britain. As Herbert Read pointed out, Surrealism resolved this conflict, not by establishing a synthesis of the two, but by altogether "liquidating classicism, by showing its complete irrelevance, its anaesthetic effect, its contradiction of the creative impulse" (Read 1971: 22-23). Read defined this numbing Classicism of decorum and precision as the expression of the inorganic, not in Worringer's sense, but in the sense that it

does away with everything that is *human* in poetic creation: the unconscious. Hence, the image, insofar as it represents the unmediated unconscious, becomes the most human element in Surrealist poetry.

1.2. Symbolism.

Another significant predecessor of Surrealism is Symbolism which, although a quintessentially French movement, was made available to an English-speaking audience through Arthur Symons's seminal treatise *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* (1899).[34] Symons's book, published the same year as Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams*, strongly influenced the poetry of several British poets, among whom T.S. Eliot and the Surrealists must be included. This is made clear in a recent and enlightening study on Symbolist art, in which Michelle Facos provides a definition of Symbolism which serves as a point of departure for my analysis of the Symbolist influence on British Surrealist writing. According to Facos, Symbolist artists and writers

> opposed Naturalism and advocated that works of art suggest ideas rather than describe appearances. They defined artists as gifted individuals, geniuses, who possessed a special capacity to discern and convey invisible realities. These realities were often accessed through the unconscious, particularly dreams. (Facos 2009: 9)

Likewise, Surrealism in general and British Surrealism in particular drew on the Symbolist conception of poetry as an irrational activity and of the writer as a sensitive individual capable of perceiving the connections between the real and the ideal. Baudelaire had given poetic form to this neo-Platonic vision of reality in a poem from *Les Fleurs du Mal* (1857) precisely entitled "Correspondences":

> La Nature est un temple où de vivants piliers
>
> Laissent parfois sortir de confuses paroles;
>
> L'homme y passe à travers des forêts de symboles
>
> Qui l'observent avec des regards familiers. (Baudelaire 1998: 18).[35]

However, in British Surrealist writing the image does not *suggest*, *symbolise* or *evoke*, but reveals and makes manifest ideas formed by unconscious repression (i.e. desires, fears and anxieties). Furthermore, for the British Surrealists, the poet or artist is also a genius, but this is a category which is not exclusive of the poet, but rather is inherent in the human condition: since the collective unconscious is, in principle, available to all, poets are only specialised

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[34] This was preceded only by a few articles on individual Symbolists and lectures by Paul Verlaine and Stéphane Mallarmé at Oxford and Cambridge.

[35] "Nature is a temple where living columns / sometimes utter confused words; / there man advances through a forest of symbols / that observe him with familiar eyes" (my translation).

craftsmen whose perceptiveness is only derived from praxis. Although characteristic of all British Surrealism, with the exception only of David Gascoyne, who was greatly influenced by the French Symbolists, this is especially seen in the works of the poets associated with Mass-Observation, Humphrey Jennings and Charles Madge. It is precisely from one of the predecessors of Symbolism, Lautréamont, that the Surrealists inherited a more *democratic* and inclusive concept of the poetic act: "Poetry should be made by all. Not by one" is the famous precept from *Les Chants de Maldoror* (1868) which the Surrealists hailed as a universal truth. Finally, British Surrealism's materialistic approach represents a progression from Symbolism's essentially idealistic stance: in Surrealism, the revelation of the mechanisms of unconscious repression allow for the questioning and reconfiguration of the mythologies which support the dominant ideology. So, the ultimate aim of the Surrealist exploration of the unconscious is to effect a change in society, something which was not collectively pursued by the Symbolists.

Surrealism inherits from Symbolism its understanding of the poetic drive as a universalising principle which may not be reduced to a particular language or country, to specific modes of expression (literature interacts with the other arts) or to generic considerations (the traditional distinction between poetry and prose is no longer valid in Symbolism and Surrealism). René Wellek establishes the chronological boundaries of Symbolism as "a trend in French poetry which we can trace back at least as far as Nerval and Lautréamont and follow at least as far as Claudel and Valéry" (Wellek 1984: 18). This demarcation necessarily includes the so-called *poètes maudits*, the most influential of the Symbolists in British Surrealism (Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Mallarmé, Verlaine, to whom Jean Moréas also refers in his 1886 manifesto "Le Symbolisme"): the Surrealists took from them their rebellious attitude to life as well as their concept of poetry, which is not devoid of a certain hermeticism. However, especially in Britain, the Surrealists rejected their excessively abstract concern with musicality and euphony and their often decadent and pessimistic outlook on life: the British Surrealists abandon euphony as a poetic parameter in their compositions (the Surrealist image emerges not from an aesthetic motivation, but from an unconscious one); also, they are vigorous in their outlook, and even when they exhibit a certain apocalypticism, it is always convulsive, anticipatory of revelation or revolution, rather than decadent.

The symbol in Symbolism is a Hegelian inheritance: it is the expression or sensuous representation of an Idea. In his manifesto "Le Symbolisme" Moréas states that:

la poésie symboliste cherche à vêtir l'Idée d'une forme sensible qui, néanmoins, ne serait pas son but à elle-même, mas qui, tout en servant à exprimer l'Idée,

demeurerait sujette. L'Idée, à son tour, ne doit point se laisser voir privée des somptueuses simarres des analogies extérieures; car le caractère essentiel de l'art symbolique consiste à ne jamais aller jusqu'à la conception de l'Idée en soi. Ainsi, dans cet art, les tableaux de la nature, les actions des humains, tous les phénomènes concrets ne sauraient se manifester eux-mêmes: ce sont là des apparences sensibles destinées à représenter leurs affinités ésotériques avec des Idées primordiales. (Moréas 1889: 33-34).[36]

In this conception of poetry as a form of mysticism (Moréas's "esoteric affinities"), the poetic symbol becomes also a sort of mystic symbol in the poet's search for the inexplicable (central to Gascoyne's poetry) or a totem that reveals an ancient truth (present in Penrose's images). Although the resemblances between the Symbolist ideal and *surreality* are clear, the Surrealists rejected the Platonic notion of "Idea" in favour of the concept of *image* (which agglutinates both symbol and idea, signifier and signified) as a psychological formation. Also, the term "Idea" in Symbolism remains vaguer and less graspable than in Surrealism, in which it acquires the quality of an unconscious desire or fear forced into repression by some external condition: by liberating this idea, the Surrealist image sets itself the task of correcting the external condition which lies at the core of the repression. It is in this sense that the image in Surrealism is therefore not only a form of expression and a mental activity, but a performative act in itself: it acts on the reality which it wants to change: as Roland Penrose stated, "That is why I am a surrealist. To experiment with reality" (Penrose 1938b: n.p.). Finally, the British critic and scholar Geoffrey Brereton provided a definition of the symbol which coincides with that of the image in Surrealism as the poetic unit in which "the separation between subject and object, the internal and external worlds" is abolished (in Wellek 1984: 26). This concept of the symbol as a form of epistemological *rapprochement* is also central to the Surrealist theory of the image. Nevertheless, and in spite of all these similarities, the Surrealists reject the Symbolists' excessive aestheticism, which, in spite of Moréas's Hegelian conception, tends to negate the ideological element in the formation of the symbol, or to consider it, in the Platonic essentialist line, as an unattainable absolute.

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[36] "Symbolist poetry endeavours to clothe the Idea in a sensuous form which, nevertheless, is not a goal in itself, but which, while helping to express the Idea, would remain subject to it. The idea, in turn, must not allow itself to be deprived of the sumptuous trappings of external analogies; because the essential character of symbolic art consists in never attaining the conception of the Idea in itself. Thus, in this art, the pictures of nature, the actions of humans, all the concrete phenomena, would not know how to manifest themselves: these are but sensuous appearances intended to represent their esoteric affinities with primordial Ideas" (my translation).

From a purely formal perspective, Surrealism also drew on and transcended a number of Symbolist discoveries. Free verse evolved into the Surrealist prose poem, used to a greater or lesser degree by all the poets in this study. In their works, poetic language is finally liberated from formal constraints and, whenever a recognisable, albeit not necessarily normative, formal pattern is used in British Surrealism, it is either to recover the incantatory and ritualistic rhythms of the oral tradition (Hugh Sykes Davies, Roland Penrose), to suit the unconscious and instinctive rhythms of the unconscious (George Barker), or to underscore a satirical or parodic content (Roger Roughton). Also, specific symbols later became Surrealist images.[37] For example, Roland Penrose associates the hair of a woman with the sky, rain and the colour blue in his visual poem book *The Road is Wider than Long* (1939), and in his Surrealist object *The Dew Machine* (1937), in which water filtering through funnels and ducts has turned the hair of an upside-down mannequin's head blue. This image was already present in Baudelaire's poem "La Chevelure" included in the 1861 edition of *Les fleurs du mal* (1857): "Cheveux bleus, pavillon de ténèbres tendues, / Vous me rendez l'azur du ciel immense et rond" (Baudelaire 1998: 50).[38] Moreover, in Penrose, as in Baudelaire, the otherwise hardly remarkable metaphorisation of the head as sky acquires the quality of the symbol, or the image, by virtue of the super-natural elements incorporated in the formulation. These would be elements above what is readily perceptible: the alchemical process in Penrose's dew-producing mechanism, and the suggestion of a transcendental reality in the shadows of Baudelaire's poem. Another example is the swan, a symbol dear to Baudelaire and Mallarmé, which also appears in George Barker's *Calamiterror* (1937). In Baudelaire's "Le cygne" (1861), the image of a lost swan makes the speaker think "À quiconque a perdu ce qui ne se retrouve / Jamais, jamais! à ceux qui s'abreuvent de pleurs / Et tettent la Douleur comme une bonne louve! / Aux maigres orphelins séchant comme des fleurs!" (Baudelaire 1998: 176).[39] This association of the swan with loss, pain, orphanage and hunger is weaved into the complex stanzas of *Calamiterror*, in which it becomes the ambivalent mother, the benevolent *she-wolf* of Baudelaire's poem, who nurses a myriad starving orphans (the fatherless offspring of a country at war, Spain) and the poet himself, symbolically disowned for a Cain-like sin which he has committed:

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[37] A detailed study of the images of Symbolism is provided in Louis Forestier's "Symbolist Imagery" (1984).

[38] "Blue head of hair, vault of extending darkness / You give me the azure of the vast round sky" (my translation).

[39] "Of those who have lost that which shall not be found / Never, never! Of those who drink and drown in tears / And nurse on Pain, a good she-wolf / Of emaciated orphans drying out like flowers" (my translation).

O my multitudinously feathered swan,

Gathering the souls like babes to the breast, my mother

World, murmuring the lark's lullaby and the whippoorwill's sorrow.

Bearing on your breast the burden of the thousand

Heaven feathers, move idly, move easily, sail like a song

Dipping your wild laboured breast in Time like Thames. (Barker 1937b: 41)

Thus, like the symbol in Symbolism, the Surrealist image effectuates an approximation, not only to the nature of reality, but to the collective unconscious too. Arthur Symons summed up this idea when he stated that, through the symbol,

We are coming closer to nature, as we seem to shrink from it with something of horror, disdaining to catalogue the trees of the forest. And as we brush aside the accidents of daily life, in which men and women imagine that they are alone touching reality, we come closer to humanity, to everything in humanity that may have begun before the world and may outlast it. (Symons 1958: 5)

Similarly, the Surrealist spirit was described in Britain as a disposition or an impulse that pervades the course of the history of literature; it is not a style or a school or an aesthetic system, but an attitude to life and art which, concerned with poetic creation as a biological faculty and the mechanisms of unconscious thought, is inherent in the human condition (Gascoyne 1935a: 25; Read 1971: 22; Sykes Davies and Read 1937: 48). In spite of Symbolism's excessively aesthetic and idealistic approach to poetic creation, which the British Surrealists rejected, it undeniably stands as one of the predecessors of the Surrealist poetics of the image in Britain.

1.3. Imagism.

Another obvious antecedent to Surrealism is Imagism. Imagism was initiated in the autumn of 1912 by Ezra Pound and Richard Aldington when, as legend has it, Pound used the epithet "Imagiste" to describe H.D.'s poem "Hermes of the Ways" (Lewis 2010: 274). The movement came into being under the auspices of T.E. Hulme's Poet's Club, and it was in fact from the literary discussions and meetings organised by Hulme that Pound drew the main tenets of the Imagist poetics that appeared in "The Imagist Manifesto" of 1913. Then followed Pound's anthology *Des Imagistes* (1914) and, in response to Pound's canon, Amy Lowell's *Some Imagist Poets* (1915). In a recent analysis of Pound's poetics, Ellen Stauder has suggested that one of Imagism's poetic achievements is the complete dissociation of the poet-maker, the mask fabricated in the text and the language of the poem "by insisting on the presentation and objectivity of the image and by doing away with a persona altogether in favor of the

presentation of an 'emotional and intellectual complex in an instant of time'" (Stauder 2010: 28). This is in fact Pound's definition of the image, which he provided in his cautionary notes to the initiated, "A Few Don'ts by an Imagiste" (1913), published in Harriet Monroe's *Poetry*:

> An 'Image' is that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time. [. . .] It is the presentation of such a 'complex' instantaneously which gives that sense of sudden liberation; that sense of freedom from time limits and space limits; that sense of sudden growth, which we experience in the presence of the greatest works of art. (Pound 1968: 4)

There are several elements in Pound's configuration of the image that surface from time to time in British Surrealist writing, such as the insistence on the objectivity of the image, which becomes dissociated from the poet-speaker by virtue of automatism; or the concept of the image as the presentation of a complex or conflict which eventually brings about liberation of some kind. However, in Surrealism, this complex is not emotional or intellectual, but psychical, which the image sets itself to resolve. As Herbert Read puts it, the Surrealists discard intellection and emotion in the formation of their images: "Surrealism is opposed to any intellectualisation of art –to any preference, that is to say, for rational as opposed to imaginative elements" (Read 1971: 61).

These questions aside, perhaps the only feature that can be used to describe the variegated canon of Imagist poetry is precision. Of the three tenets of Imagism published in *Poetry*, two of them are in fact instructions on how to apply precision to poetic creation: "Direct treatment of the 'thing,' whether subjective or objective" and "To use absolutely no word that does not contribute to the presentation" (Pound 1970: 83). Furthermore, in her preface to *Some Imagist Poets* (1915), Amy Lowell states that "concentration is of the very essence of poetry" (Lowell 1915: viii) and highlights exactness and precision as essential qualities of the image. Similarly, insofar as dream image is concerned, the Surrealist image is also characterised by concentration and definition: Surrealist theory and practice generally draw attention to the clarity and precision with which images are perceived in unconscious states. In this regard, Herbert Read states: "We all remark on the vividness of our dreams. Confusion there may be, but no vagueness or mistiness" (Read 1938d: 179). This is attested to by Salvador Dalí's miniature imagery and by the British Surrealists' concrete images introduced by the definite article:

> The gay paraders of the esplanade,
>
> The diamond harlequins, the acrobats,
>
> The gloriously lost in summer glades,

> The wanderers through the acropolis,
>
> The one who seek the times' shade
>
> Reclining by catastrophes,
>
> The figures of the downward grade:
>
> The gay shadows of the shade. (Barker 1937b: 9)

In relation to Imagism's poetics of concentration, Pound developed the concept of the "one-image poem" as "a form of super-position, [. . .] one idea set on top of another" (Pound 1970: 89). Although Pound's one-image poem is influenced by the concrete expression and brevity of the Japanese haiku, the kind of superposition to which he refers is also found in several examples of British Surrealist writing. For example, in the catalogue for the Surrealist Objects and Poems Exhibition, celebrated at the London Gallery in late 1937, an untitled poem by A.C. Sewter gives a Surrealist twist to Pound's concept:

> The dream: the mosquitos
>
> which slowly devour the green flesh
>
> of her ladyship, are unhappy
>
> on account of the unequal settlement
>
> of the explosives, and poison-gas. (The Surrealist Group in England 1937a: n.p.)

On the other hand, Hugh Sykes Davies's poems are instances of what may be called *extended* one-image poems. In them, several ideas overlap and are superimposed in the presentation of the image, a process of composition that Breton took from Freud's theory of condensation in dreams, but which was also available to the British Surrealists in Pound's Imagism.

In this regard, Pound contends that the image "is the furthest possible remove from rhetoric" (Pound 1970: 83), and with this statement, he asserted its pictorial (visual, spatial), rather than lyric (musical, temporal), quality. The same tendency to abstraction (i.e. a break from mimetic representation) underlies both tendencies, but whereas the former preoccupies itself with patterns of emotion, the latter engages in correspondences created by formal motivation only. Thus, Pound condemned the use of the image as rhetorical ornament:

> All poetic language is the language of exploration. Since the beginning of bad writing, writers have used images as ornaments. The point of Imagisme is that it does not use images *as ornaments*. The image is itself the speech. The image is the word beyond formulated language. (Pound 1970: 88).

Similarly, although in the realm of painting, Herbert Read complained that the Impressionists "have made painting an ocular exercise; a decorative variation on the data of physical vision. Against such an art it was necessary to protest; and the best protest [. . .] was the invention of

the collage by Picasso or Braque" (Read 1971: 62). Pound, who also supported the art of Picasso, used the analogy of painting when he stated that "The Image is the poet's pigment" (Pound 1970: 86). Following this analogy, it may be said that in Imagism, and in Surrealism too, the image is to the poem what colour is to the painter's canvas. This is most clearly seen in Penrose's postcard collages, in which the forms and images of the postcards are used to create patterns of colour. If a painting is an arrangement of lines and colours, then the poem is an arrangement of forms and images: that is, the image is the colour in the poem.

Pound also had his influences: he admired Dante's spatial conception of the image, and the synthetic forms of Oriental poetry; as he said, "A Chinaman said long ago that if a man can't say what he has to say in twelve lines he had better keep quiet" (Pound 1970: 88). On the other hand, he scorned Milton for his rhetorical excesses and, in this regard, he stated: "Rhetoric is the art of dressing up some unimportant matter so as to fool the audience for the time being. [. . .] Even Aristotle distinguishes between rhetoric, 'which is persuasion,' and the analytical examination of truth" (Pound 1970: 83). In a similar fashion, Surrealism also rejects rhetoric as a conscious artifice for its component of rationality. For the British Surrealists, especially for Roland Penrose and Charles Madge, rhetoric is a mechanism deployed by official discourse to mask the truth: the unconscious creates its own symbols and its own myths, without the need for conscious formal elaboration or rhetorical embellishment. Following Pound, and Hulme and Worringer before him, the image is for them, not an ornament, but the basic poetic unit, and this is an idea which undermines definitions of the poem based on prosody.

Regarding the meaning and interpretation of the image, Imagism was for Pound, not only a creative movement, but a form of literary and artistic criticism. In the same way, the need for a theoretical hermeneutics of the work of art or the poem lies at the core of Avant-Garde aesthetics, with its innumerable manifestoes and critical writings: the image does not exist on its own, but is accompanied by a set of theoretical parameters which aid the interpretive process. In Surrealism the image also becomes a hermeneutic tool, and the British Surrealists defended, in the face of constant attacks from the supporters of realistic modes of representation, the need for an interdisciplinary approach to the image. In a debate on Realism and Surrealism organised by the Artists' International Association on 16 March 1938, the British Surrealists advocated for communication among the arts, affirming that painting and poetry frequently offer critical commentaries on each other (Swingler 1938: 932).[40] Such

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[40] The Artists' International Association was a left-wing exhibiting society founded in London in 1933. The Surrealists joined it officially in 1936.

was the position upheld by Grace Pailthorpe too in her psychoanalytical experiments in painting and poetry, which she carried out with Reuben Mednikoff.[41]

Grace Pailthorpe was a British psychoanalyst who joined the Surrealist Group on the occasion of the 1936 International Surrealist Exhibition in London. Her approach to Surrealism was mainly scientific and therapeutic, and she used automatic painting and writing as part of her patients' treatment. In her article "The Scientific Aspect of Surrealism" (1938-1939) she considers the human demands for full expression as a biological necessity and sustains that behind the imagery of the work of art there is an unconscious fantasy-story which is discernible and intelligible (Pailthorpe 1938-1939: 10). The work of art thus requires psychoanalytical explanation, which often takes the form of discursive enunciation. Pailthorpe and Mednikoff found that dissimilar imagery in a person's drawings, paintings and poems reveals a recurrent unconscious content, and that each of these enhance or complement the others, offering interpretive keys. Paradoxically, they also realised that similar imagery in different people's works hardly accounted for equivalence in meaning or implication. Similarly, although decidedly not from a psychoanalytical perspective, Pound stated that

> Imagisme is not symbolism. The symbolists dealt in 'association,' that is, in a sort of allusion, almost of allegory. They degraded the symbol to the status of a word. They made it a form of metonymy. One can be grossly 'symbolic,' for example, by using the term 'cross' to mean 'trial.' The symbolist's symbols have a fixed value, like numbers in arithmetic, like 1, 2, and 7. The imagiste's images have a variable significance, like the signs a, b, and x in algebra. Moreover, one does not want to be called a symbolist, because symbolism has usually been associated with mushy technique. (Pound 1970: 84)

Even if he did not acknowledge it, Pound's statements are influenced by Freud's theories on dream symbolism, according to which the same elements in the manifest dream may hold various meanings in interpretation. Although in his *Interpretation of Dreams* (1900) Freud offered a tentative unifying interpretation of certain recurrent dream symbols, he sustained that the dreamer's associations and circumstances were necessary for dream interpretation (Davis 1973: 128). The Surrealist image, while not directly dependent upon external circumstance, can never be assigned a fixed value, and its significance is only realised in the

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[41] Analyses of Pailthorpe and Mednikoff's contribution to Surrealism in 1930s Britain are scant. See Nigel Walsh and Andrew Wilson's *Sluice Gates of the Mind: the Collaborative Work of Dr. Grace W. Pailthorpe and Reuben Mednikoff* (1998); also, Michel Remy's *Surrealism in Britain* (1999): 85-95; 205-208. There is also an unpublished PhD dissertation by Lee Ann Montanaro, *Surrealism and Psychoanalysis in the Work of Grace Pailthorpe and Reuben Mednikoff: 1935-1940* (2010, University of Edinburgh), which sheds some light on the nature of the relation between Pailthorpe, Mednikoff and Surrealism in Britain.

poem. Also, Surrealism privileges literalness over symbolic representation, and Pound had already affirmed that "the natural object is always the adequate symbol" (Pound 1968: 5):

In British Surrealism, the eye is, for example, an image which condenses a variety of meanings and associations. In David Gascoyne's poems, visual perception is disparaged in favour of other cognitive processes such as intuition and imagination: in "Three Verbal Objects" (1937), the human eye cannot register the funnel-like shape of "invisible monsoons" (Gascoyne 1988: 64); "feathery eyelids" prevent vision and allow for convulsive perception in "The Rites of Hysteria" (Gascoyne 1936d: 40); and "The Supposed Being" (1935) presents the description of an ideal woman whose eyes are engulfed and seared by closing eyelids and covering hands. This opens the path to oneirism and irrationality as new and truer forms of perception:

> Supposing the eyes
>
> Luscious in lashes and deep stained with sleep
>
> The eyes in the forehead like pools in the rocks
>
> And the turbulent sea approaching
>
> Shivering ravenous venomous scarred
>
> By the sharp-taloned claws of its waves
>
> As eyes by their ravaging lids
>
> As their lids by the richly veined hands
>
> That are burnt by the light of the sun
>
> And the stones are on fire
>
> And the pupils of eyes are glazed by the
>
> Heat of their flames. (Gascoyne 1988: 62)

In Gascoyne's poems, one of which he even entitled "The Truth is Blind" (Gascoyne 1936d: 26-27), a new reality emerges as vision is obliterated. Contrariwise, in Roland Penrose's images, visual perception is always associated with imaginative freedom. A paradigmatic example of this is his poem book *The Road is Wider than Long* (1939), which combines photographs, poems, drawings and a variety of typographical features in order to aid his search for the poetic truth: Penrose, being a painter, accessed the unconscious through visions rather than words. In his poems, the eye incorporates notions of uncorrupted freedom and unrestrained wildness: "there are sixteen children / swinging on my eyelids" (Penrose 2003: n.p.); "a flight of pigeons lifted from her eyes" (Penrose 1936d: n.p.). Of all the British Surrealist compositions, George Barker's *Calamiterror* (1937) is the richest in terms of eye imagery. This is so because, as will be seen, it is precisely the blinding accident that lies at the core of the

process of composition of the poem. In the following image, the eyeball, already dissociated from the face, condenses a series of meanings, from pierced vision to anal penetration, from emasculation to Fascist alienation: "Under his lid the stalactite tear forms, / Pointing to sorrow wherever his eyeball veers" (Barker 1937b: 15). However, the eye is only one of many images that take on a variety of connotations in Surrealist poetry and, as we have seen, this type of treatment suggests a link with earlier Imagist poetry.

Although the British Surrealists tended to minimise the extent to which they were part of a distinctively Anglo-American literary Avant-Garde, the points of convergence between Imagism and Surrealism reveal that the former's influence on the latter was greater than they were willing to acknowledge. However, points of divergence are found too. One of Pound's most lauded Imagist poems presents a vision of modernity which relies on the juxtaposition of the natural and the mechanical for its effect: "The apparition of these faces in the crowd: / Petals on a wet, black bough" (Pound 1970: 89). In contrast, Humphrey Jennings's images of the machine (not the metro, as in Pound's poem, but the locomotive), recreate a myth of industrialism in which primitivism and technology, atavism and futurism, intuition and reason merge in a very *imagistic*, condensed, expression: "As we journey up the valley / Of the Connecticut / The swift thought of the locomotive / Recovers the old footprints" (Jennings 1939b: 7). Finally, the concise expression of the Imagist is at times surpassed by the naïve simplicity and clarity of the Surrealist, as in the following fragment from Penrose's *The Road is Wider than Long* (1939):

> The Macedonian whose flute kills
>
> stands everywhere
>
> his bears will dance
>
> they forget the dust for a little music
>
> the Macedonian will be able to buy
>
> a pair of gold eyes for his bride. (Penrose 2003: n.p.)

Compare this with the following fragment from Amy Lowell's "The Travelling Bear" (1915):

> And over the cobblestones,
>
> Square-footed and heavy,
>
> Dances the trained bear.
>
> The cobbles cut his feet,
>
> And he has a ring in his nose
>
> Which hurts him;
>
> But still he dances,

> For the keeper pricks him with a sharp stick,
>
> Under his fur. (Lowell 1915: 84)

In spite of the similarities between both fragments, Penrose's remains the most accomplished, and the one that exemplifies best Lowell's own definition of the image, even if Penrose never acknowledged Imagism as an influence on his poetry.

In a short space of time, Imagism in Britain soon developed into Vorticism; this would also play a central role in the configuration of the image in British Surrealist writing, and the following section is devoted to it.

1.4. Vorticism.

Vorticism, the only original British Avant-Garde movement, was founded in 1914 by Wyndham Lewis with the creation of the Rebel Art Centre and the publication of the first issue of the Vorticist journal *Blast*.[42] Influenced by Hulme's (deliberate) misreadings of Worringer, its emergence responded to an express desire to antagonise the Bloomsbury atmosphere that pervaded the London art scene, still under the spell of Roger Fry's teachings on post-Impressionism. The movement was interested in the modern tendency to abstraction which characterised the geometrical forms of Cubism, and it opposed Romanticism and sentimentality in art and poetry as forms that precluded any approximation to the truer, abstract, nature of the image. Although it is generally claimed that Vorticism was a combination of Italian Futurism and German Expressionism, Lewis tried to establish a distinct British movement which rejected the impressionistic character of Futurism and the static simultaneity of Expressionism. As Miranda Hickman has rightly noted, Vorticism began as an artistic movement with painters such as Helen Saunders, Cuthbert Hamilton, Edward Wadsworth and William Roberts, and, as it evolved, it included other disciplines, such as sculpture (with Henri Gaudier-Brzeska and Jacob Epstein) and literature (with Ezra Pound and Wyndham Lewis himself) (Hickman 2010: 287). In literature, the movement adopted the tenets of Imagism, but also incorporated the concept of the vortex as the centre of its poetics.

Dissatisfied with the excessively pictorial, and therefore static, quality of Imagist poetry, the Vorticists attempted to energise the image by incorporating movement into it. Unlike the Futurists, they were not concerned with representing vertiginous acceleration or dynamism. Rather, they sought the exact point of stillness at which thrusting forces, experiences and concepts collide: that point became the centre or vortex of the image. In his

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[42] Of *Blast* only two numbers were issued, in 1914 and 1915 respectively. The second one was known as the "War Number". For an analysis of the historical and literary dimensions of the movement within Modernist poetics see Miranda Hickman's "Vorticism" (2010).

essay "Vortex" (1914), Pound defined it as "the point of maximum energy" (Pound 1914: 153), which is also a centre of "energetic and creative action" (Pound 1970: 92). Later, writing retrospectively about Imagism, he redefined the concept of the image in terms of the Vorticist aesthetic:

> The image is not an idea. It is a radiant node or cluster; it is what I can, and must perforce, call a VORTEX, from which, through which, and into which, ideas are constantly rushing. In decency one can only call it a VORTEX. And from this necessity came the name 'vorticism.' *Nomina sunt consequentia rerum*, and never was that statement of Aquinas more true than in the case of the vorticist movement (Pound 1970: 92).

In this regard, it should be noted that, in some cases, the image in Surrealism becomes a sort of vortex: a whirling and spiralling axis in which ideas are constantly condensed and displaced, as in George Barker's *Calamiterror* (1937), in which the instant of the blinding of the brother becomes the point of maximum still energy, a whirling vacuum into which "objects revolve, holding the man in place" (Barker 1937b: 36). However, the Surrealist image also departs from Pound's vortex in that, for Surrealism, the linguistic component of the image is always prior to the thing it represents. This will be seen more clearly in my discussion of the creative power of the word and the identification of signifier and signified in British Surrealist writing. At any rate, in a Vorticist poem, as Pound claims, "one is trying to record the precise instant when a thing outward and objective transforms itself, or darts into a thing inward and subjective" (Pound 1970: 89). With the exception of Sykes Davies and Penrose, who embraced Henri Bergson's concept of time as subjective *duration* developed in his study *Time and Free Will* (1889), the Surrealists shared the Vorticist view of the image as *instant*. This is very clearly seen in the poems of David Gascoyne, where revelation takes place in moments of convulsion, and in those of Humphrey Jennings, for whom the image is a moment of sudden illumination.[43] However, it is in their understanding of the relation between subject and object that Vorticism and Surrealism differ: whereas the latter privileges impression, or, as Pound would have it, *conception* and transformation, the former is concerned with expression and revelation. Aquinas's statement (*Nomina sunt consequentia rerum*), which Pound uses in his essay to explain the nature of Vorticist poetry, is reversed in Surrealism: *Res sunt consequentia*

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[43] But there are other influences too: whereas Gascoyne's concept of the image as convulsive revelation is connected with Breton's notion of "convulsive beauty" (Breton 1964: 190), Jennings's is closer to Walter Benjamin's "profane illumination" (Benjamin 1999: 209). This will be seen in more detail in the sections devoted to these poets.

nominum.[44] Vorticism aims at bringing language closer to reality; Surrealism liberates the poetic word from all reference to the *thing*, because it may be said to be the *thing* itse.

One of the most interesting aspects of the Vorticist creed is its emphasis on individuality as a form of reaching collectivity, a paradox inherent in a very British attitude to the role of the artist in society that the Surrealists inherited two decades later. In his manifesto "Long Live the Vortex!" (1914), Wyndham Lewis stated:

> Blast will be popular, essentially. It will not appeal to any particular class, but to the fundamental and popular instincts in every class and description of people, TO THE INDIVIDUAL. The moment a man feels or realizes himself as an artist, he ceases to belong to any milieu or time. Blast is created for this timeless, fundamental Artist that exists in everybody. (Lewis 1914: 7)

Furthermore, in their fascination with mechanisation and industrialism the Vorticists found a way in which the collective could be realised in the individual. They developed a sort of *technological primitivism* which transcended the Futurist ideal of acceleration and allowed them to create a mythology of origin in which modernity and instinct, machine and nature, were reconciled. This mythology of origin would be further developed by Humphrey Jennings in works like *Pandaemonium* (collected in the 1930s, published posthumously in 1985) and his collagistic reports on the industrial revolution. Meanwhile, in their "Manifesto II" (1914), the Vorticists praised the industrial creativity of England as the link that connects past and future, primitivism and modernity:

> Machinery, trains, steam-ships, all that distinguishes externally our time, came far more from here than anywhere else. In dress, manners, mechanical inventions, LIFE, that is, ENGLAND, has influenced Europe in the same way that France has in Art. [. . .] Machinery is the greatest Earth-medium: incidentally it sweeps away the doctrines of a narrow and pedantic Realism at one stroke. [. . .] It cannot be said that the complication of the Jungle, dramatic tropic growths, the vastness of American trees, is not for us. For, in the forms of machinery, Factories, new and vaster buildings, bridges and works, we have all that, naturally, around us. (Lewis et al. 1914b: 39-40)

On the other hand, in "Manifesto I" (1914) they blessed England, "industrial island machine, pyramidal workshop" (Lewis et al. 1914a: 23-24). This context of Britain as the place where the connection between the individual and the collective occurs is summed up by Hal Foster: "this

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[44] "Things are the consequences of naming" (my translation). Precisely, Jacques Lacan stated that "*Nomina non sunt consequentia rerum*" in a 1978 article of the same title.

bounded British island, efficient like a machine, hierarchical like a workshop, is a figure for Lewis of a new collective ego" (Foster 2004: 128).

However, this relation between the individual and the collective takes on an unusual turn in Wyndham Lewis's writing: modelled on the Nietzschean superman and the Freudian super-ego, this collective subject was eventually assimilated in a Fascist ideal of biological supremacy. For Herbert Read, this was only an indication that Lewis "suffered from a disastrous form of individualism" and that he lacked "social coherence" by failing to establish some kind of "mutuality" between art and society (Read 1971: 60). Moreover, it was this progressive support of Fascism which led the Surrealists to a definitive dismissal of the former masters of Vorticism (Pound, Lewis and also Eliot).[45] With regard to this, Miranda Hickman has recently argued that

> Pound's increasing investment in Mussolini's fascist Italy in the 1930s was importantly informed and strengthened by his belief that in the visual culture of Italy around him, he discerned signs of a resurrection of the vorticist project. The visual forms Pound witnessed, for example, at the massive 1932 exhibit, the *Esposizione del Decennio*, organized by Mussolini's Italy to commemorate the regime's first decade and persuade spectators of fascist Italy's might, bore significant resemblance to those in which he had been immersed through vorticism: the bold, sans-serif, enormous lettering of 'DUCE' on the exhibition's wall, the whirling, dynamic, masculine heroic action suggested by its collage and montage effects, and the multimedia extravaganza the exhibition displayed, provided Pound with ample evidence that the vorticist ideal was being realized in a new form. (Hickman 2010: 294)

The Surrealists, on the other hand, were convinced pacifists who rejected all forms of military action, and only eventually embraced war strategically, in order to expose the feigned pacifism of the British Government in the context of the Spanish Civil War and its implementation of the Non-Intervention Agreement.[46] The differing attitudes of Vorticists and Surrealists regarding war found expression in the precise and geometric images of the former, which contrasted with the often fluid, metamorphosing and oneiric images of the latter. Vorticism sought the vortices of modern civilisation in the precision and clarity of the Renaissance; Surrealism sought the liberation of the unconscious in the irrational Romantic imagination.

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[45] When asked by the communist journal *Left Review* to "take sides" on the Spanish Civil war, both Ezra Pound's and T.S. Eliot's replies appeared under the generous heading of "Neutral?": Eliot decided to "take no part in these collective activities", whereas Pound called Spain "an emotional luxury" for dilettantes (*Left Review* 1937: 15). Before that, Pound had already attacked the Surrealists for their empty revolutionary discourse (see pages 478-481 of the section devoted to Roger Roughton).
[46] See pages 164-173.

2. Psychoanalysis and the Dream Image.

The Surrealists' belief in the central position of the unconscious and the imagination in the creative act makes an analysis of the relation between psychoanalysis and the Surrealist image fundamental. This section focuses on this particular aspect of Surrealism, drawing attention to the conception of the Surrealist image as a form of dream image intended to fulfil unconscious wishes by liberating desire. This liberation of unconscious desire was for the British Surrealists (especially for Sykes Davies, Gascoyne, Barker and Penrose) one of the aims of Surrealist writing. The other aim was, as will be seen in the following chapter, to broaden awareness of material reality.

When asked to interpret the dreams of several artists included in Breton's *Les Vases Communicants* (1932), Freud replied that "a mere collection of dreams without the dreamers' associations, without the knowledge of the circumstances in which they occurred, tells me nothing, and I can hardly imagine what it could tell anyone" (in Davis 1973: 128). But, in spite of his attempts to dissociate himself from the activities of the Surrealist Group (the Surrealists' reverence for Freud was not reciprocated), Freud's theory on the nature of creative writing in its relation to the dream-work was used by the Surrealists to substantiate their claim of automatism as the artistic manifestation of the unconscious. Freud approaches the question of poetic inspiration, its nature and sources in his essay "Creative Writers and Daydreaming" (1908). By presenting Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* (1516) as both an example of creative imagination and of the rearrangement of pre-existing fabled material, Freud's essay points to a tension which would become central to later debates on Surrealist automatism.[47] This tension, which is inherent in Surrealist theory and practice, is concerned with the mechanisms of poetic inspiration and the materials of poetic creation, and it presents the image as both an automatically generated trope and/or as a ready-made concept or *objet trouvé*.[48] Freud already pointed towards this when he stated that "We must separate writers who, like the ancient authors of epics and tragedies, take over their material ready-made, from writers who seem to originate their own material" (Freud 1998: 486). This is the familiar distinction between the Classical writer and the Romantic writer. As far as this is concerned, the British

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[47] This tension was already anticipated by Cardinal Ippolito d'Este when, on account of the originality of Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*, he paradoxically retorted: "Where did you find so many stories?" (in Freud 1998: 483n). Loosely drawing on a wide variety of sources, among which Ariosto's work is found, while simultaneously characterised by unlikely images, British Surrealist writing exemplifies this tension.

[48] The *objet trouvé*, or found object, was for the Surrealists the materialisation of the finder's unconscious desire: "The finding of an object serves here exactly the same purpose as the dream, in the sense that it frees the individual from paralyzing affective scruples, comforts him and makes him understand that the obstacle he might have thought unsurmountable is cleared" (Breton 1987: 32).

Surrealists defended the Romantic heritage of Surrealism: they resorted to automatism, unconscious association, the simulation of madness and other trance-inducing techniques as image-making mechanisms in their compositions; David Gascoyne, George Barker and Roger Roughton are examples of this. In fact, the first Surrealist image was of an unconscious nature, which made itself available to Breton in the state of trance that occurs between vigil and sleep: "There is a man cut in two by the window" (Breton 1972: 21). However, the Surrealists also made frequent use of ready-made material in the construction of their images, and it is in these instances in which the image is an already-existing visual, linguistic or ideological entity waiting to be *found* by the poet. The use of this kind of image gives rise to works in which the possibilities of the Surrealist image, its collagistic, fragmented and alienating character, become clear. This is the case, for instance, of Hugh Sykes Davies, Charles Madge and Humphrey Jennings, who make use of pre-existing material in their texts.

In both instances, whether through automatism or through the *objet trouvé*, the automatic genesis of the image is made patent, and Herbert Read explained this by pointing to the creative element inherent in the process of finding and selecting:

> If I am walking along the beach and my eye catches a sea-worn and sun-bleached knot of wood whose shape and colour strongly appeal to me, the act of identification (which may in any case have a psychological explanation) makes that object as expressive of my personality as if I had actually carved the wood into that shape. Selection is also creation. (Read 1971: 64)

What is at stake then when considering the Surrealist image is not only its material (or immaterial) sources, but also the ways in which Surrealist writers negotiated the tensions between unconscious desires and preoccupations and how they might manifest themselves as well as new juxtapositions and associations of ready-made material in order to create new realities, new mythologies and new meanings through their images. This is attested to by the very nature of the term "image", which incorporates notions of originality (image as trope) and, etymologically, of mimetic reproduction (image as *imitation*).[49] In his poem *Comme deux gouttes d'eau* (1933), Paul Éluard objected "to the love of ready-made images in place of images to be made" (Ernst 1976: 180), in a way that underscores this tension, inherent in the Surrealist aesthetics, between the image conceived as creation (the result of a spontaneous flow of uncontrolled thought) and the image as revelation (the result of an unconscious

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[49] Latin *imago* derives from *imitari* meaning "to copy, to imitate". Compare this to the Greek term *metaphor*, meaning "to transfer". I deal further with the automatic nature of literary collage on pages 214 and 531-534.

process of finding, or of an automatic process of rearrangement of pre-existing material). Hence, the Surrealist image partakes of these two qualities which grant it the condition of being both an already made entity and an entity in the making.

Returning to Freud, his psychoanalytical approach to the nature of creative writing actually anticipates Breton's own position: tracing imaginative activity to childhood, Freud's notion that "every man is a poet at heart and that the last poet will not perish till the last man does" (Freud 1998: 483) resembles Lautréamont's dictum that "Poetry should be made by all" (Lautréamont 1965: 333), which the Surrealists eagerly embraced. Freud's and Lautréamont's statements imply that poetry is inherent in the human condition and that, as such, it is a collective act. Furthermore, for Freud, the daydreams of the adult and the fantasies created in the work of art or the poem are a surrogate for play in infancy. Hence, adult daydream and child play originate from our dissatisfaction with reality and in them large amounts of libido energy are invested in order to correct it: this is the wish that daydream and play are intended to fulfil. So, in the Freudian system of thought, human activities such as play, fantasy and literary creation are wish-fulfilling activities of this kind: they are attempts to correct a reality which clashes with or represses the unconscious drives of the *id*, drives which generally respond to the dictates of the pleasure principle. In the same way, the Surrealist image is a psychological construction that serves this purpose and, accordingly, for David Gascoyne (who belonged to the first, more Freudian or intuitive, line of Surrealism), image-formation is not a means of expression, but rather an activity of the mind.

So, the Surrealist image functions like a dream image but, in the dream-work, images are not created *ex nihilo*; they are residues of waking life that have been re-arranged. However, latent dream thoughts are not expressed directly in dreams: the governing ideas and concepts that appear in dreams are distorted by the censorial ego, which, bound by the reality principle, invests some of its energy in repressing the wish that the dream sets out to fulfil. From this perspective, dream images are therefore distorted representations of the fulfilment of a wish. Freud also outlines the mechanisms through which distortion occurs in the dream-work (condensation and displacement) in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900). Condensation consists of the amalgamation of concepts or ideas within a single element in the manifest dream, whereas displacement constitutes a side-stepping manoeuvre, by means of which the focus of the dream thought is deferred in the decentring movement of the dream. In these ways, the essential symbols of the dream evince the wishes that it is set to fulfil. Through condensation, those symbols are brought together forming a unit: the underlying wish or desire is expressed in that symbolic unit in the manifest dream. Moreover, the symbols are

displaced onto obscurely related ideas or images that require decoding, delaying meaning and therefore understanding. Hence, the dream simultaneously condenses and displaces what it struggles to make manifest, its object of desire. This double movement also takes place in the production of the Surrealist image, dream images and literary images sharing a common mechanism. Graham Frankland states that Freud's *a priori* assumptions of the dream were literary long before they were scientifically justified as psychological processes (Frankland 2000: 128). Similarly, Herbert Read considers that "poetic inspiration has an exact parallel in dream-formation" (Read 1971: 66), and Lacan points to the relation between the dream-work and poetic creation in considering condensation as an essentially metaphoric process, and displacement as primarily metonymic in nature (Lacan 1998: 1055). As we can see, the origins and mechanisms of the Surrealist image resemble those of the dream image: in many cases, they are both distorted representations of a wish which deploy condensation and displacement in order to make available some latent or repressed content. The ideological implications of this are not negligible, for, through this process of making available repressed content, awareness of the mechanisms of repression which are at work in society is made possible: for the British Surrealists, who were also materialists (in the Marxist sense of the term), the liberation of the unconscious has an effect on social consciousness, because for them what is repressed is precisely awareness (through the authoritative discourse of dominant ideologies). This was the position adopted by Penrose, Roughton, Jennings and Madge, for whom Surrealist writing was a form of expanding consciousness (which was, necessarily, *class* consciousness).

Regarding the nature of the Surrealist image as both a verbal *and* a visual entity (to which I have referred briefly before), in his essay "Freud and the Scene of Writing" (1966), Derrida deals with Freud's model of psychical writing, which he describes as "irreducible to speech" (Derrida 1972: 88). From this perspective, the dream image and, by extension, the Surrealist image, cannot be reduced to a discursive form. Although Frankland argues that Freud's hermeneutic of the dream is interspersed with literary associations, being in itself a form of literary criticism, these assertions can only be upheld if "poetry" and the "poetic" are understood, not so much in purely linguistic terms, but in a wider Romantic (also Surrealist) sense: for the Surrealists, poetry is not a form of expression, but a creative activity of the mind which can take a variety of forms (writing, drawing, painting, and so forth). Even if Freud placed great emphasis on the linguistic configuration of the manifest dream (the psychoanalytical method being in essence a *talking cure*) the strongly visual character of the dream cannot be denied. In this, too, the Surrealist image also resembles the dream: the

Surrealist image is not merely a verbal image, which would only require verbal or intellectual dexterity to be successful. The Surrealist image is *translatable* from one *poetic* language to another and, indeed, from one tongue to another, not confining the Surrealist poetic revolution to a restricted politico-geographical demarcation: the possibilities of language for the Surrealists are universal in a way that anticipates later models of linguistic universalism.[50] Hence, some poems in British Surrealism are poetic renderings of paintings, or find correspondences in them. For example, David Gascoyne's poem "The Very Image" (1936), which he dedicated to René Magritte, evidences the visual character of the Surrealist image:

> An image of my grandmother
>
> her head appearing upside-down upon a cloud
>
> the cloud transfixed on the steeple
>
> of a deserted railway station
>
> far away
>
>
> An image of an aqueduct
>
> with a dead crow hanging from the first arch
>
> a modern-style chair from the second
>
> a fir tree lodged in the third
>
> and the whole scene sprinkled with snow
>
> [. . .]
>
> An image of the painter
>
> with his left hand in a bucket
>
> and his right hand stroking a cat
>
> as he lies in bed
>
> with a stone beneath his head. (Gascoyne 1988: 48)

The visual nature of Gascoyne's automatic images relies on the effects of the striking juxtapositions and unlikely associations that are also found in Magritte's paintings. Indeed, Gascoyne himself stressed that, prior to writing this poem, he did not have a predetermined idea of the kind of images that would appear, and nevertheless later realised that to each stanza the title of one of Magritte's paintings could be attributed (Gascoyne 1988: xvi). The effects of both Gascoyne's and Magritte's images (verbal and pictorial images, respectively)

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[50] For example, Noam Chomsky's model of Generative Grammar in *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax* (1965).

are similar in their *short-circuiting* of logical thinking, which enables a distinct form of apprehension of reality not mediated by reason.

The automatic or unconscious genesis of the Surrealist image means that, depending on the moment of revelation, it is made available to the artist/poet in either a verbal or a visual form, which implies that it is also *translatable* from one mode to the other.[51] Hence, Breton's first Surrealist image was verbal, "so clearly articulated that it was impossible to change a word, [. . .] a phrase" (Breton 1972: 21). Nevertheless, the unequivocal nature of the phrase could only be corroborated by its being accompanied by "the faint visual image of a man walking cut half way up by a window perpendicular to the axis of his body" (Breton 1972: 21-22). As Breton acknowledged, the verbal insistence of the phrase was only due to his condition as a poet, emphasising the revelatory and visionary character of the Surrealist image. In a footnote to this passage, Breton added that

> Were I a painter, this visual depiction would doubtless have become more important for me than the other. It was most certainly my previous predispositions which decided the matter. Since that day, I have had occasion to concentrate my attention voluntarily on similar apparitions [. . .]. With a pencil and white sheet of paper to hand, I could easily trace their outlines. [. . .] I could thus depict a tree, a wave, a musical instrument, all manner of things of which I am presently incapable of providing even the roughest sketch. I would plunge into it, convinced that I would find my way again, in a maze of lines which at first glance would seem to be going nowhere. And, upon opening my eyes, I would get the very strong impression of something 'never seen.' (Breton 1972: 21n)

As will be seen, Breton's concern with language is not only formal. His references to "unrestricted language" (Breton 1972: 33) or "spoken thought" (Breton 1972: 23) are a Freudian inheritance, and his use of the term "language" generally suggests a poetic form which is not restricted to the linguistic: "a universal language" (Breton 1972: 263) or "a new language" (Breton 1972: 220). When Walter Benjamin states that in Surrealism "language

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[51] Of course, the verbal and visual modes are not the only ones through which Surrealist images may be made available. However, it must be noted that Breton was extremely suspicious of other modes of expression, especially of music. In this regard, Roland Penrose recalls the time when E.L.T. Mesens, who had started life as a musician, asked Paul Éluard if he might put some of his poems to music, to which Éluard replied: "Je vous conseille de mettre votre piano à queue dan le cul!" (Penrose and Young 1977: 5-6). Nevertheless, there have been great Surrealist composers (Erik Satie and Marcel Duchamp), and sculptors (Alberto Giacometti and Henry Moore), and Breton himself engaged in the creation of *tactile* objects. See Daniel Albright's *Untwisting the Serpent: Modernism in Music, Literature and Other Arts* (2000): 275-310; and Janine A. Mileaf's *Please Touch: Dada and Surrealist Objects After the Readymade* (2010).

takes precedence" (Benjamin 1999: 208), he uses the term "language" metonymically, referring to language as form, as opposed to its referentiality, his emphasis being as much on the visual as on the verbal (or aural): "language seemed itself only where sound and image, image and sound, interpenetrated with automatic precision and such felicity that no chink was left for the penny-in-the-slot called 'meaning'" (Benjamin 1999: 208). It is the image, the "snapshot" as he calls it, which makes up the Surrealist idiom, stressing the interconnection between the verbal and the visual. Symptomatic of this interrelation is Hans Arp's affirmation that it was during the Surrealist period that his investigations on the nature of artistic creation became unified in his poems and in his plastic creations (Arp 1972: 350), something which also occurs in Roland Penrose's *The Road is Wider than Long* (1939), where the visual and the verbal are combined for the creation of ideological content, as will be seen.[52]

Breton's foundational image of a man cut in two by a window anticipates and imposes an aesthetics of fragmentation on the Surrealist image which has ideological implications.[53] But this had yet another source: in a study of the Surrealist aesthetics of dismemberment, Amy Lyford explores the influence that Breton and Aragon's experiences at the hospital of Val-de-Grâce had in their construction of a Surrealist discourse of fragmentation and fracture.[54] According to Lyford, this discourse was used by the Surrealists to undermine the official rhetoric of regeneration and reconstruction promoted by the French Establishment in the years following the First World War:

> The fragments of soldier's bodies displayed at the [hospital] museum operated like parts of speech, with each body part conforming to the rules that bound the collection's discourse about social reconstruction. Val-de-Grâce shaped that discourse around the indisputable facts of the war while simultaneously transforming those facts (body parts) into embodiments of the state's commitment to social progress. Individual loss and suffering was replicated for the museum's audience as the grounds for collective regeneration. Yet somewhere between the facts of dismemberment and this rhetoric of reconstruction was the space of ideological construction, and it was this space that I imagine surrealism might have viewed as a vehicle for cultural critique. If progress was to be demonstrated using the bodies of French soldiers, could surrealism

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[52] For an analysis of the Surrealist image as a synthesis of the verbal and the visual, see J. H. Matthews's *The Imagery of Surrealism* (1977).

[53] The ideological dimension of the interaction between fragment and whole in British Surrealism is dealt with on pages 105-120 of this study.

[54] Breton and Aragon met while they were medical students at the Val-de-Grâce in 1917. The hospital also housed a museum, opened to the wider public in 1916, in which casts of soldiers' destroyed and reconstructed faces were shown in what for the Surrealists was a seemingly artistic fashion.

counter that proposal by showing how the body was being used to fabricate political consent? (Lyford 2000: 50-51)

Lyford suggests that the dynamics of fragmentation and reconstruction recreated at the Musée du Val-de-Grâce was one of the "primary aesthetic models" to which the founders of Surrealism were exposed: "What is significant about the museum of Val-de-Grâce for surrealism is the fact that the collection fabricated an iconography of reconstruction that was based upon the visual display of body parts" (Lyford 2000: 51). Whereas the collection at the museum implied a "return to order" (Lyford 2000: 52), the Surrealists' use of fragmentation and dismemberment implied, on the other hand, a return to disorder:

> Body parts had *already* been turned into aesthetic objects for national consumption by the early 1920s, although at Val-de-Grâce the body-in-pieces symbolized France's regeneration rather than its destruction. Thus surrealism's emphasis on dismemberment suggests a proposal to recast the state's rhetoric of reconstruction in language that reasserted the carnal horror of the war. (Lyford 2000: 52)

Because of this, Lyford considers Breton's first image as an example of this traumatised male body, the same fragmented body as it was presented at Val-de-Grâce, and she reads into it an ideological content, seeing in Surrealism's efforts to "expose the gaps in postwar narratives of reconstruction" an attack on the official accounts of scientific development and social progress (Lyford 2000: 53). Similarly, British Surrealist writing is full of images in which the body is fragmented and denaturalised, as fingers, hands, limbs and eyes are dissociated from their bodies. As will be seen, this propitiates a series of psychoanalytical readings, from castration anxiety and auto-erotic desire to self-annihilation and the obliteration of sensory perception. Through these, the dismembered body also becomes the site of ideological disruption and political struggle, as the British Surrealists used these images (which are also fragments in themselves) as a form of interruption of the homogenising discourse of dominant ideologies (capitalism, imperialism and Fascism).

Moreover, the Surrealist image is, even when not explicitly concerned with the physicality of bodies and body parts, fragmentary and alienating in nature: it is an image which presents itself in isolation or as part of a series of disconnected fragments that bear no relation to one another. Its alienating and defamiliarising power serves to unsettle our notion of external reality on the two grounds to which Benjamin referred, image and sound, by attacking its visual and aesthetic order and by subverting the rhetoric which supports it. Fragmentation is, then, a fundamental feature of the Surrealist image in content and in form which emerges as a natural result of the technique of psychic automatism: spatial juxtaposition in the dream

image finds correspondences in syntactic juxtaposition (syntagmatic level), whereas displacement is expressed in metonymic relations of absence and presence (paradigmatic level). In this way, the Surrealist aesthetics of dismemberment is based on a relation between the body and the part, the whole and the fragment, on this dynamics of absence and presence. Moreover, as an instrument for the scientific exploration of the unconscious, the Surrealist image also implies an exploration of antithesis and contradiction, very much in the fashion of Magritte's paintings, in which the dialectical relationship between fragment and whole is never static. The aim of this exploration is to unearth the hidden relations that emerge in this dialectical deferral, and which are not available at a conscious level.

Along these lines, in an essay on Freud and literature, Lionel Trilling states that "the common characteristic of both Freud and Romanticism [is] the perception of the hidden element of human nature and of the opposition between the hidden and the visible" (Trilling 1947: 183), an idea which also appears in Breton's Hegelian conception of Surrealism in the "Manifesto": as a philosophical system, he argues, Surrealism "is based on the belief in the superior reality of certain forms of previously neglected associations" (Breton 1972: 26). This establishes the principle of unexpected association as central to the Surrealist system of *un-thought*: this superior reality is the unity in which the body and the part are reunited. In this regard, Herbert Read privileges the poetic value of condensation and synthesis over displacement and fragmentation:

> It is possible that in the integral dream –the dream as entire myth rather than as a series of fragmentary symbols- the work of synthesis is already done. In most dreams we find elements that are merely the casual residues of the day's anxieties; but we find also the day-world transformed, and occasionally this new reality presents itself to us as a poetic unity. (Read 1971: 65)

However, we will see how this *poetic unity* is at once sought and disrupted in British Surrealist writing, where the tension between fragment and whole is irreducible: the creation of this *new reality* (which implies notions of coherence and completeness) is constantly interrupted, because the new myths of Surrealism are, as opposed to the totalising myths of Fascist ideology, in themselves fragmented. In a way, this is related to Magritte's explanation of *The Red Model* (1935) in terms of hybridization and the psychosocial tension that emerges between fragment and whole in this painting.[55] In *The Red Model*, he states,

> the image starts by being a foot, and ends up, through a process of hybridization, with the properties of a boot. The problem of boots demonstrates how the most barbaric

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[55] Magritte's painting was used as the front cover of the 1971 edition of Herbert Read's *Surrealism*.

things pass as acceptable through the force of habit. One feels, thanks to *The Red Model* that the union of a human foot and a leather shoe arises in reality from a monstrous custom. (in Gablik 1970: 124)

Thus, the Surrealist image enables an awareness of a reality which has remained unquestioned, and this is, in fact, a metonymic relation: the disintegrated body (political, moral, ideological, aesthetic) being the absent reality to which the Surrealist image-fragment points. However, this relation can only be described as unstable, and hence the constant ambiguity that pervades Surrealist imagery, and the difficulty of its interpretation. As it is stressed at different points throughout this study, it is in this ambivalence that the disruptive power and ideological significance of the images of British Surrealism lies.

The question of interpretation and meaning of dream images was also addressed by Freud. As he insisted when asked to interpret the Surrealists' dreams, it is necessary to deal with the circumstances, the processes and the relations. Since condensation and displacement are central to dream distortion, no fixed meaning can be attached to a given element in the dream: there is no interpretive key to the unconscious. The decoding process is individual, the codes are particular, for it is context that grants meaning. For Derrida, "The absence of an exhaustive and absolutely infallible code means that in psychical writing, which thus prefigures the meaning of writing in general, the difference between signifier and signified is never radical" (Derrida 1972: 89).

We will return to the question of the relationship between signifier and signified in the Surrealist image, but suffice it to say for now that this relationship is at best described as problematic. Derrida goes as far as to say that if meaning is dependent upon context, then there are no proper signifiers, which is a partial re-elaboration of the Surrealist identification of signifier and signified in the Surrealist image, and of Lacan's assertion that the signifier is the *id*, as will be seen. But before that let us briefly broach the question of meaning and interpretation, for, if the image is, in Freudian theory, the fulfilled wish, then the image also presents an *idea*. In *The Conquest of the Irrational* (1935) Dalí explores the meaning of Surrealist images through an analogy with his own paintings:

The fact that I myself, at the moment of painting, do not understand the meaning of my paintings does not indicate that these paintings have no meaning: on the contrary, their meaning is so deep, complex, coherent, involuntary, that it escapes the simple analysis of logical intuition. For my paintings to be reduced to the level of common language, in order for them to be explained, they should be submitted to special analyses, preferably with a scientific rigor that should be the most ambitiously

objective possible. Any explanation appears, then, *a posteriori*, once the painting already exists as a phenomenon. (Dalí 1998: 265)

Thus, interpretation is not only possible, but desirable and even necessary. In "Surrealist Situation of the Object" (1935), Breton reminded his audience that not only poetry must be made by all, but also that it "must be understood by everyone" (Breton 1972: 262), a condition which warrants the interpretability of the Surrealist image as the fulfilment of an unconscious wish, the manifestation of repressed fears and anxieties or the correction of an unsatisfactory reality: this is the psychoanalytical theory of the Surrealist image. However, as has also been stressed, this has a not insignificant ideological import: the Surrealist image, conceived as the revelation of new and undiscovered associations, as a form of broadening awareness of material reality and as a fragment that constantly points to the gaps in the totalising discourse of dominant ideologies, is a concept that results from the Surrealists' application of Freudian theories on the liberation of the unconscious to Marxist materialism.

3. The Surrealist Image and the Revolution of the Wor(l)d.

In 1924, André Breton and several other writers, united by a common indignation at the signs of honourable respectability shown on the death of Anatole France, addressed an invective against the staleness and sterility, the "gilded mediocrity" to which the French language had been reduced (Breton et al. 1924: 23). In this collective text entitled "A Rotten Corpse" (1924), Pierre Drieu La Rochelle stated: "our piety remains with those who are dead so young, whose words were not left in their mouths like old lumps of sugar but were snatched from them in blood and foam" (Breton et al. 1924: 23).[56] For the Surrealists, words are not lumps of sugar, unless they are deceivingly made of marble and placed inside a cage enticing the viewer to lift it, unaware of its heaviness, as in Marcel Duchamp's *Why Not Sneeze, Rose Sélavy?* (1921); or unless they are ritualistically plunged into a glass of milk inside a woman's shoe by means of a symbolic mechanism, as in Dalí's *Scatological Object Functioning Symbolically* (1931). In "The Object in Surrealism" (1940), Conroy Maddox argued that Dalí's object-images reveal the marvellous by opening a gap in reality (Maddox 1940: 41). Similarly, the Surrealist image creates a fissure in rational logic, in the ideological *continuum* of authoritative discourse and, ultimately, in reality itself: this progression is seen in the images of all the writers analysed in this study. Thus, the revolution brought about by the Surrealist image was both a revolution of the *word* (a linguistic revolution against the stultified mediocrity of everyday expression and a literary revolution against mimetic representation),

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[56] The French writer Pierre Drieu La Rochelle (1893-1945), became associated with Surrealism in the 1920s.

and a revolution of the *world* (an ideological revolution to broaden awareness of reality and a political revolution for the establishment of a class-less society).

For Gerald Mead, the image is essentially a phenomenon of language (Mead 1978: 7), an idea which had been stressed by Breton in the "Manifesto of Surrealism" (1924):

> the realistic attitude inspired by positivism, from Saint Thomas Aquinas to Anatole France, clearly seems to me to be hostile to any intellectual or moral advancement. I loathe it, for it is made up of mediocrity, hate, and dull conceit. [. . .] It constantly feeds on and derives strength from the newspapers and stultifies both science and art by assiduously flattering the lowest of tastes; clarity bordering on stupidity, a dog's life. (Breton 1972: 6)

Related to this, prior to the publication of the "Manifesto", Breton wrote his essay "Introduction to the Discourse on the Dearth of Reality" (1924), published in English in *transition* in 1927. In it Breton discusses the political position of language in terms of syntagmatic relations that reflect the order of things:

> Words are likely to group themselves according to individual affinities, which generally have the effect of making them re-create the world each instant upon its old model. Everything goes on, then, as though a concrete reality existed outside the individual, -I might say, as if such reality were immutable. (Breton 1927: 140)

In this view, language constructs reality, being prior to it. The Biblical statement "In the beginning was the word" acquires then a new significance.[57] For Surrealism, in the beginning is the image, considered as a poetic revelation, and therefore as a linguistic phenomenon. For the Surrealists, in realistic representations of reality, the fixed syntagmatic relations that are established among words are responsible for the illusory immutability, and mediocrity, of our world: "Does not the mediocrity of our universe depend essentially upon our power of enunciation?" (Breton 1927: 140). Hence, Breton proposes a change in the linguistic model in order to rid language of its traditional responsibility –"this servitude", he calls it- to represent, to mimic, what lies beyond it. In so doing, language, far from becoming dissociated from reality (i.e. meaningless), acquires new and nobler functions in relation to it: "It is from [words that] we have acquired this taste for money, these constraining fears, this feeling for the native land, this horror of our destiny. I believe it is not too late to recoil from this deception, inherent in the words we have thus far used so badly" (Breton 1927: 140). A revolution of the word would thus necessarily entail a revolution of the material conditions which language itself conjures up. For the Surrealists, then, language is not only prior to ideas but universal as

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[57] John 1:1.

well.[58] Moreover, the Surrealist image is a universal concept which does not depend upon the particular symbolism of a given linguistic community, but on the linguistic constructions which create and support a given ideology. When Breton denounced the baseness to which the French language had been reduced, this was only a preliminary step towards a pan-linguistic revolution (Surrealism), for his condemnation of the ways in which enunciation was responsible for "the mediocrity of our universe" was in fact a reference to a Western capitalist scenario which transcended the French frontiers.

So, the Surrealist image reconciles the apparent contradiction between language considered as prior to ideas and a modifier of material conditions, and language as a universal entity. Besides this, the literalness of the Surrealist image is intimately connected with the linguistic and social revolution that Breton proposes: where there is no referent other than the word itself and language becomes self-referential, the poetic word is liberated from the servitude of mimetic representation, and from parochial symbolisms. Literalness is poetry's *non serviam*: a declaration that it will not conform to reality or its logic. In *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* (1936), I.A. Richards defined the two constituents of the metaphor as tenor and vehicle. Following this configuration, it may be said that in the Surrealist image the vehicle is all there is, and therefore so ends language's anchorage to external reality. Freed from the burden of external referentiality, poetic discourse regains its creative power. Reflecting on Remy de Gourmont's annotations to Saint-Pol-Roux in his anthology of French poetry, *The Book of Masks* (1921), Breton complained of Gourmont's anxiety to decode the poetry in Roux's language in order to obtain a language without poetry:

> A rather dishonest person one day, in a note contained in an anthology, made a list of some of the images presented to us in the work of one of our greatest living poets. It read: *The next day of the caterpillar dressed for the ball . . .* meaning *butterfly. Breast of crystal . . .* meaning *carafe*. Etc. No, indeed, sir. *It means* nothing of the kind. Put your butterfly back in your carafe. You may be sure Saint-Pol-Roux said exactly what he meant. (Breton 1927: 141)

This idea would later be echoed in David Gascoyne's review of Paul Éluard's *La Rose Publique*, in which he defends the universality of Éluard's Surrealist images: "Every line means exactly

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[58] This statement, paradoxical from a purely linguistic point of view, is nevertheless sustained in Surrealist theory by Breton's defence of the inherent translatability of the Surrealist image and his understanding of the revolution of the word as a pan-linguistic phenomenon. The theory of linguistic relativity, introduced by Edward Sapir and Benjamin Lee Whorf in the early decades of the twentieth century, is partly responsible for Derrida's arguments on the limitations of translation (Derrida 1972: 89-90). On linguistic relativity, see William A. Foley's *Anthropological Linguistics: an Introduction* (1997): 167-246.

what it says: thus imagery becomes completely free symbolism and refers to nothing but itself. This is a universal language, devoid of all particularities" (Gascoyne 1935h: 18).

It is the literalness of the Surrealist image that partly accounts for its universality. Yet, it would be necessary to explore the conditions that grant the Surrealist image this literalness. As we have seen from a psychoanalytical viewpoint, the Surrealist image is a form of dream image, and the fact that Breton asked Freud to interpret the images contained in *Les vases communicants*, together with the fact that Freud refused, is significant. For Breton's insistence on the translatability of the image also implied its interpretability. Unlike Freud, Breton believed that the Surrealist dream image could be interpreted regardless of external circumstances or relations, that it was, in fact, prior to ideas and above (that is, *sur*) reality: the image is universal, free from all symbolism and, therefore, literal. If the image is, as sustained above, the fulfilment of a wish or the manifestation of suppressed awareness, and since desire is a biological (i.e. universal) condition, one can only conclude that the Surrealist image is a collective occurrence. The technique used to achieve these collective images is, of course, automatism. Through the use of what he called "psychic automatism in its pure state" (Breton 1972: 26), Breton managed to redefine the terms in which the Freudian dream image was used by Surrealism.[59] Also, Read defended that only in a state of trance or automatism is the gap between experience (of the dream) and expression bridged (Read 1938d: 183). So, the unconscious genesis of the image is paramount in Surrealist theory: for example, the association of disparate realities is not a premeditated act. It does not imply action, but rather it is the result of the passive perception on the part of the writer of the spark created by the fortuitous collision of those two realities. The seemingly hazardous nature of the encounter and the writer's marvellous apprehension of it imply the materialisation of the laws of *hasard objectif*, according to which chance encounters represent the realisation of a universal law which responds to the secret dictates of unconscious human desire and necessity. In the Surrealist theory of objective chance, it is this unconscious necessity that brings those elements together, bridging the distance between subject and object, word and idea, the individual and surreality. Breton described this moment of unconscious revelation in which reason only has a recording function:

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[59] Although Breton's definition of Surrealism is widely known, a study of this kind would be incomplete without it. Breton defined Surrealism as "Psychic automatism in its pure state, by which one proposes to express –verbally, by means of the written work, or in any other manner- the actual functioning of thought. Dictated by thought, in the absence of any control exercised by reason, exempt from any aesthetic or moral concern" (Breton 1972: 26).

It is, as it were, from the fortuitous juxtaposition of the two terms that a particular light has sprung, *the light of the image*, to which we are infinitely sensitive. The value of the image depends upon the beauty of the spark obtained; it is, consequently, a function of the difference of potential between the two conductors. [. . .] Now, it is not within man's power, so far as I can tell, to effect the juxtaposition of two realities so far apart. The principle of the association of ideas, such as we conceive of it, militates against it. [. . .] We are therefore obliged to admit that the two terms of the image are not deduced one from the other by the mind for the specific purpose of producing the spark, that they are the simultaneous products of the activity I call Surrealist, reason's role being limited to taking note of, and appreciating, the luminous phenomenon. (Breton 1972: 37)

Breton thus conceived of the Surrealist image as a revelation of a superior reality, and it is interesting to note that in this excerpt he makes recurrent use of terms associated with illumination such as "light", "spark" and "luminous", much more in the sense of intellectual enlightenment than of vision. Similarly, in "Beauty will be Convulsive" (1934), Breton places beauty "Right at the very bottom of the human crucible, in that paradoxical region where the fusion of two beings who have really chosen one another restores to all things the lost colours of the time of ancient suns" (Breton 1936b: 37). This is a revelation in which the ego, bound by the reality principle, takes no part. In a lecture that Breton delivered in Prague in March 1935, "Surrealist Situation of the Object", he introduced the concept of "the image present to the mind" (Breton 1972: 260), which implies the *a priori* existence of the image, and even its being autonomous from the poet.[60] In his taxonomy of the different types of Surrealist image, Breton privileged the image which makes itself available to the poet in a state of trance and passive perception, its greatest virtue being "the one that is arbitrary to the highest degree" (Breton 1972: 38). It is, nevertheless, not arbitrary in the Saussurean sense, but rather in the Jungian manner of *synchronicity*, described as "the simultaneous occurrence of two meaningfully but

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[60] This form of a-priori collective image is what Carl Jung termed *archetype* or *primordial image* of the collective unconscious in his essay "Instinct and the Unconscious" (1919). In a lecture delivered in London, "The Concept of the Collective Unconscious" (1936), Jung distinguished the collective unconscious from the Freudian pre-conscious: "While the personal unconscious is made up essentially of contents which have at one time been conscious but which have disappeared from consciousness through having been forgotten or repressed, the contents of the collective unconscious have never been in consciousness, and therefore have never been individually acquired, but owe their existence exclusively to [biology]" (Jung 1990: 42). The archetypes are then pre-existing and universal forms lodged in the collective unconscious "which can only become conscious secondarily and which give definite form to certain psychic contents" (Jung 1990: 43).

not causally connected events" (Jung 2010: 25).[61] In this direction, borrowing this time from Pierre Reverdy, Breton provided a definition of the Surrealist image as

> a pure creation of the mind. It cannot be born from a comparison but from a juxtaposition of two more or less distant realities. The more the relationship between the two juxtaposed realities is distant and true, the stronger the image will be –the greater its emotional power and poetic reality (in Breton 1972: 20).

The similarities in their approaches are clear, especially their understanding that the distance that separates the juxtaposed realities is directly proportional to the poetic effect of their conjunction, and their rejection of the simile as a tentative and therefore incomplete form of union.[62] Nevertheless, there is an essential difference between Reverdy's conception of the image and Breton's later adaptation: for Reverdy the image implies creation, fabrication, whereas for Breton the image is passively perceived by the poet in a state similar to that of trance. It is not consciously created by the poet, but rather he is just a passive witness to an encounter which takes place in a unconscious state: it is in this sense that the images, not manipulated by conscious or rational skill exercised by the poet, are automatic. Breton emphasised the receptive state of the poet as mere spectator when he compared the Surrealist image to drugged-induced images: "It is true of Surrealist images as it is of opium images that man does not evoke them" (Breton 1972: 36). Also, quoting Baudelaire, he stated that the images come to the poet "spontaneously, despotically. He cannot chase them away; for the will is powerless now and no longer controls the faculties" (Breton 1972: 36).

It is here that automatism comes into Surrealist practice. It is a literary technique used by the Surrealist to deter any kind of intention to subject literary creation to the control of reason, moral mandates or aesthetic principles. The Surrealist image thus liberates the individual from these conventions: it is not a conscious literary artifice, and it does not respond to a desire to structure thought or to create a new mode of expression, even if these are also functions that the image unintentionally performs. Automatism is also a form of democratisation of the poetic act, and this is clearly seen in the works of Humphrey Jennings and Charles Madge, who make use of collage as a form of collective writing. Thus Breton urged writers to "Forget about your genius, your talents, and the talents of everyone else. Keep reminding yourself that literature is one of the saddest roads that leads to everything" (Breton 1972: 29). This sense of collectivisation was possible only insofar as the surreal encounter of

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[61] See Jung's *Synchronicity: an Acausal Connecting Principle* (1952).
[62] In his preface to the catalogue *Exhibition X . . . Y . . .* , dated April 1929 and reproduced in *What is Surrealism?* (1936), Breton announced that Surrealism had suppressed the word "like" (Breton 1936b: 25).

unconnected or dissimilar realities remained independent from the poet's will, who can only access it in a state of automatic trance. Therefore, automatic writing was seen by the Surrealists as the only path to complete arbitrariness in poetry, its "greatest virtue" in Breton's terms. Moreover, this arbitrariness responds, as has been suggested above, to an objective necessity. This form of unconscious motivation had already been explored in Freud's *Psychopathology of Everyday Life* (1901), where it was claimed that apparently mechanical and automatic acts are in fact motivated by a repressed desire in such a way that the unconscious enters the realm of the conscious; hence the relationship that is established in Surrealism between poetic creation, wish fulfilment, liberation of desire and social transformation. However, the Surrealist image is not the expression of a wish to transform reality, but a transformative act in itself: reality is transformed in the very act of *imaging*. That is, the Surrealist image, inasmuch as it is automatic, becomes a biological activity, like sex, death or defecation, an idea which is central to the Surrealist poetics of Hugh Sykes Davies and George Barker. However, what motivates the Surrealist image varies. In some cases, the Surrealist image serves the purpose of fulfilling a repressed desire; in some others, it is intended to resolve a psychical, spiritual, ideological or material conflict. Thus, David Gascoyne's poems utter a spiritual void which they intend to fill; George Barker's images indulge in the painful re-enactment of a psychological conflict which they aim to resolve; Hugh Sykes Davies's forms and Roland Penrose's myths intend to recover an absent past by making it present; Roger Roughton's poems attempt to transform spiritual uncertainty into ideological inevitability; finally, Humphrey Jennings's and Charles Madge's collective images are meant to give voice to the inarticulate masses. In the analysis of these writers' images, we will see the extent to which these conflicts are indeed resolved and how it is precisely through these attempts that reality is effectively transformed in British Surrealist writing.

Before this analysis of the Surrealist image as a linguistic phenomenon may continue, it is necessary to deal briefly with what is probably the most compelling critical problem posed by automatism. From a purely formal viewpoint, it has been generally argued in the criticism that the Surrealist image is not, in spite of its claims of irrationality and experimentation, as radical and ground-breaking as the syntactically innovative images of Futurism and the Dada movement.[63] J.H. Matthews states that the images of Surrealism, while escaping rational control, are "poetic statements which remain grammatically impeccable" (Matthews 1969: 56). This has been seen either as a lack of true commitment to the principles of pure psychic

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[63] See, for example, Gerald Mead's *The Surrealist Image* (1978): 63-64. Elza Adamowicz comments on this in *Surrealist Collage in Text and Image* (1998): 49-50.

automatism and unrestrained thought, that is, an evidence that irrationality cannot be induced and that *unreflexive* writing necessarily has a *reflexive* dimension (Jameson 1974: 101); or as a negation of the Romantic exaltation of the irrational, and an affirmation of the neo-Classical roots of Surrealism, especially of British Surrealism (Mengham 2004: 371).[64] Nevertheless, Breton's insistence that syntax should be observed rather responds to his conception of the automatic image as a primarily linguistic entity, which necessarily foregrounds the condition of language as prior to the idea, that is, of the unconscious being essentially linguistic in nature (Breton 1927: 141; Breton 1972: 41). In Breton's system, then, grammaticality and formal coherence are intrinsic features of Surrealist writing. In this regard, Elza Adamowicz has drawn attention to the radically subversive aesthetics behind the Surrealist preservation of syntax:

> The surrealists' use of syntax, far from being as negativist as that of the futurists or the Dadaists, is perhaps more perverse, for they seek to erode syntax from within by stretching its structures to the limit, rather than abolishing syntax altogether. Their practice might therefore be considered to be closer to that of Mallarmé than to the futurists or Dadaists. Surrealist syntax minimises or perverts normative connections between constituent discursive units, and it does this in two opposing ways, by adopting paratactic or hypotactic strategies. On the one hand, the use of minimal syntactic links and of different typefaces, or the combination of iconographic and verbal elements, allows discursive or figurative units to clash more forcefully, conferring on the text a spatiality which disrupts the temporality of syntax, while still ensuring its readability. On the other hand, the use of fixed syntactical frames, as in surrealist games (where syntax is aggressively foregrounded), presents an overt frame lending an apparent formal cohesion which contradicts the semantic anomalies of the collage elements. (Adamowicz 1998: 49-50)

This is the case too in British Surrealist writing, in which parataxis, hypotaxis, polysyndetic coordination, syntactic parallelism and anaphoric repetition are used to disrupt conventional syntagmatic relations. This highlights the tension between simultaneity and deferral (the fact that the image means only itself but our understanding will always come later) which is characteristic of the Surrealist image, as in the following example from David Gascoyne's "The Symptomatic World" (1936):

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[64] Jameson is mistaken in his understanding of Breton's inauguration of a *reasoning* phase in Surrealism as an aesthetic, rather than as an political claim (see pages 122-123). On the other hand, Mengham's otherwise insightful analysis of thirties' literature fails to acknowledge that rhetorical composure is not a feature exclusive to British Surrealist writing: clarity and simplicity are permanent properties of Surrealist language (Caws 1970: 206).

The glass-lidded coffins are full of light

They displace the earth like the weight of stones

Eating and ravaging the earth like moths

Which follow the arrow

[. . .]

Till its feathers are all worn out

And the trees are all on fire

The pillow-case is bursting

The feathers are blown across the roofs

The room is falling from the window. (Gascoyne 1988: 58)

As the last five lines demonstrate, the combination of parataxis and a variety of verbal tenses forces the reader into a temporal dimension which is deeply subjective, and in which future and present, potentiality and actuality, coalesce. This temporal fissure is articulated through syntactic omission, as the conjunction which should introduce the line "The pillow-case is bursting" is missing, creating a space for ambiguity. In this poem, whose publication coincided with Gascoyne's stay in Spain in the early months of the Civil War, we already see that the revelation which is sought always takes place in moments of intense convulsion. These images are all suggestive of a process of unearthing the unconscious, of bringing to light inner material, and are also reminiscent of one of the last scenes in Luis Buñuel's *L'Age D'Or* (1930), in which pillows are bursted and feathers fly about, and several objects (a flaming tree, a bishop, an old-style plough and a giraffe) are thrown out of a neo-Classical window. In Gascoyne's lines and in Buñuel's scene, the creation of temporal and spatial fissures is used to subvert bourgeois notions of the real. Another fragment from the same poem illuminates the tension between presence and absence that is created by means of juxtposition:

This is my world this is your garden gate

Our vistas stretch a thousand leagues from here

As far as forests full of moving trees

As far as fingers holding tigers' skins

As far as bushes on the window-sill

As far as castles with unlicensed towers

As far as caskets full of human hair

As far as clouds on fire and dying swans

On lakes that swallow beds as fast as tigers swallow hands. (Gascoyne 1988: 60)

The use of syntactic parallelism in these lines allows the poet to obscure the relation between what is perceived ("bushes on the window-sill") and what is intuited (forests, fingers, castles, and so forth), between what exists at the conscious and the unconscious level. If in the previous example a temporal fissure is opened, here it is a new spatial dimension that is created, a subjective space in which the conscious and the unconscious merge.

Forms of syntactic repetition like those already mentioned are frequently used in British Surrealist writing. For Adamowicz, these create syntactic frames in which the logic of language is maintained, while they allow disruption at the semantic level and, in relation to Surrealist games like *Cadavre Exquis*, she mentions "the pleasure of adhering to rules (grammatical and syntactical) while breaking the laws (of association and logic) (Adamowicz 1998: 57). Nevertheless, in the case of British Surrealism, disruption is not an exclusively semantic feature, for the extreme use that the British Surrealists make of these structures evidences their desire to stretch the boundaries of normative syntactic form, to bring syntax to a point of disintegration which hampers without utterly preventing readability. For example, Humphrey Jennings does this through complex hypotactic sequences which he obtains by means of textual collage in "The Boyhood of Byron" (1936):

> If there is a kind-hearted and faithful servant about the premises who will undertake this task, the breeder is fortunate; for without this he is compelled to resign his colt to a colt-breaker –a man who seldom has any conception of the influence kindness would give him, but who has frequent recourse to violence and that of the most outrageous kind, until the colt, dull and dispirited, cherishing a deep feeling of wrong, becomes determinedly vicious and dangerous. From Livadia the travellers proceeded to Delphi.
> (Jennings 1936c: 147)

The collagistic text, built on pre-existing but conflicting structures, becomes alienated from its own syntax, and nevertheless its grammaticality is flawless. On the other hand, polysyndeton, combined with hypotaxis, can contribute to destabilising syntactic relations, as in George Barker's *Calamiterror* (1937): "The hand that lifts the intimating rose / With infinitesimal machinery is / The instrument that digs and dies and buries / Itself and self" (Barker 1937b: 11). In this example, it is through the copulative conjunction that the union of semantically incongruous concepts ("digs and dies and buries") and of syntactically incompatible linguistic units ("Itself and self") is made possible: in this way, the Surrealist image defies, not only logic, but the formal rules that, in Breton's system, precede that logic.

As has been suggested above, anaphoric repetition and syntactic parallelism are the most recurrent structures in Surrealist writing. This is so because they are appropriate for the

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expression of unconscious thoughts and intuitions: since form is invariably preserved, the poet may engage in a free play of associations while neglecting rational, moral and aesthetic concerns. This is the case, for instance, of Roland Penrose's poem "Portrait" (1939), in which syntactic parallelism and ellipsis are devices used to disrupt syntax, underscoring the plastic quality of the poem:

> His body a porpoise his head lead
>
> His body a tennis court his beard flies
>
> His body a boat his bed a badger
>
> [. . .]
>
> His lungs a street lamp his knees a saw
>
> His funny bone Drake's drum his nose a rose
>
> His ankles porcupine quills. (Penrose 1939d: n.p.)

As we can see, these casual encounters of hybrid images come randomly, spontaneously, but in reade-made linguistic structures. Also, here we observe that, whereas the juxtaposed images are intended to *build* a body, the nature of the parts that are brought together resists assimilation into a unified whole, something that is further reinforced by the lack of connectors and verbs: this is a body that cannot exist in material reality and, nevertheless, the very act of imagining it confers it with an existence beyond rationality which unsettles our vision of the world, transforming it. In many other poems, nevertheless, we observe that, although a particular structure dominates certain parts, the same frame is not maintained throughout, and a series of unrelated fragments are used to disturb the rhythm and syntax of the poem. Thus, whatever meaning is sought in the process of building the poem is always abruptly interrupted. Conspicuous examples of this are found in poems like Hugh Sykes Davies's "It Doesn't Look Like a Finger" (1938) and Roger Roughton's "Animal Crackers in your Croup" (1936). In these poems, the structure that dominates the composition facilitates the gradual process of metamorphosis from one image to the other as the images are not perceived in isolation, but in constant organic flux: this is a mechanism that both aids and is a consequence of automatism and is widely used in British Surrealist writing. This use of repetitive patterns creates the possibility of spiralling, never-ending constructions suitable for the liberation of unconscious content. Their very potential for incompleteness and suspension also allows a constant deferral of meaning which was dear to the Surrealists. This is something that, in French Surrealism, originates in Bretonian doctrine. Nevertheless, in British Surrealism, the use of these patterns has a double genesis, for its concern with form draws, not only on Breton's precepts, but also on Worringer's theories on abstraction and empathy. Following

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Worringer, Sykes Davies sees these patterns as the only legacy that the modern poet retains of the folk and primitive tradition and they are suitable for automatic expression only insofar as they dispossess writing of all that is accessory and culturally acquired. In this way, through them the poet restores the instinctive and the intuitive elements in poetry, in which the collective unconscious is made available. The Surrealist concern with form thus responds to the same urge to abstraction which dominated early art and poetry.

After this digression on the nature of automatism in British Surrealist writing, let us return at this point to the concept of the image as a linguistic entity. The Saussurean notion of linguistic arbitrariness implies a dissociation between signifier and signified which the Surrealist image denies: for Saussure, the signifier (the acoustic or graphic *image*) possesses none of the attributes of the concept (the *idea*) to which it is linked by means of an arbitrary convention (Saussure 2011: 78); in Surrealism, on the other hand, the image, by virtue of its literalness, either abolishes the concept or becomes the concept itself. Language, in its current state of debasement, is an instrument of the censorial ego: that is, it is bound by the reality principle, a set of general assumptions based on social convention and social habit. Thus, the Surrealists propose a return to language's ancient origins and demand that it be led by the pleasure principle which rules the *id*, so that language recovers its referential freedom, so that the unconscious regains its enunciative power and, ultimately, so that signifier and signified become united again. For Read, it is through automatism that the distance between the Surrealist image as signifier and the *id* as signified is bridged:

> by automatism [. . .] we mean a state of mind in which expression is immediate and instinctive –where there is no time-gap between the image [the dream image or unconscious wish] and its verbal equivalent [the Surrealist image]. [. . .] poetry is in this sense, and for this reason, a basic form of speech –Ursprache. (Read 1938d: 184)

Since the Surrealist image is formed in the unconscious, this means that the dissociation between the sign and its referent is erased, and that the Surrealist image becomes, not the expression of the unconscious, but the unconscious itself.

As will be seen, this Lacanian identification of signifier and signified, of language and unconscious, may be explained by Derrida's concept of *différance*: it is an identification that is not based on mere juxtaposition, but, as it is described in Dalí's paranoiac-critical method, on deferred simultaneity. Elsewhere, reflecting on the nature of the Surrealist image in "The Agency of the letter in the Unconscious" (1957), Lacan stated that, for the Surrealists, a metaphor is constituted by the conjunction of two signifiers, on condition that the images signified are of the greatest possible disparity. The conjunction of two disparate realities is

necessary for the production of the poetic spark, identified as a form of metaphoric creation.[65] However, Lacan sees this approach as a flawed one:

> The creative spark of the metaphor does not spring from the presentation of two images, that is, of two signifiers equally actualized. It flashes between two signifiers one of which has taken the place of the other in the signifying chain, the occulted signifier remaining present through its (metonymic) connection with the rest of the chain. (Lacan 1998: 1052-1053)

Hence, the Surrealist image is based on the juxtaposition of dissimilar realities, but its creative spark, as Lacan suggests, emerges from the complex dynamics established between absence and presence. This is what David Bate calls the "psychical conflict of the image" (Bate 2004: 68): the space left between the lack to which the Surrealist image points, and the desire that is evinced in it. This complex dynamics between absence and presence that is at work in the Surrealist image was earlier explained by Breton in terms that anticipate Lacan's notion of the metaphoric spark: "I had begun to cherish words excessively for the space they allow around them, for their tangencies with countless other words that I did not utter" (Breton 1972: 20). Breton's emphasis on the simultaneous actualisation of two disparate realities was, one might say, *theatrical*. In fact, this actualisation gives rise to a signifier in which absence and presence, fragment and whole, metonymy and metaphor, are articulated. By identifying signifier and signified, the Surrealist image intended to divest poetry of all that is external, accessory and accidental (i.e. of the Freudian *circumstance*), in order to reach a universal language. In his Prague lecture "Surrealist Situation of the Object" (1935), Breton defended the need to liberate poetic language from

> historical narration and rhetoric. For it to remain free is, in effect, for it to be by definition released from fidelity to circumstances, and especially from the dizzying circumstances of history; it is equally not to be concerned about pleasing or convincing, and unlike rhetoric it is to appear to be free of any sort of practical end. (Breton 1972: 269).

Thus, the Surrealist image exists in and by itself, and it is *useless* in the sense that it does not emerge from the need to serve a practical purpose. However, in this opposition to and negation of rhetoric as an aesthetic and ideological tool, the Surrealist image becomes an

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[65] Breton understood the metaphor as a form of image, both being essentially poetic tools. In "Surrealist Situation of the Object" (1935), he defended the use of metaphor, "among all type of images", as "the marvellous instrument" that would dissociate completely poetry from prose, the vitality of natural language from the mediocrity of logical thought (Breton 1972: 268).

aesthetic and ideological statement in itself: it is a statement about a reality which, although it is not its aim to change, is nevertheless transformed in the act of *imaging*.

Regarding the relationship between the Surrealist image and reality, it is necessary to bring up again the concept of the image as the fertile union of disparate realities, as in Lautrémont's fortuitous encounter, not devoid of sexual nuances, of a sewing machine and an umbrella on a dissecting table (Lautréamont 1965: 263). It is not surprising then that this encounter from *Les Chants de Maldoror* (1869) is every so often quoted as a primal example of the Surrealist image. For example, the translation of Lautréamont's image into more prosaic terms was rendered by Max Ernst in his article "Inspiration to Order" as "*the fortuitous encounter upon a non-suitable plane of two mutually distant realities*" (Ernst 1932: 80), and through Lautréamont's classic example, he explains the nature of the Surrealist image, a procedure systematised by the Surrealists:

> A ready-made reality, whose naive purpose seems to have been fixed once and for all (an umbrella), finding itself suddenly in the presence of another very distant and no less absurd reality (a sewing machine), in a place where both must feel out of their element (on an operating table) will, by this very fact, escape its naive purpose and lose its identity; because of the detour through what is relative, it will pass from absolute falseness to a new absolute that is true and poetic: the umbrella and the sewing machine will make love. (in Breton 1972: 275)

Once executed and revealed, this act of love is elevated (should one say "demoted"?) to the condition of the real for, in Breton's terms, "What is admirable about the fantastic is that there is no longer anything fantastic: there is only the real" (Breton 1972: 15). However, this is only possible if the Surrealist image is considered, not as a reality in itself, but rather a fissure in reality, in which the revelation (but also the disruption) takes place. Thus, the Surrealist image is a locus of revelation that connects two planes: as in Breton's image of a man cut in two by a window, it is the exact point of collision between the vertical and the horizontal, which is also an encounter between the masculine and the feminine, the real and the ideal.

The alchemical implications of this process of antithetical integration are outlined by Breton in his "Second Manifesto of Surrealism" (1930) where he, following Rimbaud, defends poetry as an alchemical pursuit.[66] This is so because the Surrealist image, insofar as the union

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[66] Whereas Inez Hedges sees the Surrealist image as alchemical reunion (Hedges 1983: 275), David Bate sees it as chiasmus: "In the image Breton is caught, trapped 'between' places in the position of a splitting. It was precisely a splitting of the subject (a chiasmus) that surrealism demanded the subject occupy, as a spectator to their own thoughts. An act that simultaneously reasserts and thwarts the

of opposites, is a representation of the mystical supreme point, and in this regard he states that "the marvellous is always beautiful, anything marvellous is beautiful, in fact only the marvellous is beautiful" (Breton 1972: 14).[67] Thus Breton secularises the concept of the supreme point and takes it, as Alquié suggests, from cosmology to psychology (Alquié 1955: 146). Moreover, the alchemical character of the Surrealist image lies in its contradictory, disruptive, and simultaneously reconciliatory character, and the way in which this reconciliation of opposites is achieved in Surrealism is through metamorphosis: the Surrealist image presents an object (an entity or a place) as its opposite, or as a very different reality, due to its protean nature. As Inez Hedges suggests in her analysis of the Surrealist metaphor, transformation lies at the core of the Surrealist image (Hedges 1983: 275). Besides, this idea of transformation is not based on absence, but on simultaneous presence. Unlike the case of metaphor, it is not substitution of one thing for another, but rather the synchronous presence of two realities.

Anna Balakian also discusses the alchemical nature of this transformation, rejecting, as Breton had done, the simile as a suitable vehicle for the Surrealist image: "Things and beings are not like other qualities or states; through the alchemy of the word they become something else, and the metaphor through which they are transformed draws them not from parallel spheres but from forms that are logically unrelated" (Balakian 1965: 36). In the same way, in British Surrealist writing, the simile is also discredited as a worn-out figure that has been corrupted by the common idiom. For example, Roger Roughton's "A Date at the Kremlin" (1937) presents a succession of commonplace comparisons which satirises the simile as a vulgarised form that, through everyday use, has lost its poetic value: "Straight as a die, strong as a horse, sound as a bell, tall as a lamp-post, hard as a brick" (Roughton 1937c: 34). Elsewhere, however, it can also be used to give rise to powerfully beautiful images: "Love has grown up like a hair" (Roughton 1936h: 55); "Rippling shells like careful signatures" (Gascoyne 1936d: 37); "The light laughs like an unposted letter" (Gascoyne 1936d: 38). These similes effectuate a break away from proverbial expressions and posit a previously unknown reality. Another point related to the Surrealist concept of the image, not as substitution, but as transformation, is Dalí's notion of the *gratuitous*, which is for him the necessary condition of

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cogito of Descartes 'I think therefore I am.' The surrealists' meditation on presence in the world tries to situate the subject where it is not thinking" (Bate 2004: 72).

[67] The supreme point, essentially an occultist concept, is defined by Anna Balakian as the "unattainable but conceivable" goal of poetic practice (Balakian 1986: 6). In the Cabbalistic system, for instance, the supreme point is a primordial totality: the union of subject and object. As will be seen in the following chapter, the character of this reconciliation of opposites is not predetermined, and this allows for ideological disruption in British Surrealist writing.

the Surrealist image, and it refers to its independence from any kind of psycho-sensory contamination that would render a conventional interpretation of it possible. In Dalí's theory, the gratuitous implies that, in order for a comparison to be possible, no connection must exist between reality and the image: "There would be no possibility of comparing two things, unless it would be possible for them to exist with no links whatsoever, conscious or unconscious, between them. Such a comparison made tangible would clearly serve as illustration of our notion of the gratuitous" (Dalí 1998: 224-225). That is, the connection exists only in fragmentation or juxtaposition.

Thus, the liberation of language implied in the Surrealist image is also a liberation of perception: reality is perceived on the brink of transformation, which undermines traditional forms of perception and mimetic modes of representation. Moreover, the Surrealist image is not a mere juxtaposition, but a double entity: a reality within another. In this regard, Rosalind Krauss explores the nature of this double entity in terms of Derridean *différance*:

> Through duplication, [the double] opens the original to the effect of difference, of deferral, of one-thing-after-another, or within another: of multiples burgeoning within the same. This sense of deferral, of opening reality to the 'interval of a breath,' we have been calling (following Derrida) *spacing*. (Krauss 1981: 25)

Hence, the metaphoric identification in the Surrealist image, not only of the two realities brought together, but also of signifier and signified and, ultimately, of language and unconscious, is based, not only on sequentiality (i.e. juxtaposition), but on what could be termed *deferred simultaneity*, Lacan's metaphoric spark emerging in the rather narrow fissure in which the encounter takes place. This process is best described by Derrida's own definition of *différance* as

> the displaced and equivocal passage of one different thing to another, from one term of an opposition to the other. Thus one could reconsider all the pairs of opposites on which philosophy is constructed and on which our discourse lives, not in order to see opposition erase itself but to see what indicates that each of the terms must appear as the *différance* of the other, as the other different and deferred in the economy of the same. (Derrida 1982: 17)

Elsewhere, Paul Éluard had pointed to this tension between simultaneity and deferral in the following terms: "deux objets ne se séparent que pour mieux se retrouver dan leur éloignement" (in Mead 1978: 29).

In the Surrealist aesthetic, *différance* is observed most clearly in the deployment of Dalí's paranoiac-critical method, which expands the potential of the double image *ad*

infinitum. In his essay "The Stinking Ass" (1930), published in *This Quarter* in 1932, Dalí described paranoiac activity as a mechanism which, together with automatism, can be used "to systematize confusion and thereby contribute to a total discrediting of the world of reality" (Dalí 1998: 223).[68] Dalí goes on to, in a way, subvert Breton's theory of the image by opposing the passivity of automatism to the active character of paranoia, which he advocates. Dalí explains how the paranoiac image is obtained thus:

> It is by a distinctly paranoiac process that it has been possible to obtain a double image: in other words, a representation of an object that is also, without the slightest pictorial or anatomical modification, the representation of another entirely different object [. . .]. The double image (an example of which might be the image of a horse that is at the same time the image of a woman) may be extended, continuing the paranoiac process, with the existence of another obsessive idea being sufficient for the emergence of a third image (the image of a lion, for example) and thus in succession until the concurrence of a number of images which would be limited only by the extent of the mind's paranoiac capacity. (Dalí 1998: 224)

This contribution to the theory of the Surrealist image would become central to the development of the poetics of British Surrealism, not only in terms of image construction, but also in terms of world interpretation: his paranoiac-critical activity proposes the systematization of delirium as an aesthetic principle and as an interpretative-critical system. Moreover, Dalí's method of irrational knowledge gradually took on a political import as world interpretation became, by virtue of its ideological implications, world transformation. In the abovementioned essay, Dalí acknowledges the ideological content behind the Surrealist image, and postulates the disintegration of a world which the image sets itself to undermine:

> The day is not far off when a picture would attain the value and only the value of a simple moral act, which would yet be a simple gratuitous act. The new images, as a functional form of thought, will adopt the free disposition of desire while being violently repressed. The lethal activity of these new images, simultaneously with other Surrealist activities, may also contribute to the collapse of reality, to the benefit of everything which, through and beyond the base and abominable ideals of any kind, aesthetic, humanitarian, philosophical, and so on, brings us back to the clear sources of masturbation, of exhibitionism, of crime, and of love. The Surrealists are Idealists partaking of no ideal. The ideal images of Surrealism are at the service of an imminent crisis of consciousness, at the service of the Revolution. (Dalí 1998: 226)

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[68] Translated as "The Rotten Donkey" in *The Collected Writings of Salvador Dalí* (1998).

Similarly, in *Treatise on Style* (1928), written in a period of transition from a Surrealist stance to the adoption of Socialist realism, Louis Aragon emphasised the ethical dimension of the literary revolution. This ethical dimension begins with the crisis of consciousness which Dalí, and Breton elsewhere, allude to. It has been argued above that the Surrealist image creates new meanings, but in so doing, it also creates new ways in which individual consciousness relates to reality, new ways in which reality is thought of and ordered, contributing to the establishment of alternative ideals, new ideologies. Therefore, the Surrealist image creates a new order as sensorial perception is derided and objects lose their essential functionality, temporal causality is obliterated, and spatial situation becomes a trick of the eye. From all this it becomes clear that, in spite of its apparent *nonsense* and *gratuitousness*, the Surrealist image is an attack on the bourgeois organisation of reality, its system of ethical and aesthetic values, and the positivistic science and logic which support these. Fredric Jameson understood this attack as a return to a pre-industrial and pre-capitalist world. His description of the Surrealist object as a space of encounter shows the extent to which image and object can be identified: "These [Surrealist] objects -the places of objective chance, or of preternatural revelation- are immediately identifiable to us as the products of a not yet fully industrialized and systematized economy" (Jameson 1974: 103-4). In this way, the spectator's rational response to the image is challenged: consciousness is violently shaken and desire is liberated as the revolution of the word becomes a revolutionary act of socio-political dimensions.

Walter Benjamin also sees this relation between the Surrealist image and revolution. In his essay "Surrealism. The Last Snapshot of the European Intelligentsia" (1929), he discredits the metaphor as the alienating instrument of bourgeois politics: "What is the program of the bourgeois parties?" –he asks- "A bad poem on springtime, filled to bursting with metaphors" (Benjamin 1999: 216). He thus defends a *poeticisation* of politics based on the image, an essentially Surrealist and *surrealising* tool, and feels it urgent

> to discover in the space of political action the one hundred percent image space. This image space, however, can no longer be measured out by contemplation. If it is the double task of the revolutionary intelligentsia to overthrow the intellectual predominance of the bourgeoisie and to make contact with the proletarian masses, the intelligentsia has failed almost entirely in the second part of this task because it can no longer be performed contemplatively. Yet this has hindered scarcely anybody from approaching it again and again as if it could, and calling for proletarian poets, thinkers, and artists. To counter this, Trotsky had to point out –as early as *Literature*

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and Revolution- that such artists would emerge only from a victorious revolution. In reality, it is far less a matter of making the artist of bourgeois origin into a master of 'proletarian art' than of deploying him [. . .] in this image space.[69] (Benjamin 1999: 217)

Benjamin's words abstract the state of flux in which the question of the interrelation between aesthetics and ethics in the Surrealist image reached Britain. This is a period of transition from contemplation to action, from the passivity of automatism to the efficiency of paranoiac criticism, from Communism to Trotskyism. For Benjamin, the revolutionary artist and poet must not attempt to be a proletarian artist or poet, for that can only be achieved once the revolution is successful. His role is in the realm of the image, the only tool for the revolutionary artist and poet. The British Surrealists (especially, Penrose, Roughton, Jennings and Madge) shared Benjamin's concept of the role of the poet in society, and their deployment of the Surrealist image contributes to the poeticisation of politics to which Benjamin alludes. In this way, they contributed with their Surrealist images to the transformation of the world.

4. Towards a Poetics of Surrealism in Britain.

In the "Manifesto of Surrealism" (1924), Breton established a typology of Surrealist images which remains, as he intended it to be, tentative:

The countless kinds of Surrealist images would require a classification which I do not intend to make today. To group them according to their particular affinities would lead me far afield [. . .]. For me, their greatest virtue, I must confess, is the one that is arbitrary to the highest degree, the one that takes the longest time to translate into practical language, either because it contains an immense amount of seeming contradiction or because, presenting itself as something sensational, it seems to end weakly (because it suddenly closes the angle of its compass), or because it derives from itself a ridiculous *formal* justification, or because it is of a hallucinatory kind, or because it very naturally gives to the abstract the mask of the concrete, or the opposite, or because it implies the negation of some elementary physical property, or because it provokes laughter. (Breton 1972: 38)

As Willard Bohn has suggested, Breton's classification accounts for effect (either rhetoric, aesthetic or emotional) of the conjunction of elements in the image, but it obviates the relations established between those elements (Bohn 2002: 145-146). Even so, the images that are encountered in the works of the British Surrealists all partake in one way or another of the

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[69] To the question of "poetic politics" he nevertheless retorted "Anything, rather than that!" (Benjamin 1999: 216).

features outlined by Breton, sharing in different degrees a flair for striking juxtaposition, apparent arbitrariness, hallucinatory vision and a deliberate willingness to shock readers out of their complacencies. However, it is the connection between image and ideology founded on these poetic conjunctions, or spatial fissures, that is central to the poetics of Surrealism in Britain. The British Surrealists' deployment of Surrealist techniques encodes an ideological conviction that is profoundly radical: in their works, the interrelation between poetic and political experimentation is at the base of the aesthetic and ethical revolution which they propounded. However, this is achieved in a variety of ways. On the one hand, the aesthetic element, or image, predominates in the poetics of Hugh Sykes Davies, David Gascoyne and George Barker. In their poems, the image, understood either as linguistic or psychological formation, can be seen as permeated to different degrees by ideological content. The ethical element, on the other hand, is uppermost in the poeticised political works of Roland Penrose, Roger Roughton and the Mass-Observationists Charles Madge and Humphrey Jennings, in which it is the aesthetic element that permeates ideology. In their different approaches they analyse the mechanisms of poetic creation and the sources of poetic inspiration in order to achieve a broadening of consciousness and a better understanding of the collective unconscious as it was made available through dream, myth and poetry. As we have seen, their approach is Freudian, but its application is Marxist.

Briefly, let us consider how the British Surrealists conceive the Surrealist image as a preliminary approximation to their texts. For example, Dalí's form of paranoiac-critical perception and interpretation of reality is central to the Surrealist poetics of Hugh Sykes Davies. In his use of Dalí's method, Sykes Davies presents a reality in flux. Objects are in a permanent transition from one state to another, signalling a tension between fate, experienced as gratifyingly painful nemesis, and unconscious desire. His images are metamorphic, never static, a condition that resembles the state in which objects and other entities are found in folk tales, a genre which the author cherished. The transformations to which Sykes Davies subjects reality generally affect natural and organic entities, his landscapes being closer to those of fables than to the urban scenes of French Surrealism. In them, the real and the fantastic meet, as in the following fragment from *Petron* (1935), in which, through a metaliterary trick, the reader and the author become involved in the nightmarish vision of a dead cattle-dealer:

> These five cries, these five whistles, simultaneously issuing from the corpse by the
> mouths of his own death-wounds, are indeed fearful to hear. [. . .] little wonder is it if
> those five strange cries for help are answered by no human voice, but only by the

savage notes of our five mouths; little wonder if no one comes save myself and my four readers. (Sykes Davies 1935a: 65).

In his texts, metamorphosing trees, animals and anthropomorphic objects attempt to restore a primordial union and harmony among the three kingdoms of nature. This union has its linguistic counterpart in Sykes Davies's return to a more biological, primary and instinctive understanding of language and poetry, which for him must recover the lost rhythms and patterns of the folk tradition. Although his concern is mainly with form, his images acquire an ideological dimension too: through constant defamiliarisation, they undermine the reality principle on which rational formulations of reality are based, pointing to the elusive nature of the real, and to the fallibility of sensorial perception and logical thought. Constructed on endless parallel, circular and repetitive structures, they attack the apparent immutability, the temporal causality and the spatial logics of bourgeois reality. Also, by resisting rational categorisation and semantic constraint, they sabotage language as a bourgeois rhetorical construct. These ideological elements, together with Sykes Davies's concept of poetic creation as a primeval urge to abstraction, allow a redefinition of his Surrealist texts in terms of image and ideology.

David Gascoyne's automatic poetics owes much to Dalí's irrational epistemology, and his convulsive images are impregnated with a Dalinian influence. "La beauté sera CONVULSIVE" –stated Breton in *Nadja* (1928)- "ou ne sera pas" (Breton 1964: 190).[70] For Gascoyne, too, revelation must partake in the convulsive nature of beauty, because, according also to Breton, "only the marvellous is beautiful" (Breton 1972: 14). The revelation of a new reality takes place in convulsive sates such as those experienced in hysterical fits, in moments of connection with a transcendental reality and in orgasmic climaxes. Hence, Gascoyne's hallucinatory images reveal the speaker's state of mental derangement and sensorial obliteration; nevertheless, reality is intimately perceived in such states. Mental conditions such as paranoia and hysteria, moments of visionary revelation and mystic trance, or of intense union such as those reached through alchemy and sex give rise to images in which the censorial influence of the ego is minimised and desire is liberated. This is clearly seen in his poem "The Supposed Being" (1935), which presents the convulsive description of an unattainable ideal, both sexual and virginal:

Supposing the breasts

Like shells on the oceanless shore

At the end of the world

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[70] "Beauty will be convulsive or will not be at all" (my translation).

> Like furious thrusts of a single knife
>
> Like bread to be broken by hands
>
> Supposing the breasts still untouched by desires
>
> Still unsuckled by thirsts
>
> And motionless still
>
> Breasts violently still and enisled in the
>
> Night and afraid both of love and of death. (Gascoyne 1988: 62-63)

Nevertheless, this ideal being does not exist, and therefore Gascoyne's images point to a lack which is only realised at the exact point at which contraries are reconciled:

> Such a being escapes from the sight of my visible eyes
>
> From the touch of my tangible hand
>
> For she only exists
>
> Where all contradictions exist
>
> Where darkness is light and the real is unreal and the
>
> World is a dream in a dream (Gascoyne 1988: 63)

In this way, Gascoyne's poems are liberating performative acts: they shape a reality that responds to collective desires and fears, to a universal longing for and dread of eternity. As much concerned with eschatology as with genesis, his images are at some points apocalyptic, at some others, regenerative. Profoundly aesthetic in nature, Gascoyne's irrational images are also an attack on the rule of reason which characterises modern thought and discourse. His sacrilegious images in which the religious and the erotic become inextricably connected rebel against established morality and reveal Gascoyne's search for a transcendental unknown in the midst of spiritual desolation. He understands poetry as a mental and spiritual activity: his images make available a latent psychic content which seeks, above all, the expression of a lack and the correction of a flawed reality. In so doing, they act directly on the order of things. Whereas Sykes Davies's images dwell in the spiralling movement of endless transformation, Gascoyne resorts to automatic juxtaposition to create fragmented and disconnected images that oppose and expose the apparent continuity of the external world. Here, poetic imagination functions as the ordering principle which brings image and ideology together.

George Barker's Surrealist production is restricted to his long poem *Calamiterror* (1937). There he creates a poetics of consumption and excretion, which he sets against the background of the ideological and physical hunger which dominated the thirties' decade in Britain. His imagery establishes a connection between digestion, desire and poetic creation, as in the following fragment, in which the embryos must be read as the products of three

reproductive processes (eating, sex and writing): "What figures are like embryos coiled in trees / Mimicking the idiom of the bird? What word / By the bird spoken speaks openly of mystery? / How can the stream translate from water tongue / Speaking of origin beyond source?" (Barker 1937b: 15). In the line of Georges Bataille's unorthodox Surrealism, the eye becomes a central element in Barker's poetics, as it condenses a series of concepts and images on which the poem is built: sight, blindness, rape, sodomy, excrement, desire, birth, death, sex, sin, cannibalism and war. There is a constant deferral or suspension of univocal referentiality, and the poem's focus is continually shifted and displaced, creating a complex web of intra-textual connections which stylistically resembles Sykes Davies's enchained images. Apart from this, Barker takes us to what we said about psychoanalysis and dream as his text responds to Freud's configuration of the work of art as the liberation of a repressed wish or the resolution of a psychical conflict, and it is in this sense that he defines poetry as a biological act. Thus his images are the images of the *id*, which express, while simultaneously deferring, what they struggle to fulfil. Contradicting the general claims made in the criticism, it will be argued that the Spanish Civil War was not present in the creative process of *Calamiterror*, but rather that it was later introduced once the poem's imagery had been, for the most part, constructed. Nevertheless, the presence of the Spanish War reveals something about the reconciliation of image and ideology that is achieved in its lines. Barker's excremental aesthetics, which unearth the author's psychological obsessions, fears and desires and his attempt to excrete them in the poetic act, does not only encode a personal message, but a collective one. As the theme of war is gradually introduced in the highly subjective images of the poem, their ideological, objective, content is revealed, and Barker's poetics of the abject becomes a reflection of the equally abject reality of war.

Roland Penrose's intense involvement in political theorisation and action towards the end of the thirties' decade had a profound effect on his own condition as an artist. Primarily a painter and collagist, the ideological despondency brought about by Franco's victory in Spain and the imminence of the Second World War led him to experiment with language and create a series of hybrid works in which the poetic and the visual, text and image, merge in his search for poetic truth. His is a case of poeticised politics, for it is an ideological issue, the question of the institutional lie, which instigates this poetic search. He resorted to poetic experimentation as a means to contest the political lies of his time, when everything else had failed and experimentation with visual images was not enough. He was aware, as much as Breton was, that a revolution of the word needed to precede the revolution of the world: only a change in the linguistic paradigm could exercise a change in our conceptualisation of reality. In direct

opposition to Gascoyne's automatic probing of the unconscious, Penrose's search for revelation was conscious and active, as he sought a truth which would counteract the false rhetoric of bourgeois idiom and the political lies of official discourse: "At the end of the road shiploads of light / are sucked down between stone walls / into a new sea" (Penrose 2003: n.p.). He discovered this truth (an ever-widening truth in constant renewal) through his elaboration of a myth of nomadism, a symbolic-linguistic reconfiguration of humanity which replaces both historiography and news media as sources of historical truth. For the creation of this myth, Penrose resorted to a series of motifs or revelatory entities: woman, who is in contact with the truth through her creative power; magic, which supersedes science and religion as hermeneutic approaches to reality; and sound, which undermines the effect of written regulations and the noise of war. Camouflage and code are also central to Penrose's poetics, as the truth must only be revealed to those who share an understanding of the new language of Surrealism. In spite of its apparent simplicity and ingenuousness, Penrose's imagery is a subtle comment on a crude reality: seemingly anecdotal and inconsequential, his poetry is nevertheless a poeticised political tract which requires deciphering.

Roger Roughton poeticised politics by turning Communist militancy into a form of poetic activity and developing a poetics of resistance that transcended the idealistic traits inherent in Bretonian Surrealism. He was solidly committed to a staunch line of Communism, a condition which was unusual for a British Surrealist in the late thirties. As such, for Roughton the liberation of language and thought was not necessarily prior to social liberation, although he certainly considered it an integral part of the proletarian revolution. His automatic images present a world in fragmentation, a bourgeois world in decay which he mocks and distorts in order to expose its corrupted morality, its savage customs, its decrepit institutions and the uselessness of its material commodities. However, these vitriolic images are mainly concerned with the destruction and cataclysm that precede regeneration: they proclaim the end of an era and, not without a degree of uncertainty, prophetically announce the new world of revolution. Roughton's poetics is described in this study as a form of Socialist Surrealism which combines elements often considered antithetical, from Dadaist social satire and Carrollian humour to the political propaganda characteristic of Soviet Realism. Thus, his poems offer apparently gratuitous puns, playful parodies of society, caustic caricatures of owners of capital, harsh indictments on the bourgeoisie and on uncommitted intellectuals, heroic visions of the revolution, haranguing injunctions to join the Communist Party and earnest statements of doubt and uncertainty: "Dare you ask for a rifle and sign on the line?" (Roughton 1937a: 45) seems to be the question that underlies all of his poems. It is in this conjunction of apparently

irreconcilable positions that the extent of British Surrealism's involvement in poetic and political experimentation in the 1930s is realised.

Finally, the case of the Surrealists involved in the Mass-Observation movement, Charles Madge and Humphrey Jennings, is peculiar. They present an essentially scientific approach to literary creation, and reach the collective unconscious through the exploration of images obtained in the objective observation of coincidences and recurrences. Their collective poetics undermines the Romantic ideal of the poet as genius and of poetic inspiration, and the Classical notions of the uniqueness and originality of the work of art: the images that appear in their poems are all ready-made, the products of multiple others; and the poet, by rearranging them and giving them new contexts and meanings, is only a craftsman, the architect of the myths of the new society, and the mouthpiece of the otherwise inarticulate masses. In their texts, a collective legacy, which is both textual and ideological, is shared, and a collective voice is found: "And on our heads the crimes of our buried fathers / Burst in a hurricane and the rebels shout" (Madge1937c: 19). Collage is the Surrealist technique they use in order to reconcile image and ideology in their texts: by pasting together fragments from a variety of sources, they create counter-narratives to those of official discourse. It is in this dynamics of fragment and whole that a rapport takes place between the individual and the collective, but also between the textual and the extra-textual, the purely aesthetic and the ideological. Their images, in spite of their apparent disjointedness and the lack of an external material referent, are a precise manifestation of the modern condition. Madge and Jennings apply their Surrealist sensibility to their anthropological study of modern society, its myths, symbols, beliefs, fears and desires, in order to elaborate a conceptual map of Britain in which a series of governing images (for example, the machine in Jennings or the written word in Madge) acquire new meanings through textual interaction. For them, this form of collective knowledge and collective expression is essential for the broadening of consciousness which, in Surrealist theory, leads to social revolution.

All in all, the British Surrealists were concerned with the mechanisms of poetic inspiration, that is, with the psychical processes that lead to the formation of the image. In spite of the apparently heterogeneous nature of their approaches, the poetics of Surrealism in Britain exemplifies the tension to which I have referred in these pages. This is a tension between the image as a spontaneous creation of the mind and the image as revelation (i.e. as ready-made, found material), which these authors negotiate by resorting to a variety of Surrealist techniques: Breton's pure psychic automatism, Dalí's paranoiac-critical method, trance, dreams, irrationality, myth, fragmentation, discourse appropriation, chance

associations, puns, collective writing and collage, all of which demonstrate language's autonomy from reason, utilitarian aims, moral codes and aesthetic dogmas. And, in British Surrealist writing, these take on distinct forms: Hugh Sykes Davies develops a primitive urge to abstraction through spiralling structures and metamorphosing images which reproduce the forms of oral poetry; David Gascoyne resorts to self-induced states of psychological convulsion and creates images that seek the primordial union of the real and the ideal; George Barker compulsively probes unconscious fears and desires which are exorcised and expiated in the process of poetic creation; Roland Penrose encounters poetic truth through myth; Roger Roughton makes use of satire and propaganda, fragmentation and regeneration, in order to poeticise politics; finally, Humphrey Jennings and Charles Madge explore the poetic authority of collective images as the expression of the unconscious. However, growing political concerns also compelled the British Surrealists to negotiate the often tense relationship between the poetic and the political. By liberating language from its referential servitude to reality and by recovering the immediacy between the verbal image (the signifier) and unconscious desire (the signified, the *id*), the Surrealists contributed to the creation of new mythologies (to name is to create) which forced a revision of the dominant capitalist ideology. Aragon's words from *Paris Peasant* (1926) evince the performative power of the Surrealist image (to name is also to act):

> The vice named Surrealism is the immoderate and impassioned use of the stupefacient image, or rather of the uncontrolled provocation of the image for its sake and for the element of unpredictable perturbation and of metamorphosis which it introduces into the domain of representation: for each image on each occasion forces you to revise the entire Universe. (Aragon 1996: 66)

The evolution of Surrealist ideology in Britain is complex. The following chapter offers an exhaustive analysis of it which is necessary to understand the ways in which image and ideology are reconciled in 1930s British Surrealist writing.

CHAPTER 3

CRITICAL APPROACHES II: SURREALIST IDEOLOGY

'Surrealism is not a style, it is not a school of literature or painting,
it is not a system of aesthetics.' One might venture, perhaps,
to call it a philosophy of life; it is certainly a *Weltanschauung*.

Herbert Read, "Views and Reviews" (1935): 191.

The Surrealist image has, it has been stressed, a not insignificant ideological dimension and by bridging the distance between the word and the idea, in opening new paths for knowledge, and making the individual aware of the myths that support dominant ideologies, the Surrealist image becomes in itself a form of consciousness, as Herbert Read states, a *Weltanschauung*. Hence, the Surrealist image presents a worldview or ideology, and its ultimate achievement is the transformation of the material conditions in which it is produced. We noted that, for the Surrealists, language is prior to the idea but the question of whether in Surrealist theory material conditions are also prior to the idea remains, I believe, an unsolvable riddle for, although the Surrealists soon embraced Marxist materialism, they did not altogether give up certain idealistic propositions. For them, economic conditions were at the root of bourgeois ideology, but they also believed that a change in the ideological paradigm would bring about a change in reality. In this, they approached Trotskyist conceptions of total revolution, according to which revolutionary action was as necessary in the psychological (ideological, philosophical, artistic) sphere as in the physical (economic, material) realm. As will be seen, the Surrealists often managed to bring together intellectual activity, political action and artistic expression.

In order to understand the development of a Surrealist ideology in Britain, first the concept of ideology as false consciousness, deriving from Marxist theories, is considered. Then, Theodor Adorno's concept of the work of art as *totality* and his claim that completeness can be reached through fragmentation will be used, exploring the ways in which that sense of wholeness, in this ideological context, is disrupted by British Surrealism's proposal of a new type of totality: one which is dynamic, dialectical, and which incorporates into it interruption, fragmentation and contradiction. This leads to a discussion of the temporal dimension of the Surrealist image as an interaction between fragment (present) and whole (future), and how this sense of ideological continuity is undermined in British Surrealist writing. Following Walter Benjamin's and Maurice Blanchot's theories on the Surrealist image/fragment, it will be argued that the image in British Surrealist writing only achieves wholeness through perpetual interruption, undermining the concept of the image as the promise of a predetermined future reconciliation. Thus, British Surrealist writing did not only open fissures in the apparent

continuity of bourgeois ideology, contributing to its collapse; but also, by rejecting the possibility of total reconciliation and total resolution in their works, the British Surrealists developed an ideology which did not run the risk of becoming a form of false consciousness itself.

Finally, an extensive account of the ways in which different systems of thought partook in the shaping of the dynamic and constantly evolving ideology of British Surrealism is provided, from the adoption of Marx's dialectical materialism to the often strained relationship between Communism and Surrealism and the Surrealists' final embracing of Anarchism. Although this evolution resembles that of French Surrealism, Surrealist ideology developed differently in Britain: from Socialist pacifism to a strategic advocacy of war and, finally, to Anarchist anti-imperialism, it always retained, however, a significant degree of ideological tolerance. This evolution was especially marked by the specific temporal, geographical and socio-political conditions of British Surrealism: its belated emergence and its geographical isolation from the continent allowed British Surrealism to incorporate and discard different ideological notions contained in Breton's theoretical configurations of the movement's stance; also, the concurrence of the official inception of Surrealism in Britain and the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War made the British Surrealists adopt the Spanish cause as the Group's ideological axis; similarly, Britain's foreign policy (institutional pacifism, rearmament, appeasement, imperialism) was at the centre of much Surrealist activity in Britain; and, finally, Herbert Read's and Roland Penrose's open ideological stance was crucial for the development of a more tolerant and comprehensive Anarchist position.

1. On the Concept of Ideology.

André Breton made official Surrealism's adherence to dialectical materialism in the "Second Manifesto of Surrealism" in 1930. This was a move already anticipated by Breton's earlier adoption of a Marxist stance as a reaction to French intervention in the Rif War in Morocco, and his eventual joining of the Communist Party in 1927, of which he was a member for only a few months, on account of the continuous questioning of his allegiance to the Party (Durozoi 2002: 137). Nevertheless, it must be noted that for Breton Marxism and Communism were two very distinct systems not to be confused, and that the discrepancies and eventual schism between Surrealism and Communism in no way interfered with Breton's defence of Marx's theories: the "Second Manifesto" (1930) is in fact full of statements which very clearly distinguish Marxist thought from Communist principles and, by adopting Hegel's dialectical model and Marx's materialist vision of history, the Surrealists would transcend, or attempt to

transcend, their former idealism and adopt dialectical materialism. As late as 1936, Herbert Read upheld Breton's position and in his "Introduction" to *Surrealism* (1936), he maintains that

> the dialectical logic, elaborated by Hegel for idealistic purposes [was] brilliantly adapted by Marx for materialistic purposes. As an instrument of thought it enabled Marx to explain the evolution of human society from primitive communism to feudalism and through the various stages of capitalism; it enabled him, moreover, to predict the self-extinction of capitalism and the coming of the socialist state. [. . .] Surrealism is an application of the same logical method to the realm of art. By the dialectical method we can explain the development of art in the past and justify a revolutionary art at the present time. (Read 1971: 40)

Even so, the Surrealists' adoption of dialectical materialism in Britain was determined more by the implications of revolt that it bore at the time than by being convinced by its economic doctrine. Of course they did vindicate the rise of the proletariat: "in a world of competing tyrannies, the artist can have only one allegiance: to that dictatorship which claims to end all forms of tyranny and promises, however indefinitely, the complete liberation of man: the dictatorship of the proletariat" (Read 1971: 89-90). And they defended the preservation of collective riches (Roland Penrose during the Spanish Civil War) and discredited the concept of private property (Roger Roughton in his poems). Nevertheless, to embrace Marxist ideology implied the adoption of two premises with which the Surrealists could not agree: on the one hand, the fact that material conditions determine consciousness (that is, ideas) and, on the other, the proposition of political economy as the basis of historical development and social change. Although progressively aware of the urgency to oppose the oppressive imperialist element in capitalism and the need for social revolution, their alliance with Communism arose out of social disconformity, rather than conviction. So, the Surrealists saw the advance of Fascism in Europe as the ultimate undertaking of capitalism towards the deprivation of individual liberties. Above all, their concern was not so much with the material conditions that might determine consciousness (although this came to be a concern eventually, especially after the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War), but with ideology itself: for them, the broadening of consciousness brought about by the Surrealist image was necessarily prior to social revolution. In this regard, in a lecture entitled "Why I am a Painter" (1938), Roland Penrose defined poetic expression, that is, image-formation, in terms of ideology and consciousness:

> Poetic expression is not an easy term to define. I do not mean 'poetry' in the formal sense. I mean rather that state of mind, which is brought about by the stimulus of poetry. A poem or a picture have the quality of being like a window which opens out

on a wider horizon and lets light into our consciousness. In fact the poet or painter should be he who inspires much more than he who is inspired. His purpose should be to stimulate and widen our consciousness. (Penrose 2001: 31)

And he further elaborated on this concept by stressing that "the problem of the arts is a social problem" which the artist and the poet need to tackle from a psychological and an ideological viewpoint. The revolution of the word that the Surrealists advocated was primarily based on the idea that the individual's power of enunciation shapes, at least partially, the material conditions contained in such articulation (Breton 1927: 140). Thus, the proposition that language shapes consciousness and that consciousness is liable to condition reality is, then, in conflict with the basic premise which upholds the Marxist doctrine that consciousness derives from material conditions.

What is clear here is that the Marxist concept of ideology as the spiritual superstructure or collective consciousness of a given society, regardless of whether it is the idea or material conditions that come first, underlies the emergence of Surrealist aesthetics: the Surrealist image initially develops, not so much as an effective agent of material or social change, but rather as an instrument liable to sabotage the myths, concepts and ideas on which the prevalence of the dominant class rests. As Breton stated in a lecture delivered in Prague quite near the time of Surrealism's official emergence in Britain, "Political Position of Today's Art" (1935), this collective consciousness is psychological before it is moral (Breton 1972: 212). This statement implies that the supersession of the dominant ideology is concerned with thought before it is concerned with action. So, by offering alternative mythologies, the Surrealist image dislodges the cultural and aesthetic representations (i.e. the myths) that support the dominant ideology. Hence, we find, for instance, Georges Bataille's disquisitions on the "absence of myth" as the new myth of modern society and Breton's insistence on the need to create a new myth aside from the moral, religious and aesthetic specifications of Western thought.[71]

Although the British Surrealists did not theorise on the concept of ideology as such, it plays a central role in the development of the politics of the movement. As opposed to the

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[71] In "The Absence of Myth" (1947), published in the catalogue of the exhibition Le Surréalisme en 1947, Bataille highlighted the revelatory nature of this absence of myth: "The fact that a universe without myth is the ruin of the universe –reduced to the nothingness of things- in the process of depriving us equates deprivation with the revelation of the universe. If by abolishing the mythic universe we have lost the universe, the action of a revealing loss is itself connected to the death of myth. And today, because a myth is dead or dying, we see through it more easily than if it were alive: it is the need that perfects the transparency, the suffering which makes the suffering become joyful. 'Night is also a sun,' and the absence of myth is also a myth: the coldest, the purest, the only *true* myth" (Bataille 2006: 48).

nihilistic and anti-ideological stance of its French predecessor, Dada, Surrealism, concerned with the mechanisms of poetic creation and the performative power of the image, gradually developed into a proper ideological programme in Britain. The widening of consciousness to which Penrose refers implies a combination of Freudian and Marxist propositions: the British Surrealists advocated more awareness, of the self and of material reality. Moreover, Surrealist ideology materialised in a distinct form of action in Britain as the Surrealists became actively involved in political activities, from writing up political tracts and essays to taking part in marches and demonstrations and aiding the Republican cause in Spain. But it is above all through their poems that this new ideology crystallised: in the denunciation of the power of official and institutional rhetoric in Roland Penrose's "Mentiras" (1939) and Charles Madge's "Bourgeois News" (1936); and in the injunctions to join the revolution in David Gascoyne's "Baptism" (1935) and Roger Roughton's "Building Society Blues" (1937). Moreover, the revolution of the word and the liberation of repressed desire that the Surrealists proposed was also part of a programme to fragment and disrupt consciousness, which would necessarily develop into a definite form of socio-political action. For them, ideology was the locus of political struggle.

Drawing on Julia Kristeva's arguments on the ethical function of the text insofar as it "pluralizes, pulverizes" to extremity the processes of subjectivity, Kirsten Strom puts forward Surrealism's "inflammatory rhetoric" as a form of political action, and an alternative to the official political discourse of the time (Strom 2006: 35). Strom shows that the Surrealists' rhetorical gestures "engendered 'real world' political consequences in such a manner as to illustrate that an absolute distinction between the two represents too arbitrary a dichotomy" (Strom 2006: 41). According to her, Surrealism takes a direct route from the rhetorical to the political. Nevertheless, as British Surrealist writing suggests, there is a third element that mediates the passage from the image (language) to politics (action): that element is ideology (thought). As Breton had stated in "What is Surrealism?" (1934), "for us, surrealists, the interests of thought cannot cease to go hand in hand with the interests of the working class" (Breton 1936b: 90).

In this regard, it is necessary to consider the concept of ideology in Marxist thought, where the criticism generally resorts to the works of Marx's youth, especially *The German Ideology*, which he co-wrote with Engels in 1846.[72] In this early period, Marx may be said to develop a philosophical approach, which contrasts with the economic and scientific line of his

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[72] Although *The German Ideology* was not published in its entirety until 1932, its first chapter appeared in Russian in 1924, in German in 1926 and in English in 1938.

later writing (Larraín 1979: 36) and, although his concept of ideology changes throughout his theoretical production, the Surrealists' understanding of ideology follows the early Marx. In fact, his preface to *The German Ideology* (1846) would find correspondences in the theoretical writings of the Surrealists:

> Hitherto men have constantly made up for themselves false conceptions about themselves, about what they are and what they ought to be. They have arranged their relationships according to their ideas of God, of normal man, etc. The phantoms of their brains have got out of their hands. They, the creator, have bowed down before their creations. Let us liberate them from the chimeras, the ideas, dogmas, imaginary beings under the yoke of which they are pining away. Let us revolt against the rule of thoughts. Let us teach men, says one, to exchange these imaginations for thoughts which correspond to the essence of man; says the second, to take up a critical attitude to them; says the third, to knock them out of their heads; and existing reality will collapse. (Marx and Engels 1970: 37)

Here, the notion of ideology as false consciousness is already anticipated: ideology is seen as mythology, as false continuity, and hence it is necessarily fictitious and transient, an idea that was shared by the Surrealists.[73] It is in response to this awareness that, as Breton acknowledged in "Political Position of Surrealism" (1935), Surrealism emerged as a "method of creating a collective myth" which would have to be reconciled with "the problem of [social] action" (Breton 1972: 210).

In the "Second Manifesto" (1930), Breton presents a critique of the Hegelian system, which, according to him, reduced dialectics to mere negation. Thus he quotes Engels's example from *Anti-Dühring* (1878): "The rose is a rose. The rose is not a rose. And yet the rose is a rose" (in Breton 1972: 141). With this Breton wants to unveil "the meretricious nature of the old antinomies hypocritically intended to prevent any unusual ferment on the part of man" (Breton 1972: 123) and he proposes a more complex type of dialectics by luring

> the rose into a movement pregnant with less benign contradictions, where it is, successively, the rose that comes from the garden, the one that has an unusual place

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[73] In a way that is relevant for a study of the unconscious image in British Surrealism, the Marxist thinker Louis Althusser defined ideology in his essay "Marxism and Humanism" (1969), not in terms of consciousness, but rather as a system of representations that is "profoundly *unconscious*": "Ideology is indeed a system of representations, but in the majority of cases these representations have nothing to do with 'consciousness': they are usually images and occasionally concepts, but it is above all as *structures* that they impose on the vast majority of men, not via their 'consciousness.' They are perceived-accepted-suffered cultural objects and they act functionally on men via a process that escapes them. Men 'live their ideologies [. . .] not *at all as a form of consciousness, but as an object of their 'world'* –as their '*world*' itself" (Althusser 1969: 233).

in a dream, the one impossible to remove from the 'optical bouquet,' the one that can completely change its properties by passing into automatic writing, the one that retains only those qualities that the painter has deigned to keep in a Surrealist painting, and, finally, the one, completely different from itself, which returns to the garden. (Breton 1972: 141)

This is Breton's announcement of the final leap that Surrealism takes from an idealistic to a materialistic position, for objects cannot only be defined in terms of what they negate, but rather as the developing products of an ongoing historical process: the *rose* in connection with all the realities and conditions in which it has been. Nevertheless, and is spite of Breton's own efforts, what remains as a basic contradiction in the Surrealist adoption of Marxism is its incapacity to completely transcend Hegelian idealism and discard the element of mysticism of its concept of poetry as an instrument of revolution. Although this may have been seen as Surrealism's failure, it may also be indicative of its success as *Weltanschauung.*

In *A Cavalier History of Surrealism* (1999), Raoul Vaneigem ambiguously comments on the innocence and charming lyricism with which the Surrealists enveloped the concept of revolution, associating it with abstract and vague notions of love and freedom (Vaneigem 1999: 67-69). For example, for Breton, love is central to revolutionary ideology:

I have always believed that to give up love, whether or not it be done under some ideological pretext, is one of the few unatonable crimes that a man possessed of some degree of intelligence can commit. [. . .] A certain man, who sees himself as a revolutionary, would like to convince us that love is impossible in a bourgeois society; some other pretends to devote himself to a cause more jealous than love itself; the truth is that almost no one has the courage to affront with open eyes the bright daylight of love in which the obsessive ideas of salvation and the damnation of the spirit blend and merge, for the supreme edification of man. [. . .] We are restoring [the word *love*] to its meaning which threatens a human being with total attachment, based upon the overwhelming awareness of the truth. (Breton 1972: 180-181n)

Thus love is the necessary condition for the broadening of consciousness and the pursuit of truth on which Surrealist ideology rests. This awareness, which is a cognitive condition, is for Breton the first step towards social change: "the basis of all meaningful activity" (Breton 1972: 181n).

However, in spite of this mysticism which is characteristic of their revolutionary discourse, the Surrealists understood revolution as mainly a cultural phenomenon, concerned with the myth-making mechanisms of social consciousness (or, following Althusser,

unconsciousness). Those myths respond to a linguistic and aesthetic configuration that shapes and structures ideology. But for Breton the modern ideology of Western societies is also based on the *dictatorship* of rational thought. His reference to the guardians of education and learning in his essay "Introduction to the Discourse on the Dearth of Reality" (1924) makes manifest his denunciation of a social structure which supports and safeguards the dominant ideology:

> The perils into which reason leads us, in the most general and debatable sense of the world, in subjecting the works of the spirit to its irrevocable dogmas, in depriving us of the mode of expression which harms us the least, this peril, doubtless, is far from being dispelled. The deplorable inspectors who pursue us even after we leave school, still make their rounds of our homes and our lives. They make sure that we always call a cat a cat and, since we take this in good part, they refrain from sending us to the galleys of the poorhouse and the penitentiary. Never-the-less, let us get rid of these officials as soon as possible . . . (Breton 1927: 142-143)

By guaranteeing that language conforms to a particular view of the world (the calling of a cat a cat), the guardians of ideology secure the power for those who are, effectively, in power: as such, ideology becomes indoctrination. Similarly, for Marx, ideology was not only a set of concepts and ideas, a collective consciousness encoded in the artistic, political, religious, juridical, moral and philosophical representations of a given society, but it also implied, above all, an agreement with that society's dominant class. Ideology is also the dominant ideology, and it is in this sense that Marx and, especially, Engels often understood ideology as a form of false consciousness, that is, a set of myths fostered by the dominant class in order to ensure social stability through its own permanence in power.[74] Ideology is thus conservative, reacting to change and ensuring the continuity of the material conditions which have produced it (or, in Surrealist theory, which it has produced): in this view, ideology also implies false continuity, for it intends to pass as general (as common, as continuous), ideas which support a particular section or fragment of society. In *The German Ideology* (1846), Marx and Engels state:

> The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e. the class which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking,

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[74] On the implications of the lack of a consistent definition of "ideology" and of "false consciousness" throughout Marx's writings see "Marx's Theory of Ideology" in Jorge Larraín's *The Concept of Ideology* (1979): 35-67. Also, "Alienation and False Consciousness in the Writings of the Young Marx" in Christopher L. Pines's *Ideology and False Consciousness* (1993): 111-126.

the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it. (Marx and Engels 1970: 64)

For the Surrealists, ideology was ineluctably anchored in the myths, ideas and beliefs of the bourgeoisie. Similarly, Terry Eagleton sets the origin of ideology as a political concept at the time of the rise of an industrial bourgeoisie:

The concept of ideology, it can be argued, arose at the historical point where systems of ideas first became aware of their own partiality; and this came about when those ideas were forced to encounter alien or alternative forms of discourse. It was with the rise of bourgeois society, above all, that the scene was set for this occurrence. (Eagleton 1991: 106).

When Breton stated that Surrealism set itself "to shake up [society's] settled ways of thinking" (Breton 1972: 152), he had in mind this historical occurrence: at the time of the rise of this accommodated bourgeois ideology, the work of Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Huysmans and Lautréamont "wormed their way, admirably and perversely, into the public consciousness" (Breton 1972: 152). Surrealism inherited this *insalubrious* ideology that would "annihilate this ridiculous illusion of happiness and *understanding* which, to its everlasting glory, the nineteenth century denounced" (Breton 1972: 152-153).[75] Moreover, Breton's use of the term "illusion" manifests his understanding of ideology as false consciousness, as a set of ideas that mistakes, that is not true to, its relation with external reality.

Central to a discussion of Surrealist thought is also the question of whether ideology must be seen as a philosophical or a political concept, whether it implies only thought processes or also performance. Slavoj Žižek states that ideology exists "*qua* generative matrix that regulates the relationship between the visible and non-visible, between imaginable and non-imaginable, as well as the changes in this relationship" (Žižek 1994: 1). Terry Eagleton, on the other hand, establishes consciousness as a combination of both cognitive (or mis-cognitive) ideology and performative act; a set of beliefs that produces knowledge (or ignorance) about and reflects (or mis-reflects) the conditions of a particular class, and a set of ideas/concepts that acts on those conditions: "Thought, we might say, is at once cognitive and creative: in the act of understanding its real conditions, an oppressed group or class has begun in that very moment to fashion the forms of consciousness which will contribute to changing

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[75] Breton's reference to the insalubrious and unhealthy nature of Surrealism is to be understood as a form of corrosion and corruption of the dominant ideology: "Let us not be afraid to make a law of this insalubrity" (Breton 1972: 152). It may also be seen in the light of Walter Benjamin's concept of "intoxication" as profane illumination which, if used dialectically, may contribute to revolution (Benjamin 1999: 215-216).

them" (Eagleton 1991: 94). The Surrealist ideology in Britain responded to this double configuration, as Marx's (and also Freud's) watchword, "more awareness" (in Breton 1972: 229), presupposes not only a cognitive phenomenon, but also entails an immediate form of political action.

Let us return now to the roots of the often strained relationship between Communism and Surrealism. The discrepancies over the nature of artistic representation that soon emerged between both ideological systems exposed a basic contradiction regarding the forms of modern art that did not comply with the imperatives of Socialist Realism. In this regard, the statutes of the Union of Soviet Writers, created in 1932, state that Soviet literature

> demands from the artist an accurate, historically concrete representation of reality in its revolutionary development. Within this, the veracity and historical concreteness of the artistic representation of reality should be combined with the task of ideologically transforming and educating the workers in the spirit of socialism. Socialist realism guarantees artistic creation the exceptional opportunity to demonstrate creative initiative and to choose various forms, styles and genres. (in Günther 2011: 91)

Even if no explicit impositions were made on form or technique, the demands for mimetism and didacticism privileged particular forms and styles over others. On the other hand, the emphasis on historical and material concreteness barred the forms of subjectivism inherent in the automatic techniques of the Surrealists. Because of this, the refusal to reflect mimetically the social reality of the proletariat, non-realistic modern art was seen as a perpetuation of bourgeois ideology. However, we can posit a dissociation between society's economic base and its spiritual superstructure, that is, between its material condition and ideology, at a time when *bourgeois* art is no longer identifiable with bourgeois ideology. This is made manifest in the "Second Manifesto" (1930), where Breton quotes Cecil Day-Lewis and Stephen Spender, who at the time were also facing attacks from the Communist cell, on the matter. Cecil Day-Lewis states that the material conditions of society are necessarily reflected in the art that it produces and argues that, if the economic structure is changing, as the Communists propound, the poet will indeed be the first to reflect such changes:

> The poet [. . .] translates into his own language, the language of individual truth, the coded messages that he receives. In a capitalist regime these materials cannot help but have a capitalist tinge. But if this regime is dying, [. . .] if we are on the threshold of a new life, you may rest assured that the poet will have something to say about it, for he has sharp senses. (in Breton 1972: 226)

Stephen Spender, on the other hand, rejects the idea that bourgeois art necessarily codifies bourgeois ideology, sustaining that it simply depicts "that phase of our society when the bourgeois class possessed culture" and that the function of art in modern society is to put

> already existent forces working to pull the [capitalist] regime down into contact with each other. Art has not played a role in propaganda, but it has contributed to psychoanalysis. For this reason it is very important that we always have good artists and that these artists do not stray off into militant politics, for art may allow revolutionary militants to see clearly those events in history that have the most political meaning [. . .]. (in Breton 1972: 227)

In placing art in the realm of psychoanalysis rather than in relation with political action or propaganda, Spender's position is closer to that of the Surrealists. Ideology is seen as a form of self-awareness which may eventually be resolved in political action. Surrealist ideology seems to remain, in spite of its potential to lead to action, on a cognitive level. Similarly, when Breton comments on Surrealism's major achievement, he comes closer to an Aristotelian concept of poetry as possibility, rather than the Marxist concept of action. Breton thus unintentionally underscores Surrealism's idealistic foundation, concerned with thought rather than with action, even if by expanding the realm of what can be thought necessarily implies a redefinition of the material conditions that sustain that possibility:

> [. . .] we shall in my opinion have done enough by having helped demonstrate the scandalous inanity of what, even when we arrived on the scene, was being thought, and by having maintained –if only maintained- that it was necessary for what had been thought to give way at last to the thinkable. (Breton 1972: 177).

Breton's reference to "the thinkable" as the possibilities that Surrealism opened up in the ideological realm is reminiscent of Aristotle's distinction between poetry as the expression of what may happen, as opposed to history, which is the expression of what actually happened (Aristotle 1951: 35). This points to a distinction between ideology (and poetry) as cognitive possibility, and propaganda as performative actuality. On the other hand, Breton's assertion follows one of Marx's central claims that the individuals of a given society can only think that which is rendered thinkable by the material conditions of that society. Although Marx's assumption is in the negative, Breton's idea of possibility is positive in the sense that what is thinkable transcends and surpasses what has been thought, and therefore cognitive possibility is always regarded as future potentiality in action.

Finally, in "Political Position of Today's Art" (1935), Breton established Surrealist ideology as mainly working in the realm of psychoanalytic research towards a wider

consciousness. In this regard, the words of André Malraux serve Breton to present Surrealist ideology as a way to subvert and counteract the false consciousness constituted by bourgeois ideology, to provoke "an attack of conscience" (Breton 1972: 123): "Marxism is the consciousness of the social; culture is the consciousness of the psychological. [. . .] And the cultural watchword [. . .] which in Marx's works links the first pages of *The German Ideology* to the last drafts of *Capital* is: 'More awareness'" (in Breton 1972: 229). Surrealist ideology involves a quest for objective and subjective awareness: "More awareness of the social always, but also more awareness of the psychological" (Breton 1972: 229). Thus, the concept of ideology in Surrealism relies on both Marxist and psychoanalytical theories. Following Marx, Breton argued that social awareness would contribute to a better understanding of material conditions, a necessary step towards social change. Following Freud, he asserted that self-awareness could only be achieved through language, and it is Surrealist automatic writing that makes available the verbal traces of the repressed elements that lie in the unconscious. Those repressed elements are also those possibilities that transcend the dominant ideology, because they unveil its oppressive and alienating character, contributing directly to social transformation.

2. On Fragmentation and Wholeness.

The previous chapter dealt with the interaction of fragment and whole in Surrealist aesthetics; here, the ideological dimension of such an interaction is considered. In order to do so, Theodor Adorno's theories on the work of art as *totality* and the lyric poem as the expression of social antagonism are applied to the study of British Surrealist writing. In his essay "On the Fetish Character in Music and the Regression of Listening" (1938), Adorno argues that the collective can only be reached through the individual and that, therefore, the true work of art is, by virtue of its individualism and subjectivism, a collective totality. Furthermore, for him, the work of art is an ideological totality which opposes the false completeness of totalising (i.e. standardising, homogenising) ideologies. Such otalising ideologies are false totalities because they try to pass off as general what are in fact particular thoughts; that is, they intend to homogenise society, to impose on the many ideas, concepts and beliefs which only represent or benefit the few. This is where the Marxist concept of ideology as false consciousness, as a false ideological *continuum*, comes in. In Adorno's system, however, the work of art does not intend to standardise society; on the contrary, since it allows the expression of the individual, it allows heterogeneity, and only the sum of individualities (the fragments) can lead to a true totality (the whole). In a later essay entitled "Lyric Poetry and Society" (1957), Adorno contends that there is an ideological element

inherent in apparently apolitical (individualistic, subjective) works. This is so because, by retreating away from reality (what Worringer called the *dread of space*), these works deny society, and this is an ideological statement in itself. This is precisely what, for Adorno, makes the lyric poem (which is, by definition, the expression of subjectivity) possible as a genre: the lyric poem can reach out to society because its denial of reality is shared by the reader. Having said this, Adorno's system is suitable for a study of Surrealist ideology in Britain for two main reasons. First, the image in British Surrealism offers an alternative view of reality which sets itself to disrupt and replace the false ideology of capitalism: it creates new myths (which represent the collective) in order to replace old ones (which support an elite). Second, the Surrealist image is generally seen as the ultimate expression of subjective individualism, insofar as it is the product of a retreat into the depths of the individual's unconscious. As an unconscious formation, the Surrealist image has the capacity to connect with collective fears and desires which have been repressed by the unconscious influence of the dominant ideology. It is through this retreat into individualism that the Surrealist image (the fragment) becomes an ideological totality (the whole): it does not only unmask the dominant ideology as a form of false consciousness, but it also puts forward the idea that new ideologies, true totalities, are possible. In other words, the Surrealist image expands consciousness, and Surrealism becomes a form of consciousness, that is, an ideology.

Nevertheless, Adorno's concept of true totality is problematic in the case of British Surrealism. In the first place, it implies a form of dialectical determinism which the British Surrealists rejected in their ideological formulations: in attempting to become a true totality, Surrealist ideology would risk becoming a false ideology itself, the new opium of the people, under the promise of a future world in which *all* opposites are reconciled. Hence, in his article "Art and the Pattern of Culture" (1936), Herbert Read objected to the subjection of art to cultural or ideological demands, because this would imply its subjection to "false moral issues" (in Day-Lewis 1936c: 795-796). Furthermore, the British Surrealists rejected the idea that a final reconciliation was ever possible, as the ambiguous nature of their poems suggests: ambiguity and a lack of conclusion pervade the texts of Hugh Sykes Davies, whose structures preclude resolution; of David Gascoyne, for whom the reconciliation of opposites remains an unattainable goal; of George Barker, whose ambivalent images point to an unresolved conflict; of Roland Penrose, whose attempts to arrest time are confronted by the inevitability of a crumbling future; of Roger Roughton, whose vindication of the revolution is not devoid of irony and uncertainty; and of Charles Madge and Humphrey Jennings, whose fragmentary texts, by leaving structural gaps open to the inclusion of further fragments, never provide the

experience of a unified whole. For all of them, the Surrealist image was not the promise of a predetermined future, but the assurance of an ongoing struggle, of a constant opening up of possibilities which may, or may not, be realised. This is part of the temporal poetics of the Surrealist image. Hence, because their own ideological stance was not static, but dynamic and continuously evolving, the ideology behind Surrealist writing in Britain may be seen as a totality, but only as one that incorporated change, fissures and fragments into it, in order to be able to expand its own boundaries and encompass new ideological positions in accord with ever-developing social needs.

There are apparent contradictions here, posed by the application of Adorno's system, which can be resolved by considering Maurice Blanchot's views on the Surrealist image as disruption discussed in his essay "Tomorrow at Stake" (1969). Bearing all this in mind, I argue that Surrealism in Britain is a system of thought, or a worldview, that does not only disrupt the apparent continuity of the dominant ideology, but that, by acknowledging the fragment within the whole, it is continuously disrupted by itself. This is so due to the distinct spatial, temporal and cultural coordinates that conditioned the emergence and development of the movement in Britain, and which provided the British Surrealists with the opportunity to incorporate and discard aspects of different ideologies in order to make their system more all-encompassing, and their individual positions more tolerant. The Surrealist ideology in Britain is not (or not only) Marxist (in the form of Communism or Anarchism), not even pacifist, or mere insurrectionism: just as the poetics of British Surrealism is a syncretic conglomerate of influences and theories, so too is the ideology unfolded in its images.

I begin this discussion by referring to the fundamental Surrealist claim regarding the social function of poetry: in *Les Pas Perdus* (1924), Breton states that "poetry, which is all I have ever appreciated in literature, emanates more from the lives of human beings –whether writers or not- than from what they have written or from what we might imagine they could write" (Breton 1996: 81). Reflecting its desire to reach beyond the bounds of bourgeois ideology, Surrealism attempts "to stigmatize the baseness of Western thought", constructed on the ideas of family, country and religion (Breton 1972: 128). This is achieved through an expansion of awareness, which is only possible in the fissures opened up in collective consciousness by Surrealism's psychological researches. If, as Fredric Jameson suggests, "every age is dominated by a privileged form [. . .] which seems by its structure the fittest to express its secret truths" (Jameson 1992: 67), then, in the Sartrean terms that Jameson uses, the "objective neurosis" of the literature and art of the inter-war period found its privileged form in fragmentation. For Surrealism, the fragmentation, or disruption, of the dominant ideology

was necessary in order to establish a new consciousness truer to the psychological and material reality which it attempted to reflect. To this end, the collapse of the capitalist system and the dominant ideology which upheld it would be mirrored, at least initially, in an equally fragmented, disintegrating form. To describe the decadence of this ideological system, "funereal" was the term used by Cecil Day-Lewis (in Breton 1972: 226); "damaged" is the term preferred by Adorno. Given this, Surrealism seeks to find the ways to turn the fragmentation of modern aesthetics and modern culture into a dynamic and authentic common consciousness as part of its dialectical movement from the individual to the collective myth, from the destruction of language to the creation of a new poetics, from the collapse of bourgeois ideology to the institution of a new order. Herbert Read expresses this in the following terms:

> In dialectical terms we claim that there is a continual state of opposition and interaction between the world of objective fact –the sensational and social world of active and economic existence- and the world of subjective fantasy. This opposition creates a state of disquietude, a lack of spiritual equilibrium, which it is the business of the artist to resolve. He resolves the contradiction by creating a synthesis, a work of art which combines elements from both these worlds, eliminates others, but which for the moment gives us a qualitatively new experience. (Read 1971: 40-41)

Although not particularly sympathetic to Surrealism *qua* representation of the unconscious, Adorno's theory on the totality of the work of art contributes to an understanding of the ways in which image and ideology, fragment and whole, interact and are (or are not) reconciled in British Surrealist writing. This is so since there persists in Adorno's critique of Surrealism, to which this argument will eventually come, as well as in the Surrealists' programmatic texts, a Hegelian wish for reconciliation of antagonisms.[76] As this study on the ideological implications of the Surrealist image/fragment will show, this reconciliation (this *rapprochement*, this encounter of dissimilar realities), is a site of disruption and interruption, not only of the apparent coherence of the ideological *continuum* (i.e. of the well-structured and totalising false consciousness of dictatorial regimes), but of the very wholeness that it sets itself to achieve. The common consciousness mentioned above presupposes thus an opening up of possibilities and endless fissures which Surrealism is willing to acknowledge in the whole. In the years leading to the outbreak of the Second World War, the ideological stance of the British Surrealists, as opposed to that of Fascists or even Communists, implied an understanding of ideological totality as a dynamic structure in which

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[76] In "What is Surrealism?" (1934), for instance, Breton stated that the supreme aim of surrealism was the final unification of interior and exterior reality (Breton 1936: 49).

contradiction is necessarily incorporated. This was the only way in which Surrealist ideology could avoid becoming a false ideology itself.

Even if Adorno eventually developed a flawed, biased outlook on Surrealism, his comments on the totality achieved in the work of art provide a starting point for this analysis of Surrealist ideology as (self-disruptive) totality. Adorno contends that there is a possibility of completeness through fragmentation, and that there are forms of individualistic art that at the same time embody a political statement: "The lyric poem is always the subjective expression of a social antagonism" (in O'Connor 2000: 219). I draw on this idea in order to show how it is precisely through the subjective, fragmented and alienating character of the Surrealist image that a sense of collective totality is achieved in British Surrealist writing. In his essay "On the Fetish Character in Music and the Regression of Listening" (1938), Adorno defends the "successful aesthetic totality" (Adorno 2002: 291) offered by the Modernist work of art as a critique of ideological totalisation (i.e. of ideological or cultural standardisation sought by totalitarian systems such as Fascism or the culture industry). For him, the Modernist tendency towards individualism implies in fact an outright ideological position in relation to society, rejecting it. This denial of modern society can only be achieved in the true *totalities* offered by individualistic Modernism, since a real sense of the collective (the whole) can only be reached through the individual (the fragment): "Only individuals are capable of consciously representing the aims of collectivity" (Adorno 2002: 315). This idea, which partially draws on Leon Trotsky's *Literature and Revolution* (1924), would eventually materialise in the works of Charles Madge and Humphrey Jennings, who sought the governing (i.e. collective) images of a period in individual expression.[77] Thus, in Adorno's system, the decline in individualism characteristic of modern ideologies (totalitarian regimes, the culture industry) also implies a decline in collective interests. Regarding the appropriation of art by such modern ideologies as commercialism and totalitarianism, he observes that in these the work of art becomes commoditised: it is devoid of its subversive character, becoming a part of the totalising, homogenised whole, rather than an opposition to it.[78] In this ideologised aesthetics, which

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[77] Trotsky's defence of the writer's individuality would be later used to support Herbert Read's Anarchist theory: "individuality is a welding together of tribal, national, class, temporary, and institutional elements [. . .]. One of the most important tasks of criticism is to analyse the individuality of the artist (that is, his art) into its component elements, and to show their correlations. In this way, criticism brings the artist closer to the reader, who also has more or less of a 'unique soul,' 'artistically' unexpressed, 'unchosen,' but none the less representing a union of the same elements as does the soul of the poet. So it can be seen that what serves as a bridge from soul to soul is not the unique, but the common. Only through the common is the unique known" (in Read 1947: 31-32).

[78] Although Adorno is mainly addressing the situation of music in the culture industry, we may also refer here to Nazism's instrumental and propagandistic use of art in exhibitions such as the 1937 Entartete

Adorno rejects, the individual fragments no longer contribute to a unified, albeit heterogeneous, collectivity. Commenting on the commoditised character of commercial music, he states:

> The delight in the moment and the gay façade becomes an excuse for absolving the listener from the thought of the whole [. . .]. The listener is converted, along his line of least resistance, into the acquiescent purchaser. No longer do the partial moments serve as a critique of that [ideological] whole; instead, they suspend the critique which the successful aesthetic totality exerts against the flawed one of society. The unitary synthesis is sacrificed to them; they no longer produce their own in place of the reified one, but show themselves complaisant to it. [. . .] They are not bad in themselves but in their diversionary function. In the service of success they renounce that insubordinate character which was theirs. (Adorno 2002: 291)

For Adorno, the work of art, when used towards purposes other than the expression of individuality, becomes alienated, that is, the reified or commoditised reflection of a desire to homogenise and standardise thought. In these cases, the fragments which make up the work of art do not lead to the experience of a true totality which would oppose the totalising whole (that ideological and cultural *continuum*), but to compliance with it.[79] For him, there is a political element in the apparently apolitical works of Modernism and, although his idea of the modern does not include Surrealism, he was sympathetic towards several writers and artists who were, or had been, somehow related to the movement, such as Pablo Picasso, André Gide or Samuel Beckett.[80] He argues that there is an inherent and implicit political content in artistic form. Thus, following Adorno, it may be said that, in British Surrealist writing, the political element is in the image, not in the message: the image, responding to a fragmented and individualistic aesthetics, reveals and rebels against the false ideology that underlies capitalism. If form can be defined as a collection or arrangement of parts (which is also a suitable definition for the Surrealist image), then British Surrealist writing serves to illustrate Adorno's concept of the work of art as totality. This is clearly seen in Hugh Sykes Davies's and

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Kunst (Degenerate Art) Exhibition in Munich, which demonised the Avant-Garde, or the 1937 Grosse Deutsche Kunstausstellung (Great German Art Exhibition), which celebrated National-Socialist art.

[79] This, as will be seen, is in connection with Adorno's later critique of the Surrealist poetics of fragmentation in "Looking Back on Surrealism" (1956), in which he sees the Surrealist fragment/object/image as a fetishised *reification* of the past.

[80] In *Marxism and Modernism* (1982), Eugene Lunn traces Adorno's concept of Modernism as a form of "Modernist alternative" in relation, especially, to the second Vienna school (Arnold Schoenberg, Alban Berg and Anton Webern). Regarding Adorno's feelings towards Surrealism, Lunn states that Adorno "occasionally referred approvingly to Picasso's 'critical and fragmentary' art" (Lunn 1982: 271). See Eugene Lunn's *Marxism and Modernism* (1982): 256-274.

David Gascoyne's seemingly apolitical texts, which were criticised in their time for their subjectivity and individualism, for their lack of social concern. Nevertheless, in their apparent retreat from the material world, these texts stand as political statements on the abject and convulsive nature of a reality which they reject.

Adorno conceives of the work of art as an autonomous entity that transcends ideology (understood in the Marxist sense of false consciousness): an entity that reveals what ideology, insofar as dominant ideology, conceals (in O'Connor 2000: 214). As it has been stated, this is precisely what the Surrealist image sets itself to do. In its attempt to broaden consciousness, to unmask the lies of official discourse and to do away with the old myths which support the bourgeoisie, the Surrealist image creates fissures in the ideological *continuum* (in Adorno's terms, the totalising whole). In British Surrealist writing, this broadening of consciousness takes place through language, which becomes the instrument that connects the ideal and the real, that bridges the gap between subject and object, by virtue of the poet's own subjectivity. And this is so especially in these poets' use of psychic automatism: through automatic writing, the poet, abandoning himself to language (i.e. to a shared *other*), establishes a rapport with the *other*.[81] In this regard, Maurice Blanchot inquires into the nature of Surrealism as a historical category in his essay "Reflections on Surrealism" (1949), in which he defines Surrealism, not as a literary school or a school of thought, but, as Herbert Read himself had declared, a state of mind, a form of consciousness. In an article entitled "Art and the Pattern of Culture", published in *The Highway* late in 1936, Read affirms that "In all its essential activities art is trying to tell us something: something about the universe, something about nature, about man, or about the artist himself. Art is a mode of knowledge" (in Day-Lewis 1936c: 796). Similarly, Blanchot states that Surrealism's major discovery, the automatic message, fulfils literature's epistemological aspiration to *know* through words. And knowledge is nothing but the spark that is produced between subject and object in a moment of intense reciprocity, which is, of course, another definition for the Surrealist image. An awareness of reality, of the materiality of things, is for Blanchot the result of this Surrealist quest for knowledge:

> Surrealism was haunted by the idea that there is, there must be, in man's constitution a moment in which all difficulties are removed, in which antinomies no longer have any meaning, in which knowledge completely takes hold of things, in which language is not speech but reality itself, yet without ceasing to be the proper reality of language; in this moment, finally, man touches the absolute. (Blanchot 1995: 86)

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[81] To this abandonment to the verbal (or visual) impulse, typical of both psychoanalysis and Surrealism, responds partly Walter Benjamin's concept of "intoxication".

As will be seen, Blanchot later rejects the sense of continuity derived from the possibility of attaining the absolute, an idea which in the criticism has come to define Surrealist practice. Nevertheless, his dialectical perspective is useful towards understanding the place that Surrealism, as a system of thought, occupies in the history of ideas. The development of thought throughout history is based on different approaches to nature (i.e. to the object, to material reality). These different approaches have succeeded each other dialectically, from magic and myth in primitive peoples and Medieval superstition, in which nature ruled over the individual, to the Enlightenment, in which the material was finally subjected by reason. With the emergence of Romanticism, especially in the case of German and English Romanticism, the equilibrium between subject and object was dialectically restored, as the Romantics sought a correlative of subjective spirit and emotion in objective reality (i.e. in nature). With Modernism, a new upsurge of subjectivity occurs. Since, for Adorno, nature should be acknowledged, he sees the Modernist retreat into subjectivity as necessarily prior to the moment of reconciliation with the object, as the following quotation from his essay "Lyric Poetry and Society" (1957) demonstrates:[82]

> The subjective being that makes itself heard in lyric poetry [. . .] has, so to speak, lost nature and seeks to recreate it through personification and through descent into the subjective being itself. Only after a transformation into human form can nature regain anew that which man's rule over her has taken away. Even lyrical creations which are untouched by conventional, material existence, by the crude world of material objects, owe their high worth to the power the subjective being within them has, in overcoming its alienation, to evoke an image of the natural world. (in O'Connor 2000: 216)

Although Adorno is not explicitly referring to Surrealist poetry, his words may be used to enlighten this study regarding the reciprocity between subject and object in Surrealism. In fact, British Surrealist writing is full of this type of personification, anthropomorphism being central to the Surrealist poetics of Hugh Sykes Davies and Humphrey Jennings. And there are further coincidences: in spite of himself, Adorno's reference to the "descent into the subjective being" bears echoes of Surrealism's most fundamental practice: the probing into the unconscious. Moreover, Adorno's description of the social function of lyric poetry could be easily applied to the Surrealist exploration of subjective fears and desires through dream and trance: "Its detachment from naked existence becomes the measure of the world's falsity and meanness.

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[82] In *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1947), Adorno placed the disavowal or subjection of nature at the outset of Fascist ideology.

Protesting against these conditions, the poem proclaims the dream of a world in which things would be different" (in O'Connor 2000: 215). Similarly, the Surrealists' apparent retreat from the material into the world of dreams signals their understanding of both realities, the inner and the outer, as complementary. But Adorno also demystifies the identification of Surrealist practice and the dream in his essay "Looking Back on Surrealism" (1956) where he affirms that, given this identification, Surrealism's conceived aim to disrupt the real is futile: "something that is supposed to be a mere dream always leaves reality untouched, whatever damage is done to its image" (Adorno 2005: 1114). However, Adorno's final rejection of this identification (he complains that "That is not the way people dream"), is in itself an acknowledgement of Surrealism's capacity to touch and damage reality.

The previous chapter dealt with the spatial poetics of the Surrealist image. It is necessary at this point to go into the temporal politics of Surrealist ideology in relation to the concepts of fragment and whole.[83] As has been said before, the fragment or fissure that is the Surrealist image unveils or reflects the fragmented nature of an otherwise apparent ideological continuity that exists in the present. This implies that the fragment, like language for Lacan, points to a lack, an idea that pervades Blanchot's assertion in "Reflections on Surrealism" (1949):

> the most uncommitted literature is at the same time the most committed, because it knows that to claim to be free in a society that is not free is to accept responsibility for the constraints of that society and especially to accept the mystifications of the word 'freedom' by which society hides its intentions. (Blanchot 1995: 97)

Adorno, on the other hand, expresses it in the following terms: "The dialectical images of Surrealism are images of a dialectic of subjective freedom in a situation of objective unfreedom" (Adorno 2005: 1115). Nevertheless, the experience of the Surrealist image as fragment is not only the experience of a fragmented, damaged present: it also projects a future in which unity or wholeness is (purportedly) promised. For Adorno, Surrealism is not a projection of future wholeness, but rather the fetishised memory of a unity once achieved in the past, an idea that precludes all possibility of (future) reconciliation: "These images are not images of something inward; rather, they are fetishes –commodity fetishes- on which something subjective, libido, was once fixated" (Adorno 2005: 1115). He believes that the Surrealist image/fragment, as a dream image (but for Adorno "no one dreams that way"), loses

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[83] For an analysis of the Surrealist fragment as a temporal concept in Maurice Blanchot's essays on Surrealism, see David Cunningham's "A Question of Tomorrow: Blanchot, Surrealism and the Time of the Fragment" (2003).

all human content and is reduced to the state of the (inanimate) object: the Surrealist image as *memento mori*. This indicates the supremacy of the object, not understood as the real, but as a commodity fetish. Although I do not share Adorno's view on Surrealism, it is revealing that, in his flawed conception of the Surrealist image as a fetishisation of the past, he denies Surrealism the possibility of becoming a totality, in the Hegelian, deterministic sense in which he conceives of it. I will return to this point later in the discussion of Maurice Blanchot's critique of deterministic readings of Surrealist texts, but Adorno's view is in this sense pessimistic, as he understands that the only way in which the subject approaches the object in Surrealism is by virtually becoming the object, that is, by dying. From a Hegelian perspective (but also Freudian, which Adorno does not acknowledge), the dialectic between subjective freedom and objective unfreedom is only resolved in the subject's determination to die. Indeed, it is on Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807) that Adorno draws in order to describe Surrealism's drive towards death. As Hegel stated, in a way that anticipated Freud's proposition in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), "The sole work and deed of universal freedom [. . .] is death" (in Adorno 2005: 1115). Freud's thesis thus becomes the biological (i.e. materialistic) counterpart of the Hegelian idealistic proposition. Similar concepts also emerged, as I have shown in the previous chapter, in Wilhelm Worringer's theories on abstraction and empathy, which reached and influenced the British Surrealists, notably Hugh Sykes Davies and George Barker, through Herbert Read and T.E. Hulme. Given this, I will show that, in spite of Adorno's unsympathetic approach to Surrealism, in the case of British Surrealist writing, his propositions hold some truth. This truth must, nevertheless, be qualified.

A decade before Adorno's essay on music, Walter Benjamin had already dealt, from a more clearly materialistic stance, with the concept of the fragment in relation to *experience*.[84] Benjamin's essay on Surrealism, "The Last Snapshot of the European Intelligentsia" (1929) reflects on Surrealism's passage from an idealistic to a materialistic stance, its movement away from the subject and onto the object: in Benjamin's terminology, this is the evolution from ideological *revolt* (an essentially aesthetic –or *inaesthetic*- and ideal –or *anaesthetic*- notion) to political *revolution* (political action). Thus, he states that the writings of the Surrealists "are concerned literally with experiences, not with theories and still less with phantasms" (Benjamin 1999: 208). Benjamin sees in Surrealism a sort of "profane illumination, a materialistic, anthropological inspiration" and regrets that its incursions "over rooftops,

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[84] Benjamin saw the image, which, as "snapshot" is also a fragment, as essentially a form of experience and hence its social dimension. For a comparative analysis of Adorno's and Benjamin's reflections on Surrealism, see Richard Wolin's "Benjamin, Adorno, Surrealism" (1997).

lightning rods, gutters, verandas, weathercocks, [. . .] may have taken it also into the humid backroom of spiritualism" (Benjamin 1999: 209). Indeed, he criticises (French) Surrealism for not pursuing political discipline, something for which, less than a decade later, British Surrealism could not be reproached. Furthermore, in order to oppose the optimistic idea of future reconciliation (a "poetic politics" which he rejects), Benjamin resorts to Pierre Naville's concept of pessimism to describe what ought to be the paramount Surrealist attitude.[85] Thus, he defends the systematic deployment of the pessimistic approach in which no reconciliation is found, undermining Surrealism's celebratory discourse:[86]

> Where are the conditions for revolution? In the changing of attitudes or of external circumstances? This is the cardinal question that determines the relation of politics to morality and cannot be glossed over. Surrealism has come ever closer to the Communist answer. And that means pessimism all along the line. Absolutely. Mistrust in the fate of literature, mistrust in the fate of freedom, mistrust in the fate of European humanity, but three times mistrust in all reconciliation: between classes, between nations, between individuals. (Benjamin 1999: 217)

This idea of Surrealist *pessimism* is based on a conception of the image as fracture and rupture, and it is indeed the "image space" that Benjamin deployed as the site of pessimism and *un-reconciliation*: "Metaphysical materialism", he says, "cannot lead without rupture to anthropological materialism" (Benjamin 1999: 217). Unlike Adorno, Benjamin was sympathetic to Surrealism, but they both coincided in their rejection of Surrealist ideology as the promise of a future reconciliation or a future totality. We can also relate Benjamin's concept of ideological pessimism and dialectical rupture to the concept of the Surrealist image as a fissure in ideology, and as an ideological fissure in itself: in "Central Park" (1939), a compilation of thoughts and notes on Baudelaire, he states that "The concept of progress is to be grounded in the idea of the catastrophe. That things 'just go on' *is* the catastrophe. It is not that which is approaching but that which is. [. . .] Redemption looks to the small fissure in the ongoing catastrophe" (Benjamin 1985: 50). Thus, we might conceive of this *redemption* (in a way, a form of reconciliation) as schism, a condition which is seen by Richard Wolin in similar terms: this is "the process whereby under determinate social conditions the aura of reconciliation

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[85] Pierre Naville (1904-1993), initially associated with the Surrealist Group and the former editor of the Surrealist journal *La Révolution Surréaliste* (1924-1929) turned briefly to Communism, although he was expelled from the French Communist Party in 1928. At the time of his flings with Communism, he wrote *La révolution et les intellectuels* (1926), in which he urged the Surrealists to adopt a Communist stance.
[86] Benjamin criticised the oscillation, in Surrealist practice, "between fitness exercises and celebration in advance" as a consequence of its "undialectical" (i.e. mystified) conception of *intoxication* (Benjamin 1999: 216).

proves insupportable to works of art, so that they come to assume a de-aestheticized, fragmentary form" (Wolin 1994: 197). Many of the images produced in British Surrealist writing can be understood in the light of Benjamin's comments on Baudelaire. As Herbert Read states, Surrealism "must be dissociated from [. . .] forms of art which under the guise of fantasy or imagination are merely attempts to avoid reality, to take refuge in an illusion" (Read 1935d: 191). Accordingly, the images of British Surrealism are indeed de-aestheticised, fragmentary images which do not promise future reconciliation, but rather present the fissure as the only point of redemption. In British Surrealist writing, this fissure takes the form of ambivalent images in which doubt, ambiguity or uncertainty prevail. In Roger Roughton's "Animal Crackers in your Croup" (1936), it is present, not in the promise of a cloud to follow the bankers, but in the cynical commentary implied in the final injunction "National papers please reprint" (Roughton 1936a: 36). Whereas the former is a fissure in the ideological *continuum* (it disrupts the dominant ideology), the latter presents Surrealist ideology as a form of self-disruption. In Charles Madge and Humphrey Jennings's *May the Twelfth* (1937), it is not found in its capacity, as a monolithic totality, to interrupt the false continuity of the myth of the monarchy as an ideological construct; rather, it is in the gaps left between the fragments, in the interruptions contained within the narrative (the interruptions within the interruption), which acknowledge the ideological power of such an institution. British Surrealist writing finds redemption in those fissures which incorporate gaps, flaws and uncertainties into its own ideological structure, which is, not a closed totality that offers reconciliation as a pre-determined futurity, but rather an open system which allows constant reconfiguration.

Another related point is the way in which Benjamin connects image and experience through the capacity of the real to transcend reality in the technological production of a collective body, something only achieved so far by Surrealism:

> The collective is a body, too. And the *physis* that is being organized for it in technology can, through all its political and factual reality, be produced only in that image space to which profane illumination initiates us. Only when in technology body and image space so interpenetrate that all revolutionary tension becomes bodily collective innervations, and all the bodily innervations of the collective become revolutionary discharge, has reality transcended itself to the extent demanded by the *Communist Manifesto*. For the moment, only the Surrealists have understood its present commands. (Benjamin 1999: 218)

For Benjamin, and for the Surrealists, then, the image is the measure of the synthesis between the collective and reality in this process of politicisation, and it is in this sense that the image

for him becomes *dialectical*, a rearrangement of the real. Benjamin's emphasis on technology already anticipates concepts which he would later develop in his essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1936), where he defends again the image as a form of disruption. For example, he says of the Dadaists (although it can be said of the Surrealists too) that in collage and, by implication, also in ready-mades and Surrealist objects which could be mass-produced, they achieve "a relentless destruction of the aura of their creations" (Benjamin 1998: 1119). These techniques imply engagement, not only with pre-existing realities, but with their very means of production. The aura, as an ideologically constructed totality, is interrupted, as the object can be infinitely produced, and the cult idea of authenticity vanishes. Benjamin's theory on the effect of mechanical reproduction *en masse* as a form of social engagement in the work of art also finds correspondences in Charles Madge's and Humphrey Jennings's mass poetics and their use of collagistic reportage, which I describe in this study as a form of poeticised politics, opposing Benjamin's understanding of *poeticisation* as Fascist aestheticisation. This is so because Benjamin distinguishes between the poeticisation of politics and the politicisation of poetry in a way that, although sustained, may not be seen as the only solution to the problem of the work of art as social experience and political action:

> The growing proletarianization of modern man and the increasing formation of masses are two aspects of the same process. Fascism attempts to organize the newly created proletarian masses without affecting the property structure which the masses strive to eliminate. Fascism sees its salvation in giving these masses not their right, but instead a chance to express themselves [in propaganda, newsreels, mass press or even films]. The masses have a right to change property relations; Fascism seeks to give them an expression while preserving property. The logical result of Fascism is the introduction of aesthetics into political life. [. . .] All efforts to render politics aesthetic culminate in one thing: war. War and war only can set a goal for mass movements on the largest scale while respecting the traditional property system. (Benjamin 1998: 1121)

Benjamin is identifying here, in a way which is not upheld in Surrealist praxis, the process of poeticisation of the political with the experience of ideology as aesthetic pleasure, which eventually leaves material structures unaltered. British Surrealist writing, nevertheless, offers an alternative to Benjamin's views on aestheticised politics, for the pleasure gained in the poeticisation of politics which takes place in the texts of Roland Penrose, Roger Roughton, Charles Madge and Humphrey Jennings derives precisely from their capacity to act on reality. The pleasure afforded by these texts is not, or at least not only, of an aesthetic order, but of an

ideological order: the fissure must be seen, not as mere destruction, but as an opening up. Thus, Roland Penrose's *The Road is Wider than Long* (1939) makes use of camouflage and code as poetic techniques to express a firm antimilitaristic and antiwar stance; Roger Roughton's poems are ideological statements and political tracts which, by creating fissures in the *continuum* of bourgeois-taught ideology, open up possibilities in the real: a new social structure with new systems of production and distribution of goods; Charles Madge's and Humphrey Jennings's collective poetics destabilises the power relations between writer and reader, original and copy, by interrupting the aura that surrounds concepts such as "author(-ity)", "originality" and "uniqueness". All these contribute to demystifying the power relations of social structures. Nevertheless, these are not, as I have sustained, promises of a future new totality, but rather signs of an ongoing struggle, and of an opening up of possibilities that incorporates interruption and contradiction into it.

It is this idea of opening up, which also opposes Adorno's critique of Surrealism as static *memento*, that is defended in David Cunningham's article "A Question of Tomorrow: Blanchot, Surrealism and the Time of the Fragment" (2003). In his article, Cunningham addresses the question of how the spark that is produced in the Surrealist image relates, as a fragmentary form, to futurity. He observes that the image as fragment is both a reflection of fragmented reality, and a projection of future possibility. However, this projection is not understood in the utopian or Hegelian (in a way also deterministic) sense of Adorno's conviction that there is perforce a reconciliation to be awaited:

> [. . .] it is, in fact, precisely this [Hegelian] assumption that, for example, Benjamin's early accounts of montage (as a form of self-conscious incompletion, or, we might say, fragmentation) [. . .] are intended to counter, insisting as they do upon the montage or image's capacity to open a (necessarily speculative) perspective on how the present 'may be changed,' without violently predetermining the form that such a change might assume in terms of new modes of experience. (Cunningham 2003: 10)

In "Tomorrow at Stake" (1969), Blanchot also confronts the Hegelian determinism and imposition of reconciliation on which Breton insisted in several of his texts by making the Surrealist image point to an *absolute*.[87] He criticises the link established by some "between automatic writing and a demand for continuity. As though thought [. . .] were in unceasing

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[87] This emphasis on the ideal underlies, for example, Anna Balakian's standpoint in *Surrealism: the Road to the Absolute* (1986).

communication with everything, continuous with the whole" (Blanchot 1993: 411).[88] Blanchot acknowledges in Surrealist ideology (although he certainly does not use that term) an unfolding of possibilities which are not necessarily realised, and this is in fact the stance that is adopted by the British Surrealists for whom ideology is necessarily dynamic, full of holes and fissures which demand the constant re-elaboration of ideological tenets. In this view, fragmentation is not the utopian promise of a final reconciliation, or of a whole understood as predetermined and monolithic.[89] For Blanchot the image does not aspire to what Breton defined as "uninterrupted becoming" (Breton 1936b: 84), but rather to a search for the unknown.[90] This is an unknown which, devoid of all mystic traits, is not measured by unity, but transcends it, being a form of *interrupted un-becoming* (my term) through which there is no harmony or reconciliation, but disjunction, divergence and interruption within itself: the whole as fragment. Not only present and future, but also subject and object, come into contact only through the interruption that takes place in the Surrealist image. The following lines from Gascoyne's "Three Verbal Objects" (1937) show that for him Surrealist writing was also a form of *interrupted un-becoming*, as they point to a whole which, fragment by fragment, is never reached:

> The poet is dead; and it is in the people that we must seek to find what remains of the mysterious radiation of his soul: -birthpangs of a series of images stretching away into infinity; crystallization of the movements of impulsion and repulsion; from the hermit's cave to the broken shell of the great roc, a trail of bones and other fragments. (Gascoyne 1988: 63)

In this way, Blanchot deconstructs Breton's concept of surreality as final encounter, or a final unification of opposite states: as a temporal category, the Surrealist image can then be understood in terms of Derrida's *différance*, or of Blanchot's *difference*. Related to this is when, discussing the speaker's encounter with Nadja in Breton's eponymous novel, Blanchot states that this encounter, which "takes place in the continuity of the world is given precisely in such a way that it breaks this continuity and affirms itself as interruption, interval, arrest, or opening" (Blanchot 1993: 413). For him this encounter is

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[88] Fredric Jameson would be one of those to see Surrealism, in this Bergsonian light, as responding to an ideology of the continuous, to a drive toward continuity: Surrealism as "the reconstruction of the primal continuity of the unconscious" (Jameson 1974: 98).

[89] Michael Löwy has recently pointed to the *perpetual incompleteness* of the new *mythos* of Surrealism, which he describes as being "a myth in perpetual motion, always incomplete and always open to the creation of new mythological figures and images" (Löwy 2009: 18). If understood dialectically, Löwy's reference to creation necessarily entails destruction and disruption, deferring the possibility of a whole.

[90] "Uninterrupted becoming" is the formula used by Breton to describe the main property of Dalí's paranoiac images.

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the hiatus between several levels of reality, between several systems of determination, the outside and the inside, or between diverse fields of knowledge; or else the impossible return to unity and the paradoxically unique manifestation of difference (given in a single stroke, a single moment and in one place. (Blanchot 1993: 413)

He also adds that, in this encounter, "what arrives in an abrupt manner and like by lightning [. . .] is the non-coming itself" (Blanchot 1993: 413). Similarly, in Gascoyne's "The Cage" (1936), the encounter, described as "The brimming cup of water / The preface to the book" (Gascoyne 1936d: 28), is also seen as opening and *non-coming*. In both cases, the encounter claims that it fills the space that it creates, and that therefore it provides the continuity that is lacked in reality (projecting a future continuity), but nevertheless it also shows that this continuity or unity can only exist in terms of fragmentation and difference. The following statement summarises Blanchot's position, which undermines the Hegelian logic behind Adorno's (but also Breton's) concept of totality as applied to the Surrealist aesthetic:

> At the point of juncture –a unique point- what comes into relation remains without relation, and the unity that thus comes to the fore is but the surprising manifestation (a manifestation by surprise) of the un-unifiable, the simultaneity of what cannot be together; from which we have to conclude, even should this ruin logic, that where the junction takes place it is disjunction that reigns over unitary structure and causes it to shatter. (Blanchot 1993: 415)

Blanchot thus observes that there is something beyond this junction, something that transcends unity. Breton, on the other hand, and in spite of his emphasis on a final solution, had already anticipated this when he identified beauty (of the image, of the encounter) and convulsion. In "Beauty will be Convulsive" (1934) he describes the revelation made by the automatic image as

> an excessive solution, [. . .] a solution strictly adapted, yet very superior, to necessity. [. . .] one's pleasure is always partly accounted for by the lack of resemblance between the desired object and the discovery. Whether this discovery be artistic, scientific, philosophic or of as mediocre a use as you please, it takes all the beauty that I see in it from what it is not. (Breton 1936b: 42)

It is in this excessive solution that we perceive Breton's understanding of the Surrealist image as deferral (i.e. as the non-identification of what is desired and what is encountered), for a solution in excess of itself is also a form of dissolution.

In view of all this, the ideology of British Surrealism can be seen then as a self-disruptive totality which, by incorporating contradiction and change as part of its own configuration, does not present totalising or homogenising views of reality. The Surrealist image contributes to this, because, as a fragment, it sabotages the reconciliation which it sets itself to achieve, opening fissures in the apparent continuity of official discourse. This is very clearly seen in the works of the British Surrealists, especially of Roland Penrose, Roger Roughton and the Surrealists associated with Mass-Observation, Charles Madge and Humphrey Jennings. These authors placed ideology at the centre of their poetics, creating a sort of poeticised politics by means of myth and camouflage (Penrose), satire and political propaganda (Roughton), collage and reportage (Madge and Jennings). Hugh Sykes Davies, David Gascoyne and George Barker, on the other hand, although not so much concerned with ideology as poetic material, also developed a Surrealist politics in their texts. These are permeated by ideological content, which, following Adorno, is inherent in pure form: theirs is, then, a case of politicised poetics. Thus, the British Surrealists put forward a system of thought and a worldview which incorporates contradiction and interruption within itself, as a way to oppose the static and monolithic ideological superstructure of bourgeois society. As will be seen, this also allowed them to confront the false ideologies of totalitarian regimes, such as Fascism and Communism: the poet, according to Herbert Read, "is a creature of intuitions and sympathies, and by his very nature shrinks from definiteness and doctrinaire attitudes. Pledged to the shifting process of reality, he cannot subscribe to the static provisions of a policy" (Read 1947: 25). This is why Surrealist ideology did not run the risk of becoming a form of false consciousness: the ideology of British Surrealism developed, not as a system of thought susceptible of being taken as a refuge (Breton 1936b: 49), but rather as a system of ideas at the point of rupture, a dynamic form of *Weltanschauung*.

3. Towards a Surrealist Ideology in Britain.

Many of the ideas discussed above found their way into British Surrealism and were reflected in the collective declarations of the Group as well as in the theoretical writings of some individual Surrealists, especially those of Herbert Read and Roland Penrose. In the following sections, I present a detailed account of the political activities of the British Surrealists throughout the 1930s, the political events that shaped their ideological stance, and an overview of the different ideological systems (pacifism, Marxism, Communism and Anarchism) which converged in the complex development of a Surrealist ideology in Britain. This will contribute to a better understanding of the ways in which, not only image and

ideology, but also political action, were brought together in British Surrealist writing of the 1930s.

3.1. Surrealism from Intuition to Reason.

In the "Second Manifesto of Surrealism" (1930), Breton insisted on the natural tendency of the Surrealist idea to "assume a concrete shape" and to take shape "in the order of *fact*, in the same sense in which the idea of love tends to create a being, or the notion of Revolution tends to bring about the day of that Revolution" (Breton 1972: 136). This made Surrealism's intentions to turn the Surrealist *idea* into action official, a change epitomised by the shift of perspective adopted by the French Group in its official organ, whose name developed from *La révolution surréaliste* (1924-1929) to *Le surréalisme au service de la révolution* (1930-1933) (Mengham 2001: 26; Mellor 2011: 88). This is what Walter Benjamin understood as the transitional stage from (ideological) revolt to (political) revolution. Thus, Surrealism's concern with the ideological crisis in consciousness developed into a preoccupation with the incipient "crisis of the object" announced by Breton in a lecture delivered in Brussels entitled "What is Surrealism?" (1934). This lecture is central to the developmental line that Surrealism was to follow in Britain and, along with other essays by Breton, it was translated into English by David Gascoyne and published by Faber and Faber under the collective title *What is Surrealism?* (1936) on the eve of the London Surrealist Exhibition. The collection became thus, together with Herbert Read's *Surrealism* (1936), one of the British Group's foundational texts.[91] In "What is Surrealism?" (1934), which traces the development of Surrealism from its inception in 1919 to 1934, Breton tackles the problem of social action as an essential Surrealist issue in the midst of international political crisis and the establishment of Fascist regimes in Europe, stating that "*the liberation of the mind*, the express aim of surrealism, demands as primary condition, in the opinion of the surrealists, *the liberation of man*" (Breton 1936b: 48). Hence, the material supersedes the idea as the "intuitive" or "heroic" epoch of surrealism (initiated with the publication in 1919 of *Les Champs Magnétiques*) is succeeded by its "reasoning epoch", which observes the supremacy of matter over thought (Breton 1936b: 50-52).[92] In his "Introduction" to *Surrealism* (1936), Herbert Read defines "reason" in this context in terms of total awareness:

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[91] *What is Surrealism?* (1936) was published as number 43 of T. S. Eliot's Criterion Miscellany series. It included six of Breton's texts: "Surrealism and Painting" (1928), "Exhibition X . . . Y . . ." (1929), "The First Dali Exhibition" (1929), "The Communicating Vessels: the Phantom Object" (1932), "Beauty will be Convulsive" (1934) and "What is Surrealism?" (1934). These essays range from 1928 to 1934 but remain valid up to at least 1936, giving an idea of the eclectic nature of British Surrealism.
[92] Breton's term "reasoning" is also used in the sense of "awareness" of both the social and the psychological. This reflective dimension of Surrealism is what made Jameson state that "the idea of

Reason [. . .] should rather connote the widest evidence of the senses, and of all processes and instincts developed in the long history of man. It is the sum total of awareness, ordained and ordered to some specific end of object of attention. [. . .] Superrealism is also superrationalism. (Read 1971: 23)

The political hiatus to which Breton refers as one epoch gives way to another, and which he sets in 1925, was triggered by France's involvement in the Rif War between Spain and Morocco that year. In "What is Surrealism?" (1934), Breton outlines the conditions under which the ideological was superseded by the material:

During the [intuitive] period [. . .], in the absence, of course, of all seriously discouraging exterior events, surrealist activity remained strictly confined to its first theoretical premises, continuing all the while to be the vehicle of that total 'non-conformism' [. . .] until the outbreak of the Moroccan war, which, re-arousing in us our particular hostility to the way armed conflicts affect man, abruptly placed before us the necessity of making a public protest. (Breton 1936b: 51)

This protest took the form of a manifesto issued in conjunction with members of a pro-Communist group centred around the journal *Clarté*. Both groups co-signed the manifesto "La révolution d'abord et toujours" (1925), published in *La révolution surréaliste*, in which they defended a revolutionary pacifist stance regarding the Moroccan conflict.[93] Although the attempt was ideologically confused, Breton did not fail to see the impact that the war had in the development of Surrealism from a system of thought to a programme of political action, from idealism to dialectical materialism. War, as an "unthinkable" reality, cannot be combated (only) with thought: "Surrealist activity, faced with a brutal, revolting, *unthinkable* fact, was forced to ask itself what were its proper resources and to determine their *limits*; it was forced to adopt a precise attitude, exterior to itself, in order to continue to face whatever exceeded these limits" (Breton 1936b: 51).[94] Nevertheless, and in spite of this definite position, Breton's text underscores Surrealism's condition as a "living movement [. . .] relying on concrete facts" (Breton 1936b: 53) and "a function of the unrolling of historical realities as these may be

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Surrealism is a more liberating experience than the actual texts" (Jameson 1974: 101). Jameson's understanding of the Surrealist idea (or ideology) as more redeeming betrays textual misreading, since the liberating effect is derived from awareness, from being conscious of the unconscious, a state which is only achieved through the material texts.

[93] For an analysis of the collaborations between *Clarté* and the Surrealists see Helena Lewis's "Surrealists and the *Clarté* Movement" in *The Politics of Surrealism* (1988): 37-54.

[94] The concept of "limit" in regard to Surrealism's ideological and political capability is also central to the development of a Surrealist ideology in Britain, faced as it was with the outbreak of two conflicts in which British intellectuals were compelled to *take sides*: the Spanish Civil War and the Second World War.

speeded up between the period of relief which follows the conclusion of a peace and the fresh outbreak of war" (Breton 1936b: 54), a condition which does not only point to a Hegelian past which must not be denied, but also allows for regular contradictions and further redefinitions in accord with the development of social, ideological and artistic conditions. Thus, in "What is Surrealism?" (1934), Breton reproduces long excerpts from the "Manifesto of Surrealism" (1924) and the "Second Manifesto of Surrealism" (1930), sanctioning their validity. Moreover, he rejects both the purely speculative approach of the likes of Antonin Artaud and Robert Desnos and the political subjection of Pierre Naville and Louis Aragon.[95] Also, he defines the two main concerns of Surrealist activity as strictly distinct: on the one hand, the exploration of the relation between the conscious and the unconscious and, on the other, the problem of social action. He embraces psychoanalysis for the former, and dialectical materialism as the only solution to the latter, but refuses external control on either. Furthermore, and in spite of the strict distinction marked between both issues, he insists that "The problem of social action is [. . .] only one form of a more general problem which surrealism finds it its duty to raise, and this problem is *the problem of human expression in all its forms*" (Breton 1936b: 75). Thus, he not only shows that Surrealism has not abandoned its initial linguistic concerns and explorations in the realm of expression, but at last emphasises the interrelation of thought and action: "all fetters on the emancipation of the working class and all armed attacks on it cannot fail to be considered by us as attacks on thought likewise" (Breton 1936b: 90).

As we can see, the ideological position and concerns of Surrealism underwent a number of changes and "What is Surrealism?" (1934) constitutes a faithful document that attests to the complex state in which Surrealism reached Britain. The British Surrealists were not only faced with a movement which had developed from being an epistemological exploration of unconscious images and a Hegelian system of thought attempting to provoke a crisis in consciousness, to a Marxist programme of social action attempting to bring about a "fundamental crisis of the object" (Breton 1936b: 86); they were also faced with a movement which, in all legitimacy and coherence with its very eclectic nature, was reluctant to leave any of these aspects behind. This fact, which was acceptable for those who had actually *lived* through the movement's different stages, implied for the British Surrealists the need to adopt a more or less coherent stance with regard to techniques of unconscious exploration, image formation, ideological adherence, political engagement and social action. If seen in a different light, it may be said that the British Surrealists had the privilege to choose and boost those aspects of Surrealism that best suited their material conditions, their ideological beliefs or

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[95] All former members of the Surrealist Group, excommunicated by Breton.

their poetic capacity. Each of them negotiated these in different ways, and managed to resolve the tensions and complexities inherent in the movement's historical development contributing to further, in one way or another, its call for wider consciousness.

As we have seen, another notable influence on the poetics and politics of the British Surrealist Group was Salvador Dalí: this was confirmed by the reconfiguration of the French Surrealist ranks after the "Second Manifesto of Surrealism" (1930) which discredited important figures of the early years of Surrealism who had abandoned the movement, such as Antonin Artaud or Philippe Soupault. In the early thirties, new members, such as Buñuel, Dalí and Hugnet, contributed fresh ideas and methods of Surrealist research and, by the time Surrealism officially reached Britain, the movement had regained momentum through Dalí's paranoiac-critical method. Moreover, his influence on the British Group was favoured by a series of events which converged at the moment of Surrealism's emergence in Britain: David Gascoyne's early acquaintance with Dalí in Paris and his translation of *The Conquest of the Irrational* (1935); the enthusiastic comments regarding Dalí's contribution to the movement in Gascoyne's *A Short Survey of Surrealism* (1935) and in Breton's *What is Surrealism?* (1936); Dalí's extravagant lecture on "Authentic Paranoiac Phantoms", delivered from inside a diving helmet which nearly suffocated him, at the opening of the 1936 London Surrealist Exhibition; and Edward James's collaboration with and patronage of Dalí in the 1930s.[96]

Apart from this, the creation and manufacture of Surrealist objects was central to Dalí's Surrealist experimentation: these objects imply a kind of overture to reality, to the spatio-temporal dimension in which they actually exist and, in the case of automata and other machines, act. Paul Éluard identified the creation of Surrealist objects with a "physics of poetry" which in a way contemplated the objectification of poetry: poetry turned into a spatial category endowed with the capacity to act on the external world. Dalí's essay "The Object as Revealed in Surrealist Experiment" was first published in English translation in *This Quarter* in 1932. In it, Dalí follows Breton in the distinction of two epochs of Surrealism: the "Revolution by Night" (associated with the exploration of dreams and other unconscious states) and the "Revolution by Day", which Dalí identifies with the "day of dialectical materialism" (Dalí 1998: 238): this is a time in which "our eyes see the light of things in the external world" (Dalí 1998: 239). Finally, in *The Conquest of the Irrational* (1935), Dalí asserts that "From that time, the

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[96] For a précis on Edward James's role in 1930s British Surrealism and on his relationship with Dalí, see Remy (1999): 77, 99-100. More on James's life and contribution to Surrealism in general is found in John Lowe's *Edward James: Poet, Patron, Eccentric. A Surrealist Life* (1991).

delirious images of Surrealism have been desperately tending toward their tangible possibility, toward their objective and physical existence in reality" (Dalí 1998: 266).

For Dalí, the "crisis of the object" postulated by Breton implied an unambiguous moral position. Already in 1930, soon after the "Second Manifesto" was issued, Dalí wrote "The Moral Position of Surrealism" (1930), in which he outlines the main facets of this position. He establishes that the Surrealist revolution is, above all, a moral revolution and censures as amoral the rational attitudes that characterise modern civilisation. Surrealist ideology is based on a will to discredit the world that is "perceived by the senses and the intellect" (Dalí 1998: 219); and for him it is the Surrealist image that provokes this sensory and intellectual crisis: "The birth of the new Surrealist images should be considered, above all, as the birth of images of demoralization" (Dalí 1998: 221). Similarly, in "What is Surrealism?" (1934), Breton distinguishes the Surrealist "phantom objects" (objects of unconscious desire), from the kind of ideological constructs of metaphysics and religious idealism, described by Engels as "being outside space and time created by the clergy and fed by the imagination of ignorant and oppressed masses [which] are nothing but the products of a diseased fantasy, the subterfuges of philosophic idealism, the bad products of a bad social regime" (in Breton 1936b: 31). Thus, Surrealist ideology started to develop in Britain as a form of opposition to those false ideologies, those diseased fantasies: being a historical category and adopting a materialist stance, it opposed their de-historicised position; as a site of disruption, it undermined their false sense of continuity; as an open system of ideas, subject to constant reconfiguration, and it discredited them as homogenising and *hygienising* regimes.

The British Surrealists embraced this moral, or ideological, stance, which reached there through the writings of Breton and Dalí especially. Although they all placed great emphasis on the role that the Surrealist image was to play in the development of a Surrealist ideology in Britain, they differed in the way the new ideology was to be upheld in their texts: on the one hand, David Gascoyne, Hugh Sykes Davies and George Barker carried out a *nocturnal* exploration of unconscious images in which the ideological *continuum* became fractured; on the other hand, Roland Penrose, Roger Roughton and the Surrealists associated with Mass-Observation, Humphrey Jennings and Charles Madge, explored ideological content from a poetic stance. Although this double movement reflected in a way an inherent contradiction within Surrealism as it reached Britain, the criticism tends to overemphasise the lack of cohesion of the British Group.[97] In fact, it has not yet been properly ascertained that, within the context of Breton's most significant programmatic text for British Surrealism, the pamphlet

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[97] With the notable exception of Michel Remy's *Surrealism in Britain* (1999).

What is Surrealism? (1936), the Surrealists in Britain managed to retain the balance between Hegelian idealism and political intrusion into the poetic, an equilibrium not achieved by all of the original members of the French Group. In *What is Surrealism?* (1936), Breton criticised the excessively metaphysical nature of Artaud's and Desnos's experiments, as well as Naville's and Aragon's poetic concessions to the Comintern. However, the British poets managed to play along the fine line which, for a Surrealist, separated both positions, and this, throughout a not insignificant span of time, from the first pieces of British Surrealist writing, published by Gascoyne in 1933, to the desertions of 1939 and the final dissolution of the Group's official organ, the *London Bulletin* in 1940. The fact that the British Surrealists managed to maintain a not negligible degree of autonomy from the French Group while simultaneously retaining Breton's favour is symptomatic of the success of the Surrealist poetic revolution in Britain in the thirties.[98] On the other hand, adherence to a definite political programme also became a prerogative for the British Surrealists. Just as there had been this oscillation from idealism to materialism and from intuition to reason, it followed that party politics would become a highly controversial question in the context of 1930s Surrealism. In this regard, it is necessary at this point to outline briefly French Surrealism's development from Communism to Anarchism in order to understand the diverse positions adopted by the British Surrealists.

3.2. Surrealism and Communism.

As was mentioned above, in 1925, with the outbreak of the Moroccan war, the Surrealist Group approached a Communist position by joining forces with the *Clarté* group in issuing "La révolution d'abord et toujours" (1925). In spite of this approximation, from the outset Breton stated quite clearly, in the pages of *Clarté* and elsewhere, that the Surrealists were not willing to abandon their psychological research into the nature of poetic creation (the formation of images) in order to undertake ideological theorisation (the formation of ideas) or political action (the application of ideas). These assertions led former Surrealist Pierre Naville

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[98] Although the Group continued to develop throughout the following decade, it underwent a considerable reconfiguration in 1940, with several desertions, schisms and new adhesions. Also, the political scenario of the war and the post-war period was very different from that of the thirties' decade, which saw the rise of Fascism in Europe, the inauguration of Stalinist terror in the Soviet Union, the crushing of democracy in Spain and the outcome of the Second World War. Of course, in these years of social convulsion and political agitation, a poetic and political revolution of the kind offered by Surrealism was still seen as feasible (above all, as desirable, for it was a revolution with a cause), an idea which was progressively ousted by the consequences of the war and the Holocaust, which required reconstruction and rehabilitation instead of revolution. The conditions that inflamed the Surrealist revolution in the interwar period were propitious for the movement's attempt to reconcile poetic image and revolutionary ideology, to experiment simultaneously in the realm of poetics and of politics to bring down the social, cultural and political structures that supported the ideology of capitalism and the emerging totalitarian ideologies.

to publish *La révolution et les intellectuels* (1926), an injunction to the Surrealists to adopt a definite form of political action. The question posed by Naville reflected the discrepancies between Communists and Anarchists and in a way also anticipated the eventual inclination of Surrealism towards Anarchism: that is, the question of whether a revolution of the mind should precede an abolition of material conditions (an ideological revolution, but also, in Trotsky's view, a total revolution), or whether a change in social conditions should lead to a change in ideology (a materialistic approach which would require the transitional establishment of an ideological regime). As a response to Naville's injunction and other attacks on the part of members of the French Communist Party (notably Henri Barbusse), Breton issued a pamphlet, "Legitimate Defence" (1926), which echoed ideas contained in the manifesto of 1924: "What is thought [that is, the thoughts of the dominant classes] has become incomprehensible to the mass of men, and is virtually untranslatable for them" (in Rosemont 1978: 55). This is how Breton defined ideology as false ideology: a set of concepts and ideas imposed on the masses which does not represent them. Surrealism's primary concern, he reiterated, was to overcome the present dissociation of thought and language, that is, of ideology and image, and this could only be done by the broadening of consciousness which Surrealism propounded as an overture to reality. For him the separation of material reality and thought was a cultural construct, fabricated as an illusion of false continuity to maintain the dominant class in power: both matter and thought were not only interdependent, but equally real. Breton is also unambiguous in his reply to Naville's question regarding the proletarian revolution: "all of us seek to shift power from the hands of the bourgeoisie to those of the proletariat. Meanwhile, it is none the less necessary that the experiments of the inner life continue, and do so, of course, without external or even Marxist [Communist] control" (in Rosemont 1978: 56).

In spite of Breton's unequivocal position, the strained relationship between Surrealism and Communism continued for several years during which the Surrealist leader endeavoured to obtain for Surrealist poetic and political activity the recognition of the Communist Party in France, something that was no more likely than a Surrealist conversion to Socialist Realism.[99] In order to understand Breton's insistence on the matter, it is necessary to observe that Surrealism was the most prominent politically engaged Avant-Garde movement of self-declared Marxist inclination, while Communism was at the time the largest political

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[99] Helena Lewis offers a basic chronological account of the development of the strained relationship between Surrealism and Communism. See "The Surrealists Join the Communist Party" and "At the Service of the Revolution" in *The Politics of Surrealism* (1988): 55-76 and 77-96.

organisation of the left. Save for the Comintern's dictates on revolutionary art and literature, which grew progressively stricter, an alliance ought to seem obvious.[100] So, in June 1930, Surrealism officially placed its poetic experiments at the service of the proletarian revolution, as the title of its official organ announced: *Le surréalisme au service de la révolution* (1930-1933). However, there was a Communist reluctance to accept the Surrealists in the Communist ranks mainly derived from Surrealism's own ideological approach to revolution and its insistence on the autonomy of the artist and writer from aesthetic, moral or ideological principles, even from those of the Party. The already famous statement "If you're a Marxist you have no need to be a Surrealist" (in Breton 1972: 142) settled the matter for the Communists.[101] Nevertheless, it did not settle the matter for the Surrealists, for they persisted in their attempt to bring together revolutionary aesthetics and politics while ensuring the artistic autonomy of the writer: the loosening of the Comintern's strict impositions on revolutionary art and taking part in the cultural politics of the largest Marxist party were major aims for Surrealism at the time.[102] In his introduction to *Petite anthologie poétique du surréalisme* (1934), reviewed by Charles Madge in *New Verse*, Georges Hugnet acknowledged the role played by the Surrealists in opening the path to revolutionary politics for other left-wing intellectuals: "The Surrealists were the first intellectuals to assert themselves by taking the part [. . .] of the Revolution in a political sense and they contributed materially to the spread of that atmosphere which, at present, permits groups of revolutionary writers to unite with relative ease" (in Lewis 1988: 75-76). This was certainly the case in Britain. Moreover, the signs of anti-clericalism and anti-imperialism that the Surrealists exhibited in the pages of *Le surréalisme au service de la révolution* and in works such as Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dalí's film *L'Age d'or* (1930) gained them some unofficial recognition as revolutionaries among the Communists. However, the Communist distrust of the Surrealists prevailed and, in 1931, they were banned from the Association des écrivains et des artistes révolutionnaires (A.E.A.R.), created by the International. In 1932, Louis Aragon's final break with Surrealism in order to

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[100] The Comintern established that the art of the revolution was necessarily Socialist Realism, and that only after the revolution had succeeded the autonomy of the artist could be regained. Proletarian art would be in this sense the truly liberating and liberated form of art.

[101] The statement, reproduced in the "Second Manifesto of Surrealism" (1930), was uttered by Michel Marty, one of the leaders of the French Communist Party.

[102] In this regard, Robin Adèle Greeley has suggested in her book *Surrealism and the Spanish Civil War* (2006) that the criticism has generally failed to acknowledge the complexity inherent in the Surrealists' and the Communists' continuous efforts to engage in dialogue and to "understand Surrealist politics as generated out of a representational practice as much as out of any conventional concepts of the political. [. . .] it was precisely this wider notion of the political that intrigued the Communists even as it frustrated them" (Greeley 2006: 195)

embrace Socialist Realism and support the proletarian revolution strained further the relationship between Surrealists and Communists.[103] The Party's stance regarding the Surrealists and their form of *bourgeois* literature was gradually radicalised from the 1930 Kharkov Congress of Revolutionary Writers, which put forward new extremist dictates regarding proletarian literature, to the 1934 Soviet Writers' Congress, in which Andrei Zhdanov, in charge of cultural and artistic matters in the Soviet Union, presented the thesis of Socialist Realism as the only aesthetics of true proletarian and revolutionary art.[104] The aesthetics of Socialist Realism, with its restrictions on form and content, implicitly opposed all that Surrealism represented.

Breton was eventually expelled from the Communist Party in 1933, but it would not be until 1935 that his final rupture with Communist ideology took place. The year before, the Soviet writer and spokesman for the Soviet Writers' Union, Ilya Ehrenburg, attacked the Surrealists' excessively Freudian approach to poetic creation and condemned them for using revolutionary ideology to cover up their interest in the exploration of mental images of a sexual nature, among which Ehrenburg included onanism, fetishism, sodomy and pederasty (Breton 1972: 244).[105] On the eve of the First International Congress of Writers for the Defence of Culture, which took place in Paris in June 1935, Breton chanced upon Ehrenburg on the street and slapped his face for the insults hurled at the Surrealists in his book. Breton's gesture infuriated the Soviets, who subsequently banned him from the Congress. René Crevel, the only Communist delegate who remained sympathetic to Surrealism, interceded for him in front of the Soviet Delegation, but to no avail. Crevel's suicide, which occurred before the end of the Congress, has since become a symbol of the historical irreconcilability of Surrealism and Communism. Crevel's death compelled the Soviet Delegation to allow Breton's speech to be read by Paul Éluard in one of the sessions. The whole incident was recounted in the tract "On the Time when the Surrealists were Right" (1935), issued by the Surrealist Group in France.[106] In this pamphlet they denounced the sabotage of Breton's speech at the Congress, declared the artist's freedom to explore new forms of expression and new contents, and condemned

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[103] Gascoyne offered a complete chronicle of what came to be known as the "Aragon Affair", mostly taken from the American review *Contempo*, in his *A Short Survey of Surrealism* (1935): 82-88. For an account of the background and context in which Aragon's break took place see also Helena Lewis's "L'Affaire Aragon and Proletarian Literature" in *The Politics of Surrealism* (1988): 97-118.

[104] Accounts, reviews and briefs of the 1934 Soviet Writers' Congress appeared in the pages of the British Communist periodical *Left Review*, in which the vindication of Socialist Realism soon turned into an attack on Surrealism.

[105] These attacks, which had appeared in Ehrenburg's book *Vus par un écrivain de l'URSS* (1934), reached the British and American reading public as they were published in the *Partisan Review* in 1935.

[106] For further details on the Congress, see Helena Lewis' *The Politics of Surrealism* (1988): 129-134.

the censorship and the suppression of intellectual liberties under Soviet rule. The events surrounding the celebration of this First International Congress of Writers for the Defence of Culture had a strong impact on David Gascoyne, who was in Paris and met the Surrealists regularly at the time, and his "First English Manifesto of Surrealism" (1935) reflects the ideological climate created by the latest dissensions between Communists and Surrealists in Paris, as will be seen.

At a time when a Surrealist Group had not yet been instituted in Britain, the British representatives at the Congress of Writers for the Defence of Culture were the then older generation of writers and intellectuals which included, among others, E. M. Forster, Aldous Huxley and, conspicuously, Herbert Read. Although Read had not yet established official ties with Surrealism, his speech at the Congress is ideologically closer to Breton's than to the official line established by the Party. In "Defending Culture" (1935), Read's review of the Congress, published in *News Chronicle*, he is extremely critical of the latest examples of the restriction of individual liberties and of freedom of speech taking place in Britain, and of the vast amount of power bestowed on the police under the law of obscene libel.[107] But Read's text is not only a denunciation of the restrictive measures enforced in Britain: through comparison, it also shows his strong opposition to similar displays of censorship and control of intellectual activities in Stalinist Communism.[108] Although sympathetic to the proletarian cause and revolution, Read's distinction between artists, thinkers and men of imagination on the one hand, and men of action on the other, is revealing: photographs of the former included in the article show figures such as André Malraux and André Gide (whom Breton also admired), whereas Hitler, Mussolini and Stalin are presented as representatives of the men of action.

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[107] An editorial concerning the extension of the British Sedition Laws was published in *Left Review* in October 1934. In this editorial, *Left Review* incited its readers to "maximum disaffection" with the authors of this new bill which was understood as a measure to check political and moral thought in literary works (Slater et al. 1934: 37).

[108] David Bradshaw offers an account of the censorial climate prevailing in Britain in the 1920s and 1930s, which included the censorship and/or banning of books by Richard Aldington, Wyndham Lewis, James Joyce and Ezra Pound, among many others, in his chapter "Obscenity and Censorship" in *A Companion to Modernist Literature and Culture* (2006): 103-112. The later case of David Gascoyne and Humphrey Jennings's translation and edition of Benjamin Péret's poems *A Bunch of Carrots* (1936), which underwent censorship and was eventually published as *Remove your Hat* (1936), is yet a further example of the pressure that official censorship agencies exerted on publishers in the 1930s. This climate may account for the lack of published volumes of Surrealist writing in Britain, as only three texts by British Surrealists were published in book form at the time: Hugh Sykes Davies's *Petron* (1935), David Gascoyne's *Man's Life is this Meat* (1936) and Roland Penrose's *The Road is Wider than Long* (1938). That the British Surrealists managed to publish at all these uncensored works, in spite of them being reviewed as obscene and irrational in the press, attests to their active engagement in opposing official restrictions on intellectual and aesthetic activity.

Read's position regarding Soviet policy is unambiguous, and is already indicative of an ideological alliance with Surrealism:

> everywhere in the world the writer finds barriers raised against him. There are subjects which he may not write about; others which he **must** write about. He may not exercise his traditional right to submit the society in which he lives to his intellectual criticism, his satire, his irony. Hundreds of subjects, normally the raw material of his trade, are now taboo in countries like Russia, Italy and Germany. (Read 1935a: 10)

Read's claim for freedom and individualism implies a strong opposition to both the Fascist and the Communist state. Although he understands that the Communist regime may be just a transitory phase on the way to a proletarian society, the promise of future liberty does not justify for him the submission of the writer's freedom to the impositions of the state. Like Breton, he sees it necessary for writers and artists to continue their intellectual investigations: the only way they can contribute to the revolution is by resisting all forms of mass discipline and control. Read had attended Éluard's reading of Breton's speech at the Congress and, as he stated later in the *New English Weekly*, he "was present at the International Congress of Writers in Paris last June and without any prepossession in their favour, came away with the conviction that in all that babel of irrelevant rhetoric, the surréalistes alone had a point of view tolerable to the artist *and* the communist" (Read 1935: 139). Although he did not want to show himself as too biased in favour of Breton's movement, and explicitly affirmed that he had no intention of converting to Surrealism, the use of the adverb "alone" reveals that he was already within its field of influence. Moreover, considering Read's previous defence of the artistic and literary Avant-Garde, it was to be expected that he would oppose Soviet artistic doctrine and share Breton's views:

> the activity of interpreting the world must continue to be linked with the activity of changing the world. We maintain that it is the poet's, the artist's role to study the human problem in depth in all its forms, that it is precisely the unlimited advance of his mind in this direction that has a potential value for changing the world [. . .]. In art we rise up against any regressive conception that tends to oppose content to form, in order to sacrifice the latter to the former. If today's authentic poets were to go in for propagandistic poetry, which as presently defined is completely exterior, this would mean that they were denying the historical conditions of poetry itself. [. . .] It is not by stereotyped declarations against fascism and war that we will manage to liberate either the mind or man from the ancient chains that bind him and the new chains that

threaten him. [. . .] 'Transform the world,' Marx said; 'change life,' Rimbaud said. These two watchwords are one for us" (Breton 1972: 240-241).

Read's awareness of the discrepancies emerging from the Congress (precipitated by Crevel's suicide and Breton's intervention, read by Éluard) anticipates a concern which will be central to his and other British Surrealists' understanding of the revolution as both ideological and material in nature, an idea that already anticipates Surrealism's gradual shift to Anarchism:

> [. . .] says the Communist [. . .] these [social and economic] conditions are responsible for our present discontents –political and cultural- and these are the conditions which must be changed before the writer can once more develop his individuality in unison with a free and aspirant humanity. At this point the writers of the world begin to divide into two camps. There are those who [. . .] insist that the writer should join in the struggle to establish a new order of society. The writer, they say, has his social and political function, and must place his gifts at the service of humanity. But other writers hesitate to subscribe to such a doctrine. They may have every sympathy with the cause of the oppressed and may fervently desire a new order of society. But they feel that there is a profound difference between the rôle of the writer and the rôle of the politician. It is the difference between the life of the imagination and the life of action. (Read 1935a: 10)

With his Romantic-Surrealist concept of imagination, Read obviously sided with those who, like Breton, understood that the function of the artist and writer in the revolution was to broaden psychological and social awareness through the works of the imagination, unconstrained by external dictates of a political, moral, ideological or aesthetic order. The fact that this was seen by Communists and Fascists alike as a cause of detached individualism against the aims of collectivism was only one of the consequences of a faulty perspective on the matter. For example, Communist and Fascist art was a form of homogenisation and standardisation of taste and aesthetics, the erasure of every individual trait in form and matter, a programme which also accompanied the establishment of Socialist Realism as the only possible revolutionary art. Surrealism, on the other hand, did not despise the collective, but asserted that it could only be reached through acknowledgement of the individual. Later in 1935, Read's views materialised in a proper introduction and defence of Surrealism in Britain which appeared in the *New English Weekly*. Read's article is enthusiastic towards Surrealist doctrine as a revolutionary alternative to Stalinist Communism and a revolutionary conception of art which is already starting to be felt in Britain. He states that the Surrealists are "communists

with a difference. They refuse to accept every edict issued in Moscow as infallible; they dare to criticize the sacred precepts of Karl Marx; and they pour contempt on the party careerists and literary poseurs who are so much in evidence in Paris" (Read 1935c: 91).

The following year, in June 1936, London held a plenary meeting of the international committee of the Association of Writers for the Defence of Culture, where José Bergamín and Ricardo Baeza's proposal for the next Congress to be held in Spain in July 1937 was approved. In the meantime, the Civil War broke out in Spain, Madrid fell to the nationalists and the Republican Government moved from Madrid to Valencia, where the Congress was eventually inaugurated, holding some sessions later in Madrid and Barcelona and finally closing in Paris. The Second Congress implied a radicalisation of positions within Communism: whereas in the First Congress Trotskyism was partially tolerated, in the Second Congress it was strongly disapproved of.[109] One of the main issues dealt with in the Congress was the need for the historical continuity of culture, something with which the Surrealists could not have agreed, given their understanding of the present state of culture and ideology as a decaying one, a bourgeois product which called for destruction and rupture: already in "On the Time when the Surrealists were Right" (1935), the Surrealists had stated that "there can be no question of defending and upholding culture in a capitalist regime" (Breton 1972: 243). The British section of the Second Congress was now represented by the younger generation of engaged writers: W.H. Auden, Ralph Bates, Stephen Spender and Sylvia Townsend Warner: there was no sign of the Surrealists, of any other European Avant-Garde writer, or of Herbert Read. Soviet policy had managed to purge the Avant-Garde out of anti-Fascist demonstrations. In spite of their earnest sympathy towards the Republican cause (David Gascoyne and Roland Penrose had visited Spain in the early months of the Civil War, and Roger Roughton and Hugh Sykes Davies were still loyal Party members), the British Surrealists did not take part. Together with their outright rejection of Soviet policy in literary and artistic matters, this was mainly due to the increasing international awareness of the Moscow Trials and the Stalinist repression of Spanish Anarchists and Trotskyists in Catalonia.[110] Also, the idea of an anti-Fascist Popular Front, still

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[109] Robert Thornberry emphasises this view in "Writers Take Sides, Stalinists Take Control: the Second International Congress for the Defence of Culture (Spain 1937)" (2000). The interventions of the delegates in the First and Second Congress are reproduced respectively in Sandra Teroni and Wolfgang Klein's *Pour la défense de la culture: les textes du Congrès international des écrivains* (2005) and in Manuel Aznar Soler and Luis Mario Schneider's *II Congreso Internacional de Escritores Antifascistas*. 3 Vols. (1987). See also Nigel Dennis's "Los escritoires ingleses y el congreso de 1937" en *València: capital cultural de la República* (2008): 825-836.

[110] The Moscow Trials were a series of trials led by Joseph Stalin in the Soviet Union between 1936 and 1938 in which Old Bolsheviks were accused, tried and prosecuted for conspiring against Stalin. See Robert Conquest's *The Great Terror: a Reassessment* (2008) for an overview of the trials. On the Stalinist

supported by the Comintern, had started to founder among the Surrealists: Georges Bataille, a recent associate of Surrealism, showed his reservations about the Popular Front in France and the French Prime Minister, Léon Blum, had long fallen out of favour with the Surrealists.[111] Moreover, the Anarchists in Catalonia, with whom the British Surrealists had been sympathetic since Penrose and Gascoyne's visit, opposed the Soviet-led Popular Front in Catalonia, on account of the repression that Stalinist parties, such as the Communist Party and the P.S.U.C. were exercising on the other parties of the left, especially the Anarchist C.N.T.-F.A.I. and the Trotskyist P.O.U.M.[112] Finally, the polemic surrounding the figure of André Gide, one of the very few Communists who still retained the admiration of the Surrealists, pushed the issue further. In his book *Retour de l'URSS* (1936) Gide gave his impressions after his trip to the Soviet Union and harshly criticised the Stalinist regime as "the dictatorship of a man, not of the united workers, not of the Soviets" (Gide 1937: 71); consequently, he was not allowed to take part in the Second Congress of Writers for the Defence of Culture, which became a forum for discrediting both Gide and Trotsky.[113] Stephen Spender, who underwent a similar kind of discrimination and persecution on the part of the British Communists, later recalled: "Gide, who, only a few weeks previously, had been hailed in the Communist Press as the greatest living French writer come to salute the Workers' Republic, became overnight a 'Fascist monster,' 'a self-confessed decadent bourgeois'" (Spender 1966: 240-241).[114]

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alienation of Anarchists in Catalonia, see Robert J. Alexander's "The Anarchists in the Catalan Government December 1936-May 1937" in *The Anarchists in the Spanish Civil War*. Vol. 2 (1999): 779-801.

[111] One of the lines in Louis Aragon's poem "Red Front" (1932) read "Feu sur Léon Blum" ("Fire on Léon Blum"). Blum was also responsible, together with Stanley Baldwin in England, for setting up the Non-Intervention Committee regarding the Spanish conflict, a decision strongly opposed and publicly condemned by the Surrealists.

[112] P.S.C.U. or Partido Socialista Unificado de Cataluña (Catalonian Unified Socialist Party), C.N.T. or Confederación Nacional de Trabajo (National Confederation of Labour), F.A.I. or Federación Anarquista Ibérica (Iberian Anarchist Federation) and P.O.U.M. or Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista (Workers' Party of Marxist Unification). George Orwell, a witness to the Soviet annihilation of the Catalonian Anarchists, publically denounced the Stalinist regime in Spain in his *Homage to Catalonia* (1938).

[113] Gide's book was published in English in 1937 under the title *Back from the U.S.S.R.* (1937). This was not, nevertheless, the first time Gide was critical of Stalinist Communism. His speech at the First International Congress of Writers for the Defence of Culture, reproduced in *Left Review*, already followed Surrealist principles: he proclaimed individualism as a way to reach the collective and rejected the idea of cultural and ideological continuation. He also opposed Ehrenburg's address at the Congress: whereas Ehrenburg endorsed a literature popular with the proletariat, Gide defended minority writers (Rimbaud, Baudelaire and Blake) as revolutionary and rejected Ehrenburg's thesis of literature as *mimesis* (Gide 1935: 445-451).

[114] The polemic around Gide reached Britain: *Back from the U.S.S.R.* (1937) was criticised in a review by Patrick Sloan which appeared in the May 1937 issue of *Left Review*; a meeting was called by the Artists' International Association on 11 June 1937 to discuss Gide's statements about life in the Soviet Union. Similar criticisms of Stephen Spender also found their way into the pages of *Left Review*: in a review of Spender's book of literary criticism *The Destructive Element* (1935), Edgell Rickword criticised his lack of

All this controversy surrounding Surrealism and Communism reached Britain and developed at a time when Breton's break with Soviet politics was already official. The reasons for this were varied. Firstly, most of the British Surrealists were already in touch with the French Surrealists in the early thirties, when Breton sought to gain acceptance within the Communist Party. The British writers' first contact was established either through access to the Avant-Garde periodicals of the time, especially Eugène Jolas's *transition* (1927-1938) and Edward W. Titus's *This Quarter* (1929-1932), or during their stays in Paris: significantly, many of the British Surrealists (David Gascoyne, Roland Penrose, Humphrey Jennings, Stanley William Hayter, Julian Trevelyan, Eileen Agar, Ithell Colquhoun, Paul Nash) stayed in Paris and met the Surrealists at some point before 1935. The fact that at the time of these first contacts the alliance with Communism was an integral part of the Surrealist programme explains the central position that the British Surrealists assigned to Soviet policy in the post-1935 period. Secondly, the events surrounding the First Congress of Writers for the Defence of Culture marked the drafting of Gascoyne's foundational text *A Short Survey of Surrealism* (1935) and the publication of the "First English Manifesto of Surrealism" (1935).

Gascoyne's *A Short Survey of Surrealism* (1935) was to be the first study of Surrealism to appear in English in book form. It presents a sympathetic overview of the movement's developments, from its Romantic ancestors to the latest polemic around the First Congress of Writers for the Defence of Culture. As such, it acutely captures and reflects a Surrealist ideology in the making, still clinging to an impossible Communist stance but prior to developing a more Anarchist position. At first, Gascoyne introduces the tensions between Communists and Surrealists, explaining, quite naively and in a parenthetical remark, the reasons for these tensions: "the Communists have always treated Breton and the Surrealists with a quite unjustifiable suspicion and mistrust" (Gascoyne 1935a: 63). Later, the text becomes at points a personal defence of Surrealism against Communist attacks: "Communism has nothing to gain by suppressing the liberty of thought and expression of declared revolutionaries united in their hatred of the capitalist bourgeoisie and taking every opportunity to make clear their political attitude and their faith in dialectical-materialism" (Gascoyne 1935a: 67). Then, Gascoyne's acceptance of Lenin's doctrine serves him to sanction Surrealist activity: "all Marxist critics should beware of confusing *parlour* revolutionaries with *laboratory* (or work-room, studio, study) revolutionaries. Said Lenin: 'Without revolutionary theory, no

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commitment to the Communist doctrine, because Spender opposed "those who say that literature should become an instrument of propaganda" (Rickword 1935: 479), a position he shared with the Surrealists. Douglas Garman, on the other hand, condemned Spender for being a "dyed in the wool idealist" (Garman 1937: 499), a designation more commonly addressed to the Surrealists.

revolutionary action'" (Gascoyne 1935a: 88). In the end, Gascoyne insists on Surrealism's "unchanging political position" as that of adherence to the principles of Communism (Gascoyne 1935a: 95). However, it is Gascoyne's own configuration and critique of Surrealist ideology that remains the most interesting aspect of this book. In his "Introduction" Gascoyne establishes the "synonymity of theory and practice" (Gascoyne 1935a: 24), which implies an identification of idea and action. We are not only bound by economic and material chains, he says, "but also by chains of second-hand and second-rate ideas, the preconceptions and prejudices that help to bind together the system known [. . .] by the name of 'civilisation'" (Gascoyne 1935a: 23). Thus, civilisation is the ideological superstructure to which Marxist thought refers as "false consciousness" and which the Surrealist experiment unmasks. By doing so, theory and action become reconciled, since revolution is only possible when the workers "attain a more or less perfect knowledge of the whole field of thought" (Gascoyne 1935a: 87). Similarly, the Surrealist artist Claude Cahun went as far as to state in her controversial pamphlet *Les Paris sont ouverts* (1934) that the Surrealist experiment was the most revolutionary experiment under the capitalist regime:

> it has tended to destroy all the myths about art that for centuries have permitted the ideological as well as economic exploitation of painting, sculpture, literature, etc. [. . .] this experiment can and should serve the cause of the liberation of the proletariat. It is only when the proletarian has become aware of the myths on which capitalist culture depends, when he has become aware of what these myths and this culture mean for him and has destroyed them, only then will he be able to pass on to his own proper development. The positive lesson of this negating (*negatrice*) experience, that is to say its transfusion among the proletariat, constitutes the only valid revolutionary poetic propaganda. (in Gascoyne 1935a: 88)

A similar defence of Surrealism in the face of Communist attacks recurs in Gascoyne's "First English Manifesto of Surrealism" (1935): the direct reference to the attacks on the part of the members of the International Association of Writers for the Defence of Culture and its outright rejection of "l'attitude 'gauchiste' selon laquelle la littérature 'prolétarienne' et l'art de propagande seraient la seule littérature et le seul art révolutionnaires" (Gascoyne 1935j: 106) set the context in which Surrealist ideology was to emerge in Britain, amidst discussions about proletarian literature and the relevance of Surrealist activities in the wider context of the proletarian revolution.[115] Also, its proclamation of adhesion to the *historical* materialism of

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[115] "The leftist attitude according to which proletarian literature and propaganda art are the only revolutionary literature and art" (my translation).

Marx, Engels and Lenin as one of the four points of its programme and its dismissal of "anarchistic individualism" established the ideological background of the movement apparently more akin to Communism than to Anarchism; but this appeared at a time when this relation had already become impossible.[116] Although Communism at the time seemed the logical continuation of the *historical* materialism of Marx, Anarchism was already on the horizon for the Surrealists. Nevertheless, not all the British Surrealists strictly followed Gascoyne's ideological cue and, curiously enough, it was Gascoyne himself who found it more difficult to reconcile his own aesthetic and ideological declarations.

As a result of these particulars, most of the British Surrealists had flings, at one point or another, with Communism. Charles Madge joined the Party in 1932 as a result of his early acquaintance with Surrealism. Roger Roughton joined in 1935, David Gascoyne in 1936, and Hugh Sykes Davies and Humphrey Jennings in 1937, due mainly to the fact that, in the context of the Spanish Civil War, joining the Party was an anti-Fascist statement in itself. George Barker and Herbert Read, in spite of their engagement in writing pseudo-propaganda poems in favour of the Spanish Republic, never became affiliated.[117] Their literary commitment, like that of Stephen Spender and Cecil Day-Lewis, emerged from non-Communist leftism, and Read was soon to turn officially to Anarchism in 1937. Finally, whereas Roger Roughton became a staunch Communist in 1935, Roland Penrose was decidedly suspicious of party politics and only became a member of the Independent Labour Party instrumentally to obtain safe-conducts to visit Republican Spain. Even so, in spite of these seemingly contradictory and inconsistent positions, the British Surrealist Group managed to retain ideological cohesion throughout the thirties, opposing the signs of bourgeois ideology in modern society. These signs Gascoyne had already outlined in the "Manifesto" (1935): namely capitalism, nationalism, imperialism, Fascism and war. But the Group's cohesion was mainly due to the fact that, with the exception of Roger Roughton and maybe Hugh Sykes Davies (and these were only mild exceptions, as will be seen), adherence to Communist doctrine was not paramount: these writers were brought together by an ideological conviction that went beyond party politics, and which responded to their call for wider consciousness, both in the material and the psychological. This broadening of consciousness was only possible through a Socialist anti-nationalist, anti-imperialist, and therefore pacifist and anti-Fascist stance, which they all shared. They understood that war (the ultimate expression of aggressive capitalism,

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[116] The term "dialectical" was carefully manoeuvred out of the declaration. This deliberate eschewal of Hegelian terminology is to be seen in the context of the Communist charges of idealism against the Surrealists.

[117] Their poems were included in Stephen Spender and John Lehmann's *Poems for Spain* (1939).

nationalism and imperialism) "has no simple explanation in economic forces", but has an important psychological element and "is most probably not unrelated to the frustration of certain primitive impulses during childhood, a frustration which is prolonged and reinforced by adult codes of morality. War is, in theory as in fact, the correlative of religion" (Read 1971: 33). Hence, for them pacifism was the manifestation of unrepressed hedonism: therein lay their conviction that satisfaction of desire was central to political struggle.

As I have sustained, the ideology of the British Surrealist Group was dynamic and open, incorporating change and transformation into it, and it is precisely this capacity for continuous interruption or contradiction as part of its development that brought their differing, sometimes contradictory, positions together. The consequences were several: the aim to which they aspired, a universalism which did not compromise the writer's individuality and which therefore resisted Stalinist doctrine, gradually led them to adopt a position closer to Anarchism and, ultimately, to abandon their pacifist stance (David Gascoyne, Roland Penrose, Humphrey Jennings), to abandon Surrealism (Charles Madge, Hugh Sykes Davies) or even to commit suicide (Roughton). Of course, these were the consequences, not of the failure of the Surrealist enterprise in Britain, which continued well into the forties, but rather of the devastating effect that the Second World War had on these particular authors: the war became the ultimate form of interruption of their Surrealist ideology.[118]

Although Breton's rupture with Communism was official, he did not disapprove of the British Surrealists who joined the Communist Party, probably because he expected that in Britain the relationship between Communism and Surrealism might develop differently, to Surrealism's advantage, and that a new cultural politics in the Party might emerge from these contacts. However, that was not the case. The constant attacks that the Surrealists suffered in the pages of the Communist daily *L'Humanité* were echoed in Britain by the discussions prompted by the Communist periodical *Left Review* (1934-1938). These attacks contributed to the development of a Surrealist ideology in Britain which strongly opposed the tenets of Communism. Furthermore, unlike their French fellows, the British Surrealists did not intend to take part in the cultural politics of the Communist Party. Rather, by opposing those who supported Socialist Realism as the only form of revolutionary art, the Surrealists forced a reconfiguration of the debate towards new definitions of revolutionary ideology in terms of artistic and literary representation. They did not intend to place Surrealism, either as aesthetics or a method of investigation of the unconscious, at the service of the (Communist)

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[118] Herbert Read had in fact used similar terms to describe the First World War: "The war seemed to me to be just a meaningless interruption in the great struggle for social justice" (Read 1947: 63).

revolution, but to put forward an altogether different ideological system founded on the subversive possibilities of the image.

As has been suggested, many of the detractors of British Surrealism were regular collaborators in *Left Review*, which was the public organ of the British Section of the Writers' International, akin to the French A.E.A.R in France. Although, at least initially, *Left Review* was supportive of the political actions initiated by the Surrealists in France, the review soon became a platform for criticism and censure of Surrealist activity. For example, in 1934, an article entitled "The Writer's War" recognised the joint efforts of Modernist, Dadaist and Surrealist writers in the rejection of the bourgeois and capitalist elements in modern society (Ajax 1934: 15-16). This was an acknowledgement of the destructive and subversive forces that were at work in the genesis of Surrealism and, although it is understood that this period of denial must be superseded by the constructive affirmation of new values, the criticism is especially directed to the unreadiness of British intellectuals to unite in organised action. This was followed by articles in 1934 and 1935 in which the question of art and propaganda was discussed: from Edgell Rickword's equation of art and propaganda to Eric Gill's rejection of art in favour of artistic representations of ideology.[119] However, the first signs of explicit opposition to Surrealism as a system of thought and a modern aesthetics began to appear in late 1935: these were slight references to Louis Aragon's conversion from Surrealism to Realism as a natural development from ideological infancy to maturity, from irresponsible experimentation to responsible Communism; and to the purported decay of abstract art, championed in Britain by Herbert Read and Paul Nash, who would soon become members of the British Surrealist Group. Nevertheless, it was not until January 1936 that the first direct reference to British Surrealism appeared: Francis Hastings's review of Gascoyne's *A Short Survey of Surrealism* (1935). This critique reveals a methodological incoherence which is endemic to most of the criticism of Surrealism that was produced in Britain during the thirties, as a result of a lack of coherence in its approach to modern art. Hastings tends to confuse terms and incur in contradictions: although he acknowledges that the Surrealist image has "full meaning" (even if it is only available to the artist), he states that the Surrealists "have nothing of importance to say" (Hastings 1936: 187), denying thus the significance previously accorded to it. Hastings's purportedly Marxist critique of Surrealism is defective as it does not question the inherently ideological nature of meaning as bourgeois fabrication. On the other hand, the

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[119] Rickword's identification of art and propaganda is taken from Upton Sinclair's Socialist critique of Western culture in *Mammonart* (1925), where he states that "All art is propaganda. It is universally and inescapably propaganda; sometimes unconsciously, but often deliberately, propaganda" (Sinclair 2003: 9).

inadequacy of his theoretical approach leads him to confuse concepts such as unconscious content and emotional quality in the work of art, reducing the Surrealist exploration of the unconscious to a mere transcription of sentiment.

Later in the year, *Left Review* devoted a five-page-long supplement to the overwhelming arrival of Surrealism in Britain in its July 1936 issue. It included several reproductions and articles by Herbert Read, Anthony Blunt and Alick West. Although Herbert Read's theories of the modern had already been the object of several attacks, it was not until now that an article by him appeared in the periodical.[120] In "Surrealism: the Dialectic of Art" Read offers a definition of Surrealism as "the only all-embracing aesthetic [outside Russia] which opposes the aesthetic conventions of the capitalist epoch" (Read 1936c: ii). His definition of Surrealism encompasses the aesthetic, the psychological and the ideological: Surrealism as a manifestation of totality, in which form and content, image and ideology, become reconciled. He also draws on Freud's psychoanalytical theory on creative writing when he considers Surrealism as a manifestation of the creative impulse. However, it is not only a linguistic or plastic manifestation. Surrealism is, on the one hand, formally inclusive, for it is not restricted to a particular mode of representation: the Surrealist experiment is an experience of totality. On the other hand, it is also an experience of disruption, both of academic aesthetic conventions and of the ideological superstructure that they support. Finally, according to Read, in their application of the principles of dialectical materialism, the Surrealists claim to be, states Read, "more marxist than the Marxians" (Read 1936c: ii). As such, they oppose, not only the bourgeois artistic conventions, of which the Royal Academy is a major representative, but also the Soviet policy of Socialist Realism. Read goes on to oppoose the concept of mimesis to that of imagination. For the Surrealists, especially due to Freud's scientific studies on the nature of artistic creation, the imagination is a function of the unconscious, "the internal activity of the mind when uncontrolled by immediate sensational awareness and when free from the various moral conventions and social taboos which constitute the accepted social reality" (Read 1936c: iii). Thus, the unconscious transforms reality: in intense rapport with the external object, the imagination finds in it a correlation of its own repressed fantasies, desires and fears. From this synthesis a new reality emerges, in which both the objective world of nature and the subjective world of the unconscious are

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[120] In "Straws for the Wary: Antecedents to Fascism" (1934), Edgell Rickword criticised Read's poem "The Nuncio" (1934) for showing Fascist leanings, which Read denied; Montagu Slater condemned Read for his lack of political perspective and called him a "pseudo-Marxist" in "Art and Right and Left" (1935); Eric Gill's "Art, pure and mixed" (1936) opposed Read's understanding of revolutionary art as an eminently aesthetic category.

acknowledged. This is what Read calls the "superreality" of the work of art: "Reality transformed by the imagination" (Read 1936c: iii).[121] As we see, the link that Read establishes between form and content, aesthetics and ideology, means that Surrealism has a direct influence on the real. Moreover, his exposition of the main tenets of Surrealism becomes a critique of Socialist Realism, in which such a synthesis of unconscious content and material reality does not take place. For him, Socialist Realism is the mimetic reproduction of the objective world. Its emphasis on external, sensorial awareness displaces the subject from this process, hindering the synthesis between subject and object. Socialist Realism is not a dialectical aesthetics, for it only presents the external thesis to which no antithesis is opposed. Furthermore, the kind of mimetic representation that Socialist Realism defends is a continuation of the artistic conventions imposed by bourgeois academicism: although it reflects the living conditions of the workers instead of the life of the bourgeoisie, its realistic form perpetuates the validity and legitimacy of a theory of art which has contributed to the protraction of the ideological power structure of bourgeois society. It is in this sense that Read criticises the doctrine of Socialist Realism as an aesthetic overture to the ideology of capitalism. Hence, their concept of ideology is central to Surrealist experiment and the question that, in this respect, Read and the Surrealists ask, and which finds no answer, is:

> Why [. . .] should socialists who have thrown off the bonds of supernatural religion, who scorn all forms of mysticism and philosophical idealism, who have exposed the capitalist basis of every other form of contemporary ideology –why should these socialists still retain a pious respect for the pictorial conventions of the Royal Academy? (Read 1936c: iii).

Significantly, the French painter Maurice Denis, whose theories notably influenced the emergence of the modern art movement, said: "What I ask of painting is that it shall look like paint" (in Gill 1936: 423). However, the Soviet policy of Socialist Realism does not only impose external restrictions on the creative impulse (academic restrictions on form; ideological restrictions on subject matter), but also, by depriving art of its very creative or imaginative character, it is turning it into mere documentation. Given this state of affairs, Surrealism emerges as a response and in opposition to those aesthetic and ideological impositions.

Further criticism of Surrealism appears in the article by Anthony Blunt which is also included in the Surrealism supplement of *Left Review*. This tends towards a demystification of

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[121] Unlike in other theoretical texts of this period, Read uses the Gallicism ("Surrealism") to refer to the aesthetic, ideological and psychological process, whereas he reserves the Anglicised term ("superreality") for the resulting image.

Surrealism as yet another (even if more radical) example of the anti-rationalist element in art.[122] However, one of the failures of his argument is that he, unlike Adorno and Worringer before him, failed to acknowledge that a refusal to accept reality is itself a form of social action. Also, his claim that the true function of the new (proletarian) art is that of propaganda verges too close on the concept of art as static ideology which, in the capitalist system, turned artistic creations into commercial commodities to be consumed by those whose ideology and social status were maintained by art. Of course, the Surrealists reject this commoditised notion of art, and promote an art in constant dynamic tension with ideology: art involves a rejection of the commoditised tendencies prone to appear within dominant ideologies, but they also see art as a conflation of liberating and ever-widening ideological notions.

Another attack comes from Alick West in "Surréalisme in Literature", the last of the articles in the Surrealist supplement.[123] West states that the sense of liberation provided by Surrealism is only hallucinatory: that is, fictitious and transitory. Besides, his critique focuses on Surrealism's linguistic concern:

> The surréaliste demand for the liberty of the word really covers the demand for the liberty of the thing, the dream of a new society where everything would have a new function. That the demand for a new social order appears primarily as the demand for a new verbal order, is the first weakness of surrealism; for it means that the liberation of words veils the acceptance of the social conditions which give them their meaning. (West 1936: vii)

Paradoxically, in West's proposition, the liberation of words that Surrealism propounds implies the *a-priori* acceptance of those words, which also entails the affirmation of the material conditions on which their meaning is based. Nevertheless, as in Hastings's review of Gascoyne's *Survey* (1935), West incurs in the inconsistency of questioning the ideological nature of syntax, but not the ideological content hidden in meaning: he criticises Breton's *marriage* of a nose and an armchair as superfluous because he sees it as mere syntactic displacement eventually referring to a displacement in the physical world. This is both an

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[122] Anthony Blunt (1907-1983), the renowned Communist art historian and Soviet spy, had been acquainted with Hugh Sykes Davies during their time as members of the Cambridge Apostles. Although Blunt's attacks on Surrealism were notorious during the 1930s, he later retracted: in a Surrealist feature which appeared in *The Times Literary Supplement* in 1978, on account of the retrospective exhibition Dada and Surrealism Reviewed at the Hayward Gallery in London, Blunt regretted that at the time he did not realise the full revolutionary potential of the movement.

[123] Alick West (1895-1972) was a Marxist writer and critic, author of *Crisis and Criticism* (1937) and a regular contributor to *Left Review*. He was, together with Herbert Read, Eric Gill, A.L. Lloyd and F.D. Klingender, included in the influential book published by the Artists' International Association *Five on Revolutionary Art* (1935).

ontological statement, which implies the acceptance that the nose and the armchair actually exist, and a semantic proposition, which implies that the nose and the armchair are effectively what they are. However, for Surrealism this is neither true nor desirable: syntactic displacement is only one of the mechanisms of which the Surrealist image makes use. What West fails to see is that Surrealism does not assume the meaning of a given word, or the actuality of its referent: objects are protean realities in constant transformation, adopting forms and meanings which differ from the functional forms and meanings they have in society. In Breton's image, the armchair is not an armchair, in the same way that the village in Ithell Colquhoun's poem "The Double-Village" is not a village, or a cemetery for that matter:

> Do not be misled for a moment: this place is not what at first sight it seems. Do not be deceived by the port, the strand, the square; nor cafes, hotels, cavernous shops, houses gaunt or gay, nor by the churches, soaring or sequestered. The real village is not here. (Colquhoun 1938-1939: 23)

In these texts, meaning is constantly derided as a bourgeois fabrication. Furthermore, the decentring poetics of Surrealism tends to avoid precisely what West criticises, which is "the unconscious retention of bourgeois standards implicit in these elements of compromise" (West 1936: vii). On the contrary, Colquhoun's text suspends meaning in a way that the *unconscious retention* of the bourgeois concept of a village does not grant access to the *meaning* of the text, not even, as West suggests, as a negation of bourgeois social (and textual) relations. Finally, West urges the Surrealists to become Socialist poets and writers and adopt a "fixed, unchanging attitude of thought", which contradicts the self-disruptive nature of Surrealist ideology.

The fact is that the Surrealists questioned the feasibility of revolution if the ruling classes were not liberated from the deeply-rooted ideological and cultural heritage that supported their social and economic sovereignty, and if the working classes did not become aware of the ideological structures and alienating mechanisms at work in society. West's insistence on the bourgeois anchorage of Surrealist art echoes Blunt's fixation with Surrealism as the latest expression of individualism. Their arguments contribute to perpetuating the idea of Surrealism as a form of dehumanised, apolitical art, likening it to a Dadaistic pre-political phase which did not take place in Britain.

These tensions between Communists and Surrealists continued to grow in the pages of *Left Review* even after the publication of the supplement on Surrealism. In his review of T.A. Jackson's book on Marxist theory *Dialectics: the Logic of Marxism, and its Critics. An Essay in Exploration* (1936), Read opposes Jackson's excessively reductionist focus on the material basis

of ideology in that it disregards the psychological elements that intervene in the formation of concepts, ideas and beliefs: "Human beings *produce* their conceptions, ideas, etc.; they do not find them ready-made. That process of production is not material but mental, and psychology is the study of its laws" (Read 1936a: 520).[124] Even so, in spite of these discrepancies, Surrealism and Communism in Britain had, for the most part, more in common than they ever were willing to acknowledge. Paradoxically, their irreconcilable positions were uncritical reflections of the endless debates of the French periodicals. Hence, in spite of these commonalities, the increasingly totalitarian Stalinist stance prevented further convergence, and the Surrealists gradually veered off to Anarchism, a move that was foreseen by many, inside and outside the movement. For example, in December 1936, a review of Read's *Surrealism* (1936) appeared in the *Daily Worker* (1930-1966), the organ of the Communist Party of Great Britain. It affirmed that Read's book, with its emphasis on psychology and its incapacity to transcend individualism, had finally *exploded* Surrealism's *illusion* of being revolutionary: "As a result, the attitude taken up becomes definitely anti-working-class in just the same way as Trotskyism is anti-working class" (J.K. 1936: 7).

Further polemics appeared in *Left Review* as Surrealism settled in and became an official aesthetic and ideological system in Britain. In "Surrealism and Revolutions" (1937), A.L. Lloyd offers one of the severest commentaries on the movement to be made in Britain in the 1930s: he discredits Surrealism as the ultimate individualistic expression of bourgeois decadence and dissatisfaction, while the Surrealists deceive their audience and themselves as the saviours of the last redeeming ideology. And, although he values the British Group's activities in favour of the Spanish Republic, dissipates the suspicion of a possible connection between Surrealism and Fascism in Britain, and acknowledges the role played by Surrealism in bringing awareness to the middle classes, he states that the Surrealist experiment "can play no serious part in making the proletariat conscious of its social and revolutionary responsibilities" (Lloyd 1937: 898)

The debates that took place in the pages of *Left Review* contributed to establishing Surrealism as the only revolutionary alternative to Communism. Lloyd's attacks led Herbert Read and Hugh Sykes Davies to formulate a response in which the ideology of British Surrealism was further developed: their article "Surrealism. Reply to A.L. Lloyd" (1937) was published in the following issue of *Left Review*. This was the first time a British Surrealist other

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[124] Read's review obtained, of course, a reply from Jackson: in "Marxism: Pragmatism: Surrealism –a Comment for Herbert Read" (1936), Jackson already insinuated that Read was not a Marxist, but a *Bakunist* (Jackson 1936b: 566).

than Read had contributed to *Left Review*, which attests to the strength and cohesion of the movement at the time. In their article, Read and Sykes Davies address the question of the lyrical impulse and contradict Lloyd's statement that the lyrical and irrational elements in Surrealism are politically irresponsible. They warn of the dangers of combining Surrealist lyricism with Surrealism's intellectual position, since there is a substantial historical tradition that associates the lyrical impulse with idealistic philosophical positions from which they would like to stand aside (Read and Sykes Davies 1937: 47). When Read and Sykes Davies proclaim the isolation of the lyrical impulse from their intellectual position, it is in the sense that ideology must not take part in the process of poetic creation, but rather that it emerges as a result of it. As they insist on the isolation of the lyrical impulse, they reject Lloyd's claims that Surrealism's politics participates in the irrationality of its poetics: "we isolate the lyrical impulse, not because we are anti-rational, but because we wish to preserve a clear reason. If we have intellectual positions to explain, we shall explain them in the most direct, the most rational, the least lyrical form possible to us" (Read and Sykes Davies 1937: 47). Indeed, the British Surrealists did so in numerous political manifestoes and declarations, as will be seen. Nevertheless, what Read and Sykes Davies's argument shows is that the conflict between Communists and Surrealists emerges, not only from their radically different conception of what a socially responsible lyrical act is, but mainly from their distinct understanding of the lyrical. Read and Sykes Davies offer a critique of the concept of "lyricism" as a bourgeois literary construction which has no meaning outside the "bourgeois game of literary criticism" (Read and Sykes Davies 1937: 48). As such, the very application of the term to Surrealism would be misleading. In the bourgeois critical tradition, Read and Sykes Davies argue, the term lyricism is

> intimately connected with notions of inspiration, and so with religious and idealistic assumptions: traditionally the lyrical product is held to be inexplicable in material terms, and so to be a proof of the existence of 'something beyond matter,' 'the divine element in human personality,' and so forth. (Read and Sykes Davies 1937: 48)

Drawing on Freud's concept of the lyrical impulse, Read and Sykes Davies connect it with the unconscious mechanisms which are at work in the poet's mind, defending that the lyrical impulse must be studied as a psychological category, rather than a literary-critical one. Hence their interest in the exploration of dreams and the formation of unconscious images, of mental disease and anthropological experiments. In fact, the variety of approaches exhibited in 1930s British Surrealist writing shows the extent to which these claims are true, offering an aesthetic and ideological alternative to the mimetic correspondence between the literary and the real in

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Realism. Finally, Read and Sykes Davies stress Surrealism's political concern and the scope of their political activities, especially in Britain and Spain, and state their intention to

> continue to co-operate to the fullest extent in all revolutionary activity to which we can contribute anything, and we hope that against this background of common activity our theoretical position will assume its proper proportions for both sides, and that we shall be able to discuss it with no more spirit of controversy or systematised misunderstanding than Mr. Lloyd has shown. (Read and Sykes Davies 1937: 48)

No more open debates followed this declaration, and only passing references to Surrealism appeared in the pages of *Left Review* afterwards. However, this absence of public controversy did not point to a reconciliation of postures, but rather signalled the gradual drifting apart of Surrealism and Communism. The most significant contribution in this sense was probably Anthony Blunt's "The 'Realism' Quarrel" (1937), which commented on a series of discussions which took place under the auspices of the Maison de la culture in Paris in May and June 1936. This series of debates, which came to be known as "La querelle du réalisme", was intended to provide an answer to the fundamental 1930s' question of whether revolutionary art should have a realistic or non-realistic aesthetic basis. For Blunt the answer was already clear, as he sustained that arts which were not rooted in the proletariat, such as Abstraction and Surrealism, could not represent the ideas of the rising class and therefore could not have a role in the revolution:

> The more abstract forms of painting have up till now not gained the approval of the proletariat, which did not produce them, and which cannot find in them what it demands –namely, the expression of its own aspirations and ideas in a form which is easily and widely accessible. (Blunt 1937d: 170)

Nevertheless, the issue was far from settled, and Picasso's 1937 series of etchings *Dream and Lie of Franco* and his painting *Guernica* (1937), which had a significant influence on some of Roland Penrose's works of the 1930s, also contributed to stir up the matter. The discussions between Surrealists and Communists that had taken place in the pages of *Left Review* turned into a dialectical battle on Picasso's work between Herbert Read and Anthony Blunt, in which Roland Penrose also took part. Throughout October and November 1937, a series of articles appeared in the art section of *The Spectator* (1828-) under the title "Picasso Unfrocked". The debate was started by Blunt, who criticised Picasso's aestheticised images, unintelligible for the working classes, and his tragic depiction of the civil war theme which failed to portray it as part of the forward movement of the revolution (Blunt 1937a: 584). Roland Penrose, on the other hand, exposed the contradictions inherent in Blunt's argument, which presents Picasso

as an individualistic painter while simultaneously acknowledging his popularity among the Spanish workers. As Penrose suggests, Picasso's contribution to the 1937 Paris World Fair (not only with the commissioned *Guernica*, but also with postcards from *Dream and Lie of Franco*) enlarged international awareness of the Spanish conflict, acting also as a form of propaganda for the revolutionary cause (Penrose 1937c: 747). However, Herbert Read's words are probably the most enlightening in the context of the 1930s debates on the ideological use of the image:

> It is only too evident to anyone who knows the real facts that the particular form of opposition to modern art adopted by Mr. Blunt comes from middle-class doctrinaires who wish to 'use' art for the propagation of their dull ideas. That the drab realism which these philistines have enforced in Russia and Germany should become the art of a country like Spain is happily a contradiction of its innate artistic spirit too improbable to entertain seriously. Mr. Blunt tries to discredit Picasso by picturing him as the idol of a set of emasculated aesthetes. But on the contrary the people associated with Picasso, either as personal friends or as disinterested supporters of his art, have had rather more experience of the actual horrors of war than Mr. Blunt and other ideologists of his generation. (Read 1937a: 636)

A British tour of Picasso's *Guernica* in 1938 eventually proved Blunt wrong, as the show was warmly welcomed by the working classes of London's East End, where the admission price was a pair of boots to be donated to the Spanish soldiers.[125]

The polemics that the Surrealists incited by their mere intervention in public politics contributed to enriching the cultural atmosphere of pre-war London. The outraged debates and reciprocal attacks between Communists and Surrealists which crowded the pages of the leading left-wing periodicals were transferred to social gatherings, exhibitions and meetings organised by the Artists' International Association (A.I.A.). The A.I.A. was a society founded in London in 1933 concerned mainly with the role of the artist in society, and was initially oriented towards radical politics and Socialist Realism. Founded mainly by members of the Communist Party, its main aim was "the international unity of artists against Imperialist War on the Soviet Union, Fascism and Colonial oppression" (Morris and Radford 1983: 11). On 23 June 1936, the A.I.A. organised a debate meeting on Surrealism on the occasion of the London Surrealist Exhibition. This was indicative of the interest that Surrealism incited in the A.I.A. In spite of differences, especially between Herbert Read and A.L. Lloyd and of the kind that would

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[125] A detailed account of the British reception of Picasso's painting is offered in Gijs van Hensbergen's *Guernica: the Biography of a Twentieth-Century Icon* (2004): 82-96.

later appear in *Left Review*, ideological positions were bridged and the Surrealists were invited to join the Association, which they did soon after the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War. Although many of the artists of the A.I.A. were driven towards Realism, the Surrealists held a strong position within the A.I.A., and were regularly invited to take part in lectures and exhibitions which nicely combined an interest in the political content of Realism with the revolutionary poetics of Surrealism.[126]

In the spring of 1937, the Surrealists took part in the British Artists' Congress and Exhibition, aimed to promote the A.I.A.'s watchword "Unity of artists for Peace, Democracy and Cultural Development" (Morris and Radford 1983: 35). Economic and political issues were dealt with as the two sides of one single question, which was the position of the artist in society: in an attempt to bring together contradictory positions, especially those of the Social Realists and the Surrealists, the Congress privileged universalising concerns, such as the overall threat against artistic expression in 1930s Europe, over sterile discussions on particular modes of representation. The aim was to create a united front of artists, regardless of aesthetic orientation or artistic school, an idea which was successful for a time. A large body of Surrealist work was included in the Exhibition, continental and British, and there was a committee, presided by Read, especially appointed to select the Surrealist pieces. Further collaboration between supporters of Socialist Realism and Surrealism took shape in the May Day demonstrations of 1937, in which they jointly participated and marched. It seemed that, in spite of confrontations in other arenas, the A.I.A. had managed to show that a harmonious collaboration between Communists and Surrealists was at last possible in Britain, while it seemed to have failed on the continent. Nevertheless, this was not to last for long. A review of the Exhibition, which appeared in the May 1937 issue of *Left Review*, was again critical of the Surrealists. Although it did acknowledge their efforts at unity and their forceful denunciation of the precarious condition of the arts in capitalism, it derided the Surrealist works as products of individualism and commodities of bourgeois fashion:

> [. . .] one feels that the personal quality of experience that Surrealism implies should not admit so many works that impress as derivative exercises, even to the selection of titles from a fashionable and limited vocabulary. In spite of their protests that they are misunderstood, many of these defiant, desperate men still confuse Society with the chatter-pages of *Vogue*, and our Style Expert will tell you if spots or stripes will be worn this Spring. (J.S.H. 1937: 230)

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[126] In February 1937, Hugh Sykes Davies delivered a lecture on poetic technique, whereas Herbert Read spoke about his very influential book *Art and Society* (1936) in March 1937.

Dissensions soon crept into the ranks of the A.I.A. when injurious comments on Picasso's *Dream and Lie of Franco* appeared in the January 1938 issue of the *A.I.A. Newsheet*.[127] The Surrealists replied promptly and threatened to leave the Association. Although the editors of the *A.I.A. Newsheet* apologised publically in the following issue, the relationship between Communists and Surrealists had greatly deteriorated. As schisms within the A.I.A. started to emerge, a debate around the question of Realism and Surrealism, which echoed the 1936 debates of La querelle du réalisme at the Paris Maison de la culture, was organised by the A.I.A. at the Group Theatre Rooms in London on 16 March 1938. Surrealism was represented by Roland Penrose, Julian Trevelyan and Humphrey Jennings, and they illustrated their points with paintings by Miró and Picasso. The defenders of Realism were, on the other hand, Graham Bell, William Coldstream and Peter Peri. Old antagonists Herbert Read and Anthony Blunt also intervened. Although it is generally claimed that the Surrealists were dialectically and artistically superior to the representatives of Realism, their interventions still came under attack.[128] Randall Swingler's report of the discussion was published in *Left Review* under the title "What is the Artist's Job?" (1938). Swingler praised the "humility" and "honesty" of the Realist paintings, and he criticised the Surrealist debaters for their aggressiveness. They were, he stated,

> betrayed by their very vociferation, the pretentious flourish of any pseudo-philosophical, pseudo-psychological, pseudo-literary pseudo-phraseology which has nothing to do with painting, as people with a complete despair and sterility as regards the practice of Art. Nothing could be less 'revolutionary,' less 'shocking,' than the paintings they produced. (Swingler 1938: 931)

As was generally the case in the criticism that appeared in Britain, the main fault found in Surrealism was its reliance on Freudian psychoanalysis, which the Communist critics, as Herbert Read had rightly pointed out, were reluctant to accept as a materialist science. They failed to see in Surrealism's exploration of the unconscious an opportunity to break down the concepts and principles of capitalist society. Rather, they regarded their interest in psychological problems as a form of mysticism which hindered engagement with social

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[127] Historical accounts of the A.I.A.'s actions and exhibitions and the contents of the *AIA Newsheet* can be found in Lynda Morris and Robert Radford's *The Story of the Artists' International Association 1933-1953* (1983) and Robert Radford's *Art for a Purpose. The Artists' International Association 1933-1953* (1987).

[128] William Townsend (1909-1973), a fellow Realist who attended the discussion, confessed that "the work of my friends, honest to goodness enough and intelligent, looked pretty dull there. The others had the unfair advantage of a Picasso and a Miró! The Surrealists, too, were by far the more brilliant, fluent and well-prepared team of debaters, and Penrose was really quite successful in calling forth the merits of his favoured exhibits" (Townsend 1976: 43).

problems, and a form of idealism which prevented contact with the real world, whereas automatism, simulation of mental conditions and dreams were considered as illusions that deviated greatly from the material interests of Marxist doctrine. Thus, Jennings's suggestion that a psycho-literary study was desirable for a satisfactory interpretation of the paintings enraged Swingler: "Painting has a function as valid and necessary as scientific research. There is no need to exaggerate the importance of that function by dragging in literature and psycho-analysis" (Swingler 1938: 932). Swingler's prognosis of Surrealism as a dying movement echoed Anthony Blunt's own declaration of the death of Picasso's art in his review of the debate for *The Spectator* (Blunt 1938: 515). For Swingler, it was the short-sightedness of the modern British artist, of the Surrealist and the Realist alike, that was to blame for the lack of social significance of their work:

> When artists have the confidence to look outside their own protective circle and discover something about the larger social relations, when they get to work to define the totality of the relations there perceived, then Surrealism will die a natural death, and Realism will prove to be not the label of a certain conscientious group, but the basis of real painting. (Swingler 1938: 932)

Although, in retrospect, it is unnecessary to underscore how wrong the supporters of Realism were, what these reviews actually reveal in the context of 1930s British Surrealism is the Surrealists' faithful adherence to the movement's tenets, and their firm support of Surrealism in the face of constant assault and misinterpretation. It is true that they were supported by a large international community of reputed artists, but in Britain the number of Surrealists was relatively small, and the expertise and insight of Herbert Read and Roland Penrose were crucial to ensure the movement's success. In addition, it was mainly thanks to Read's and Penrose's incessant involvement in political, theoretical and poetic experimentation that the Group managed to retain cohesion throughout the thirties. In fact, it was Read who published his own review of the debate in the first issue of the British Surrealist Group's official public organ, the *London Gallery Bulletin* (1938-1940).[129] He regretted that political issues had not been dealt with in the debate and ridiculed the Realists as simpletons for their aesthetic theories, reduced to the camera viewpoint and to the Realism of Coubert, and for lacking the character and temper which their revolutionary politics demanded of artistic expression: "our English Realists are not the tough guys they ought to be, but the effete and bastard offspring of the Bloomsbury school of needlework" (Read 1938c: 20). By placing

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[129] From the second issue onwards, the name was changed to simply *London Bulletin*.

the Realists under the influence of Bloomsbury effeteness, Read delivered the Surrealists from the charges that had established them as the inheritors of Bloomsbury individualism.

Penrose's enlightened contribution to the debate was a speech entitled "Realism/Surrealism", in which he presented a variety of Surrealist techniques and modes of representation, including poetry, painting, collage and the object, to illustrate Surrealism's contribution to an expanding awareness of reality.[130] In this lecture, Penrose summed up the Surrealists' response to Communist detractors and presented British Surrealism as a constantly evolving aesthetic and ideological system. Since no commentary on this speech has appeared so far in the criticism, it seems necessary at this point to discuss some of its main ideas.[131] The interest and clarity of Penrose's views provide an invaluable insight into how Surrealist experimentation was understood in Britain as a form of actual approximation to and engagement with the real. Penrose's text begins with a definition of Realism as "an effort to be in contact in reality", thus gaining the approval of its representatives; however, he then continues with a critique of the very notion of reality, which not only presents it as yet another bourgeois construct, but also shows the shortcomings of the Realist approach, which fails to question the validity of the term:

> I suppose I am right in thinking that the term Realism implies in the first place an effort to be in contact with reality. Without going into definitions, we can say that there are some events, occupations, moments, objects which seem to us more real than others. In fact we are sometimes overcome with a sensation that the normal things we see lose their reality. A street lamp, a dog show, a sitting of the Law Courts may appear to us in a moment of detachment to be completely incomprehensible, even hallucinating. Nor is this sensation a sign of a weakening of consciousness, on the contrary it is at these moments that our critical and intuitive faculties become more acute and we have the great advantage of seeing things form a new angle, in a new light in fact a new and wider sense of reality is developed. So much so that we begin to doubt of the reality of what before was taken for granted. (Penrose 1938a: n.p.)

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[130] The manuscript of the text, which includes Penrose's notes on the Realists' commentaries, remains unpublished. It is part of the Roland Penrose Archive at the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art. Archive Reference GMA A35/1/1/RPA642/3.

[131] The only reference was made, in passing, by Herbert Read, who stated that Penrose had "contributed some very cool and convincing aids to extra-retinal vision" (Read 1938c: 20). His commentaries on Trevelyan and Jennings are not more informative: "Julian Trevelyan revealed himself as a brilliant dialectician, and Humphrey Jennings made some extremely important statements on the nature of automatism" (Read 1938c: 20).

"If this is true of every day [sic.] things", he continues, "how much more so of the world of art", especially because the work of art is by definition a fiction, a fact that both the creator and the spectator are willing (and pleased) to accept. A Surrealist piece of the kind presented by Magritte questions the very nature of reality, and the nature of the representation of that reality. However, both the object and its representation *can* be real when we *suspend belief* and accept the fiction as part of reality. Surrealism has in this sense the advantage of presenting a fiction that is real in itself, by virtue of its use of the imagination, and not depending, as Realism does, on the memory of an external event or object. Surrealism becomes thus more real than Realism: it is *above* (*sur-*) Realism.

Penrose's emphasis on imagination as an interpretative faculty that allows an apprehension of reality which transcends the purely sensorial opposes the emphasis of Socialist Realism on the illusory principle of mimetic representation. Quoting Blake's famous phrase from *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1790-1793) that "What is now proved was once only imagined", Penrose defends imagination as the most important faculty intervening in poetic and artistic creation. But Realism deprecates the imagined in favour of scientific observation and empirical proof, which are allowed to take precedence in the creative process, depriving poetry of its essential imagining, and *imaging*, character. Penrose goes on to present psychoanalysis as the most effective scientific tool to explore the capacities of this poetic faculty, and to understand that the real is not only encompassed by the occurrences at the conscious level, but also by what is unconscious and pre-rational (i.e. the objective events that spring from the individual's mind). In this sense, Realism is deficient, and needs to enlarge its scope so as to include everything that is part of the real. The creative impulse, which for the Realists emerges as a conscious need to denounce material conditions, for the Surrealists responds to a desire which, for the most part, is unconscious because material conditions have forced the individual to repress it. Penrose thus counters the general claim that Surrealism is the individualistic expression of problems which, being extremely personal, are not related to a shared experience of external reality:

> If anybody is so personal as to imagine or paint something that no one else has ever thought of, we should be the first to applaud. [. . .] The importance of material as personal as that which we find in dreams, is that it is not only fundamentally common to all of us, but that it belongs to that wider realm of reality which unites the most unexpected contradictions, and which is undoubtedly, one of the most fruitful sources of inspiration. (Penrose 1938a: n.p.)

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Penrose explains that the transformation of reality that is performed by imagination in the Surrealist work bears a special connection to both the objective world of reality and the subjective world of the individual. In his metaphorical elaboration of Surrealist practice as the response to what can be termed as the 1930s pandemic, that of hunger (both in a physical and a spiritual sense), Surrealism transcends the merely aesthetic, exploiting the possibilities of reality and of the Surrealist representations of it. Addressing the question of how reality transformed by imagination may interest the masses, he states that aesthetic problems of colour and arrangement "have been too often rammed down our throats for us to want something more vital in the way of food" and asserts that "The problem lies deeper in our consciousness" (Penrose 1938a: n.p.). This dialectics of hunger and food, which penetrates both the realms of aesthetics and ideology, would be explored by George Barker in his colossal book-length poem *Calamiterror* (1937), an irrational overflow of troubled and deeply personal imagery and a lucid commentary on modern life at once. Curiously, Penrose describes one of Henry Moore's sculptures in similar terms, insisting on the reality of what is presented: "I contend that these elements, shapes, ghosts seen with convincing accuracy are real". The world to which they belong is the "World of emotion of poetry which knows no limits, a world of enlargement of consciousness which invites us" (Penrose 1938a: n.p.).

Penrose goes on in his speech to consider collage as the epitome of the dialectics of fragment and whole to which I referred earlier. The tensions created between the destructive and constructive movements which give rise to it are resolved in a whole, which is at once fragmentary and coherent. Moreover, the collage constitutes an attack on bourgeois reality, its institutions, its morality, its aesthetics, its politics and its social hierarchies. However, the collage is not, as the Realists tend to see it, a mere rejection of reality or a comment on the "rampant stupidity of easy ideology". According to Penrose, it is the "rebirth of art for all" as it implies the collectivisation and democratisation of art: thus, collage becomes one of Surrealism's most successful contributions to the proletarian revolution. Aside from this, the Surrealist object, the non-linguistic counterpart of the Surrealist image, is also a major contribution to this process of collectivisation, since the object requires no special skill to make it and, as such, has no market value: "Here's Social content", Penrose states. Finally, as a reply to Blunt's comments on Picasso's *Guernica* (1937), Penrose affirms that it is courage, not pessimism, that Picasso's work transcribes, comparing its universal tragedy to that of Shakespeare's plays. His concluding remarks on Kandinsky's abstract forms actually serve as a definition of what the ideology of British Surrealism was, that is, a self-disruptive system of ideas in a constant process of reconfiguration, a totality which knows itself to be only a

fragment and which, in Benjamin's terms, finds redemption in "the small fissure in the ongoing catastrophe": "This scribble [. . .] forgets nothing, is ashamed of nothing, hides nothing – carries with it remedy for its own agony. This is Surrealism" (Penrose 1938a: n.p.).

As we have seen, the British Surrealists remained faithful, in the face of the attacks of the British Communists and supporters of Socialist Realism, to Surrealism's investigations into the nature of dreams, mental conditions, sex, love, morality, art and other realms of human thought which had been dominated by bourgeois ideology. As Herbert Read observes,

> The Surrealist is opposed to current morality because he considers that it is rotten. He can have no respect for a code of ethics that tolerates extremes of poverty and riches; that wastes or deliberately destroys the products of the earth amidst a starving or undernourished people; that preaches a gospel of universal peace and wages aggressive war with all the appendages of horror and destruction which its evil genius can invent; that so distorts the sexual impulse that thousands of unsatisfied men and women go mad, millions waste their lives in unhappiness or poison their minds with hypocrisy. (Read 1971: 86).

The Surrealists argued that intellectual and artistic research into these areas furthered the success of the proletarian revolution in the spheres of political thought and action. Their position did not only challenge the ideological structure of capitalism, but, by offering an ideological alternative to Communism, it led directly to intellectual and social agitation. As had happened in France, Surrealism and Communism became irreconcilable systems in Britain and, in spite of the fairly tolerant political attitude of the British Surrealists, their plea for *total* revolution was hardly bearable for those who defended the implementation of Soviet policy in Britain and who started to see in Surrealism signs of what was then considered an execrable Anarchism. Apart from this, the Surrealists' approximation to Anarchist positions was also partially influenced by the Spanish Civil War which, as will be seen in the following section, became for a time the ideological axis of British Surrealism.

3.3. The Spanish Civil War as Ideological Axis.

The outbreak of the Second World War had a strong impact on the configuration of the British Surrealist Group, especially because it presented an inflection point which forced a change of direction in the careers of many Surrealists, as well as a series of desertions from and new incorporations in the Group. However, of all the international political events that took place during the 1930s, it was probably the Spanish Civil War that had the greatest influence on the ideology of British Surrealism, for it was crucial in the evolution of the Group's political stance and central to its development from a sort of Socialist pacifism to a more

radical Anarchist anti-imperialism. In his autobiography *Indigo Days* (1957), Julian Trevelyan recalls the atmosphere that preceded the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War as one dominated by

> an air of gentle frivolity about our life in London. True, the Hitler terror had begun, and refugees were pouring into England. Moreover it was clear from Abyssinia and Japan that war and violence were to be the order of the day. We were vaguely uneasy, but also determined to forget about it when we wanted. (Trevelyan 1957: 57)

However, he goes on to say that

> [after] the Spanish Civil War broke out [. . .] for the next three years our thoughts and consciences were turned to Spain. Dali immediately christened a great picture on which he had been working *Prémonitions de la Guerre Civil Espagnole*, and it was against a background of uncanalized desire for some sort of militant action to stop the spread of Fascism that our little Surrealist group formed and functioned. (Trevelyan 1957: 72).

Indeed, the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War and the British Government's reaction to it made the Surrealists become actively involved in a series of political activities which soon established Surrealism as a deeply committed political movement in Britain. The Spanish conflict fuelled the Surrealist spirits of British artists and provided them with a cause and a common goal: to frustrate the establishment of Fascism in Spain as the only way to prevent a second international conflict. As Louisa Buck has stated, "the escalation of Fascism on the Continent and the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in July 1936 [. . .] provided a new focus for the group which gave it unity and momentum" (Buck 1985: 12). This is so because, in the midst of the process of internationalisation of Surrealism, it was precisely the summer of 1936 that saw the formal emergence of Surrealism in Britain with the London International Surrealist Exhibition and, only ten days after its closure, the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War.[132]

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[132] These events also coincided with the dissolution of the only official Spanish Surrealist Group, the Surrealist Group in Tenerife, of which British Surrealism was partly a continuation: the Tenerife International Surrealist Exhibition of 1935 was followed by the London Exhibition in 1936, in which Spain was strongly represented by works of Óscar Domínguez, Maruja Mallo, Joan Miró, Salvador Dalí and Pablo Picasso; consecutive issues of the itinerant *International Surrealist Bulletin* were published in Tenerife (October 1935) and London (September 1936). This all responded to Breton's efforts to give Surrealism its *universal hour*, and had been anticipated by the publication of Benjamin Péret's "Le Surréalisme International", David Gascoyne's "Premier Manifeste du Surréalisme" and the Tenerife Group's "Déclaration" in the same issue of the French *Cahiers d'art* in 1935. As a consequence of their insular condition and their relative isolation from the continent, both Tenerife and Britain developed a distinct form of Surrealist poetics which drew on both French and autochthonous sources. A seminal study on Surrealism in Tenerife is Domingo Pérez Minik's *Facción española surrealista de Tenerife* (1975). I have researched the stylistic, thematic and ideological connections between Agustín Espinosa's

Contrary to common belief in Spain, the Civil War was not an isolated domestic conflict, but was widely covered in Europe. Many British volunteers and correspondents became involved and national papers and literary journals reported on the Spanish situation and denounced the tragic episodes of the War: Federico García Lorca's death, which had great repercussions in literary circles; the 1936-1937 Madrid bombing, whose direct consequences were to be felt in the Second International Writers' Congress for the Defence of Culture; or Guernica, as Picasso's eponymous painting toured Britain in 1938. Also, throughout the pages of periodicals such as *Contemporary Poetry and Prose* (1936-1937), *Left Review* (1934-1938), *The New English Weekly* (1932-1949), *News Chronicle* (1930-1960) and *Life and Letters Today* (1928-1935), to all of which the Surrealists contributed at some point, dialectical battles were fought against the British policy of Non-Intervention, and discussions on Fascism and the cultural consequences of its rapid spread in Europe followed.[133] That the British Surrealists knew and were affected by the events taking place in Spain is attested to by these collaborations as well as by other activities: the not insignificant number of declarations and pamphlets that the Surrealist Group issued on the matter; the Surrealists' active participation in public demonstrations, marches and protests; the lifelong friendships that were forged at the time between British and Spanish artists; and, above all, the fact that Spain prompted some of the most politically aware poems and texts of British Surrealism. In spite of this, scholars have tended to obviate the influence that the Spanish conflict had in the development of the British Group or even the very chronology of historical events, which is indicative of several parallels between the aesthetic and ideological development of the movement and the socio-political events that were taking place in Spain.[134] The Spanish conflict shook the conscience of the British Surrealists and marked the evolution of their poetics and their politics. Especially in its initial stages, it acted as a trigger for revolutionary action in Britain, as the Surrealists saw in Spain a real possibility for revolution. However, their hopes were soon

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novel *Crimen* (1934) and Hugh Sykes Davies's *Petron* (1935) in a yet unpublished article, "Petron's Crime".

[133] David Deacon offers a comprehensive study of the political strategies which shaped the reception of the Spanish Civil War in British media in his *British News Media and the Spanish Civil War* (2008). For an analysis of the ideological framework within which such a reception occurred, see Tom Buchanan's *The Impact of the Spanish Civil War on Britain* (2007): 1-22. Exclusively focused on newsreel coverage is Anthony Aldgate's *Cinema and History: British Newsreels and the Spanish Civil War* (1979).

[134] Scholarly attention is generally drawn to the influence of the Spanish Civil War on more *canonical* thirties writers and poets, especially the Auden group. See, for example, Hugh D. Ford's *A Poet's War: British Poets and the Spanish Civil War* (1965); Katharine Hoskins's *Today the Struggle: Literature and Politics in England during the Spanish Civil War* (1969); and Peter Monteath's *Writing the Good Fight: Political Commitment in the International Literature of the Spanish Civil War* (1994): 67-94.

shattered as the Spanish Popular Front began to be sabotaged by the repressive actions of the Communist Party and the military supremacy of the Nationalists became evident.

This movement from elation to dejection was exemplified by the shift in the nature of the titles and headlines of newsreels and periodicals in Britain. Newsreels underwent a considerable change in tone and attitude as political turmoil gradually reached *peaceful* Britain: from Gaumont Newsreel's ecstatic "Wonderful Britain" of August 1936 to Paramount's disappointed "Where Stands Peace?" of November 1936 (Aldgate 1979: 152-153). The headlines of leftist newspapers and periodicals presented a similar shift. The Communist *Daily Worker*'s first report on the war two days after the outbreak was entitled "Fascists Land Troops on Spanish Coast. Masses Defend the Republic", and this was followed by a series of equally celebratory headlines such as "How Workers' Power Smashed Fascism" (23 July 1936). Soon these were accompanied by comments on Britain's institutional reaction too: "More Victories for Republic. Fascists Face Failure. British Authorities' Intervention Hints" (24 July 1936); or "ALL INTO ACTION NOW! DEFEND SPANISH REPUBLIC! They Fight for Democracy with Their Lives. Our Government is Helping the Fascists. Force them to aid workers!" (25 July 1936). News grew progressively confusing as the deaths of the first British volunteers were reported (Felicia Browne's in August 1936, Ralph Fox's in January 1937 and Christopher Caudwell's in May 1937 were announced in *Left Review*) and the prospect of a "Spanish Revolution" (the title of the first of Gaumont Newsreel's issues on the war) faded into the harsh reality of a full-blown Civil War. News and reports from the front generally combined eyewitness accounts, fictional or unconfirmed rumours and other exaggerations: while *Left Review* complained that the English newspapers were slow in providing information about the situation of the Republicans (Left Review 1936b: 666), it also contributed to mythologising the figure of the Spanish revolutionary.[135] British pro-nationalist papers, such as the *Daily Mail* and the *Observer*, soon spread news that churches were being burned by the Republicans. These were a mixture of truthful accounts (a continuation of the pre-war conflicts which harked back to the early 1930s) and information which the Burgos National Government's Committee of Investigation intentionally filtered to the British Press.[136] The press also contributed to the perpetuation of the myth of the Spanish Anarchist as a church-burner and nun-rapist, although

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[135] See, for instance, Ralph Bates's "Companero Sagasta Burns a Church" and Sylvia Townsend Warner's "Barcelona", published in *Left Review* in October and December 1936 respectively.

[136] Similar informative confusion was characteristic of the news of the destruction of Guernica: whereas left-wing media affirmed that it had been bombed by German planes, pro-nationalist papers insisted that it had been destroyed by retreating Republicans. For a detailed description of the events which surrounded the attack and an insightful commentary on the early accounts and news of it see Ian Patterson's *Guernica and Total War* (2007): 24-73.

these propagandistic accounts were often ridiculed in left-wing media: John Langdon-Davies, the *News Chronicle* correspondent in Spain, published *Behind the Spanish Barricades* (1936), in which he complained that "Today most English people have been convinced that the government supporters are not only 'reds' but ghouls; that the reason why they have not defeated the fascists is that they spend their time raping nuns and watching them dance naked" (Langdon-Davies 1936: 97); a similar message underlies James Holland's drawing entitled "You can't make 'em mad with a rag like that!", published in *Left Review* one month later, which showed a bullfighter being ignored by a bull: instead of a red *capote*, the bullfighter is holding a newspaper with headlines such as "Priests made to dance naked", "Eye-witness describes Communist Cannibalism", "Millions of Moscow Gold to help Spanish Reds", "Franco - the Saviour of Spain" (Holland 1936: 677); similarly, I.L.P. MP John McGovern's pamphlet *Why Bishops Back Franco* (1936), which he published after being sent on a commission to Spain, discredited these rumours by denouncing the Spanish Catholic church for having become an instrument of capitalist and Fascist exploitation. Also, in a broadcast from Radio Catalonia, where David Gascoyne worked at the time, McGovern stated:

> No-one now has any excuse for being deluded by the lying propaganda of the rebel radio stations, the Fascist press and the *Daily Mail* [. . .] we in Great Britain [. . .] have had more than our share of that propaganda from vile gutter papers using and exploiting the Roman Catholic religion for their own material gain. (in Buchanan 1991: 188)

It was precisely those rumours spread by pro-nationalist British media that pushed Gascoyne and Penrose to visit Republican Spain in the early months of the war. Their journey proved crucial, not only for the Surrealists' move towards Anarchism (they worked within the Trotskyist P.O.U.M.), but also towards establishing the position that they would adopt in later debates with Communist Realists on the role of the artist in society. For the Surrealists, a state of war like the one declared in Spain demanded of artists and writers full commitment to their intellectual endeavours: through their individualism and acute perception of reality, artists perceive the gap between ideology and the people, and work towards expanding consciousness; through their training, they become responsible for the preservation of the collective artistic riches of a country at war. In this, the Surrealists managed to maintain artists' creative autonomy while placing their skills and knowledge at the service of the revolution. Curiously enough, *Left Review*, by avoiding references to particular artists, claimed such activities for the Catalonian Communists, rather than the Anarchists: "There is a central commission for the defence of the cultural heritage in Barcelona, with local sections in the

towns and villages. This commission is headed by experts, artists, sculptors, etc." (Left Review 1936a: 775). *Left Review* nevertheless failed to acknowledge that three Surrealists affiliated with the P.O.U.M., Roland Penrose, David Gascoyne and the editor of *Cahiers d'art*, Christian Zervos, took part in that commission during their stay in Catalonia.[137]

Further news from Spain also had a direct influence on Surrealist poetics in Britain. Although the Spanish theme did not appear initially in the conception of George Barker's *Calamiterror* (1937), Surrealist imagery and an unambiguous emotional and ideological reaction to the conflict finally coalesced in the poem, which reflects the poet's desire to politicise poetry. News of the bombings of Irún and Madrid in late 1936 were incorporated as central motifs. The fall of the Basque city of Irún (4 September 1936) was reported by a Gaumont newsreel with commentaries by Ted Emmett on 7 September: "Once a proud city now a smoking ruin. [. . .] That proud city is a mass of debris, a mournful monument to the savagery of war, its heartbreak and desolation. Once again we give you a burning example of war's futility" (in Aldgate 1979: 126-127). Emmett's commentaries, together with journalistic reports of Baldwin's address to the House of Commons earlier that year, informed some of Barker's images in *Calamiterror*: "I saw in a fog of gas Mr. Baldwin orating: / We must repair the deficiencies of our forces. I heard three women weeping in Irun's ruins" (Barker 1937b: 39). Also, the bombing of Madrid, whose consequences on the infant population were denounced in a pamphlet issued by the Communist Party of Great Britain, had a strong impact on Barker's poetic imagination, as the following lines from *Calamiterror* show: "O Spain, my golden red, she tears the rot out, / The Franco gangs that furrow in her heart. See how she stands, / Her Madrid middle growing vague with ravage, / Labouring to let out liberty, with the rat and the rot at her heart" (Barker 1937b: 51).[138] Thus, Barker, hardly a political poet, found in the Spanish Civil War a driving force which enabled him to link highly subjective, unconscious images and political content: the exploration of unconscious fears and desires prompted by the act of blinding his brother eventually led him to establish a link between this accident and the Spanish conflict in terms of cannibalism, self-annihilation and a Cain-like struggle.

Another 1936 event which would prove crucial for the shaping of British Surrealism's definite ideological position was the first meeting of the Non-Intervention Committee in

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[137] In Britain the Independent Labour Party (associated with the Spanish P.O.U.M.) and the Communist Party were brought together by the idea of creating a United Front against Fascism. Although both parties were still on good terms in 1936, in Spain the antagonism between Communists and Anarchists had already started to be felt and would reach a tragic climax in the May 1937 Barcelona revolt.

[138] The 1936 Madrid bombing would be even more central to the composition of Barker's non-Surrealist poem "Elegy on Spain" (1939).

London.[139] Although the meeting took place on 9 September 1936, the repercussions of Britain's decision not to intervene in Spain were not widely reported in the press until October that year: *Left Review* published an editorial which denounced that the international Fascist programme was "working out better than they [the Fascists] dared hope owing to the refusal of the democratic countries to assist the Government of Spain as they are legally entitled to do. It is not this assistance which would lead to war, it is the refusal of it which is increasing the danger of war" (Left Review 1936b: 666); the *Daily Worker*, on the other hand, focused on Germany's and Italy's breach of the Non-Intervention Agreement and on the imperialistic motives behind Britain's foreign policy, intended to keep the country on good terms with the Fascist powers, paradoxically, in order to secure financial control over Portugal and territorial hegemony in the Mediterranean.[140] The British Surrealist who was most shocked at the news of the Agreement was probably Roger Roughton, who, in the last months of 1936, devoted his efforts and his journal *Contemporary Poetry and Prose* to denounce Britain's decision not to intervene in Spain and to expand awareness about the Spanish situation. One of his most powerful texts in this regard is his poem "Lady Windermere's Fan-Dance" (1936), which only implicitly contains that constant call for arms that resounds in the pages of his journal: "Wavering over the sun / Their arms are still greeting a king, / Holding out hands for a gun, / Impatient for shadows to spring" (Roughton 1936g: 117).[141]

As a direct response to the news of Britain's Non-Intervention policy, the Surrealists, now in fact as a Group, issued its first tract denouncing the situation in Spain in the November 1936 issue of Roughton's *Contemporary Poetry and Prose*. "Declaration on Spain" was signed by Hugh Sykes Davies, David Gascoyne, Humphrey Jennings, Diana Brinton Lee, Rupert Lee, Henry Moore, Paul Nash, Roland Penrose, Valentine Penrose, Herbert Read and Roger Roughton. Although its ultimate aim is the demand of "Arms for the People of Spain", the text contrasts with other political and propagandistic statements issued in Britain at the time in its theoretical and ideological approach. However, even in highly political tracts, these authors continued to explore basic Surrealist concerns (consciousness, ideological awareness), which shows that for them politics did not only involve purely materialistic concerns (the sending of

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[139] For an analysis of the effects of the Spanish Civil War on British Foreign and Home policy and of the political reactions to Non-Intervention in Britain, see Tom Buchanan's *Britain and the Spanish Civil War* (1997): 37-62.

[140] It is unlikely that the British Government failed to see the threat that a Fascist victory posed for its imperialistic aspirations, or territories such as Gibraltar.

[141] The poem has never been anthologised as a Civil War poem: the lack of explicit reference to the Spanish conflict has probably prevented critics from establishing relevant parallelisms between Roughton's calls for arms for the Spanish people on the back covers of *Contemporary Poetry and Prose* and this poem.

arms), but that it involved an important ideological element (in this case, the question of the institutional lie). In this regard, their argument is centred on the idea of knowledge as an ideological process that has material consequences:

> Against the appalling mental and physical suffering that the Spanish Civil War is involving, we can already offset certain gains to humanity which will remain whether the Government of the People conquers or not; gains of knowledge which have been purchased far too dearly, but which for that very reason have an imperative claim on our attention. (The Surrealist Group in England 1936a: n.p.)

The Spanish Civil war is thus placed at the centre of this process, as it unveiled a series of ideological lies fostered by the British Government and the conservative media: the lie that the Spanish Government was revoked by constitutional means, that Fascism was an isolated phenomenon in Europe which did not endanger artistic freedom and expression, and that the British Government's policy of Non-Intervention was a measure that secured peace and democracy. "If these things are clear", they state,

> we are the gainers in so far as we know *inescapably* where we stand with regard to Fascism, to the People's Government, and to the National Government of Britain. And in the light of this knowledge we support the popular demand that the ban on the export of arms to the Spanish Government be lifted. We accuse our National Government of duplicity and anti-democratic intrigue, and call upon it to make at once the only possible reparation. (The Surrealist Group in England 1936a: n.p.)

The dynamic that is established between lie and truth, deliberate ignorance and awareness, which would become central to the poetics of Penrose and Madge, is resolved here by a dialectical movement from consciousness to action. A need to *know* where one *stands*, which characterises this movement, became in fact a main ideological issue in the context of 1930s British politics. Hence, again with the Civil War at its centre, a pamphlet issued by *Left Review* compelled British writers and intellectuals to "take sides" on the matter. In this way, the Spanish conflict proved to be the definite trigger for the organisation of a cultural and intellectual front to fight Fascist ideological advancement and control over artistic creation. Once it had become clear that the war was not a minor or a short-term conflict, it was the conspicuous absence of a common response on the part of British writers that prompted them to begin collective action. With this common goal in mind, an eclectic group of writers from a variety of ideological positions and aesthetic schools, from W.H. Auden and Stephen Spender to Louis Aragon and Tristan Tzara, put together the pamphlet *Authors Take Sides on the Spanish War* in Paris in June 1937. The questions posed to a huge number of British writers

and intellectuals, although biased ("Are you for, or against, the legal Government and the People of Republican Spain? Are you for, or against, Franco and Fascism?), reflected an ideological certainty in Britain and that, in the context of the political situation in Europe and Spain, it was "impossible any longer to take no side" (Left Review 1937a: n.p.).

The pamphlet not only attests to the British authors' awareness of the particulars of the war (the battles and bombings of Durango, Guernica, Madrid, Bilbao or Almería) but, most importantly, it delineates an ideological map of Britain's literary circles in the interwar period. With very few exceptions (conspicuously, Pound and Eliot), writers were brought together by a common ideologically committed stance that strongly opposed Franco and Fascism, and denounced the crushing of liberties in Spain. German and Italian Fascisms were considered extreme representations of the imperialist enterprise, but it was the Spanish Civil War that bore the deepest psychological and ideological implications for these writers: the vision of the war as a struggle of a people against itself, references to the lack of international commitment to support the democratic Government and the description of the war as a prelude to a second international conflict recur in their replies. Pearl Binder summed up its magnitude when she stated that "Today the future of European Culture is being decided on Spanish soil" (Left Review 1937a: n.p.). This was the general attitude to the conflict, also shared by the Surrealists whose replies were published in the pamphlet. Thus, David Gascoyne, George Barker, Charles Madge and Herbert Read joined in their support of the Republican Government in Spain. In their answers, the emphasis placed by each of them on a particular aspect of the war reflects a particular concern which also pervades their poems: Gascoyne puts forward an almost transcendental concept of decency and justice in order to denounce the inhumanity of indifference; George Barker draws attention to the way in which ideological, economic and religious powers combine in the subjugation of the people ("I am against Fascism, Franco, Mussolini, Japanese Generals, Hitler, Walter Chrysler, the Archbishop of Canterbury, etc.") and advocates an international revolution ("I am for the people of Republican Spain, for the people of China, for the people of England, for the people of Germany, etc."); Madge focuses on institutional terror and repression; finally, Herbert Read already anticipates his Anarchist leanings: "In Spain, and almost only in Spain, there still lives a spirit to resist the bureaucratic tyranny of the State and the intellectual intolerance of all doctrinaires" (Left Review 1937a: n.p.). They all agreed on the central role that the writer and intellectual were to play in the support of the Spanish Republic as the last hope to preserve the bulwarks of artistic freedom and autonomy in Europe. This bridged, albeit momentarily, the ideological gap between Surrealists and Communists, as representatives of both agreed for the first time on the role of

modern art in society: thus, the Spanish Civil War was crucial in the evolution of Surrealist activity in Britain from ideology to action.

However, this was not the only change triggered by the Spanish War. As several answers in *Authors Take Side on the Spanish War* demonstrate, many figures who had previously held a pacifist stance, such as Fenner Brockway and Rosamund Lehmann, started to advocate an active struggle against Fascism. This move had already been anticipated by the Surrealists in their pamphlet *We Ask your Attention* (1937).[142] The pamphlet was signed by the leading members of the Surrealist Group, namely Eileen Agar, Hugh Sykes Davies, David Gascoyne, Geoffrey Graham, Rupert Lee, Henry Moore, Paul Nash, Roland Penrose, Herbert Read and Julian Trevelyan, and by other artists associated with the movement: Norman Dawson, Merlyn Evans, Erno Goldfinger, Charles Howard and Joyce Hume. Roger Roughton is conspicuously absent from the list of signatories. As a confirmed Communist, Roughton had not hesitated to challenge those members of the Surrealist Group who had tried to organise action outside the official Party line or deviated from the common endeavour to establish a United Front.[143] It is thus reasonable to think that at this point he attempted to stress the inappropriateness of working on a line which was so clearly dissociated from the official unitary position of the A.I.A. He, like Humphrey Jennings, had unofficially resigned from the Group only a few weeks before the pamphlet was issued on account of Breton's latest activities discrediting the Communist Party. They feared that a similar line of action would be taken in Britain. George Barker and Charles Madge, on the other hand, although never official members of the Surrealist Group, were close to the Group through friendship with David Gascoyne: whereas Barker tended to distrust collective demonstrations, Madge was already deeply immersed in another sort of Surrealist activity, his collective project, Mass-Observation.

Although issued on the occasion of the Artists' International Congress and Exhibition in April-May 1937, *We Ask your Attention* was an independent Surrealist publication which signalled the capacity of the Surrealist Group for organising political action parallel to that of the A.I.A. This was also symptomatic of the new direction that Surrealist ideology was taking in Britain. In fact, in a critical evaluation of the Exhibition which appeared in *Left Review*, the Surrealists' broadsheet was described as "an admirable statement of post-War conditions, but their concluding exhortations have the vagueness and chaos of anarchism" (J.S.H. 1937: 230).

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[142] *We Ask your Attention* is reproduced in Michel Remy's *Surrealism in Britain* (1999): 110. More recently, it has been included in Will Bradley and Charles Esche's *Art and Social Change* (2007): 110-114.
[143] For example, in his review of Gascoyne's *A Short Survey of Surrealism* for *The Daily Worker* (April 1936) and in his article "Surrealism and Communism" for *Contemporary Poetry and Prose* (August-September 1936).

Focused on the British Government's policy of Non-Intervention in Spain, *We Ask your Attention* denounces it as the product of the artificial separation between material reality and thought which Breton had already condemned. The pacifist attitude fostered by the Government is seen in this light as the ultimate consequence of a process of de-politicisation of society, which intended to separate the individual from political consciousness and which was aided by memories of the First World War and fear of a Second:

> For the pacifist tries to deal with war as an isolated disaster, apart from its wider causes and connections; he tries to look upon it as the embodiment of an abstract principle of violence, and he will try to oppose it by the equally abstract principle of reason. (The Surrealist Group in England 1937b: n.p.)

The Spanish Civil War, considered, not as an isolated event, but rather as part of a historical process, allowed the Surrealists to redefine the terms in which to understand pacifism. In this context, "political expedience and political justice" required for them the adoption of alternative measures: "With all respect for the motives of pacifism, for the sincerity and courage of pacifists, this form of Non-Intervention is completely discredited in practice by the Spanish experiment" (The Surrealist Group in England 1937b: n.p.). Aware that institutional pacifism might have been justifiable in the early months of the conflict, they also realised that the very progression of historical events and the international implications of the involvement of Fascist countries made Non-Intervention untenable as a political stance. However, the Surrealists went further in their argumentation against Non-Intervention, for their aim in *We Ask your Attention* was to unmask the incongruity of Non-Intervention as a pacifist measure to secure international political stability. News of the rearmament process and of the preparations for war began in January 1937 with the production and distribution of gas masks among British citizens. In a February 1937 issue of Gaumont newsreel entitled "Britain Re-Arms" rearmament was conveniently shown to be alleviating unemployment and, paradoxically, to be contributing to the preservation of peace: "Britain shall spend one thousand five hundred millions on arms in the next five years. Not directed against any one country, said the Chancellor, but because of our vast responsibilities in all parts of the world, and as a measure for the preservation of peace" (in Aldgate 1979: 153). Behind Britain's Foreign Policy, the Surrealists argued, there was a whole political apparatus which undermined the very principles on which Non-Intervention rested: Stanley Baldwin's rapidly advancing rearmament process, which contradicted his pacifist claims; the 1937 revival of the 1870 Foreign Enlistment Act, which actively prevented British volunteers to aid Republican Spain, while no further measures were taken against, not only Germany's, Italy's and Portugal's

breach of the Non-Intervention Agreement, but also the Soviet Union's; Governmental campaigns for physical fitness, which prepared the population for civil conscription; the expansion of military iconography following the Coronation of George the Sixth; stricter enforcement of the 1857 Obscene Publications Act, which allowed the prohibition of publications on political grounds; the Trade Disputes Act passed by Baldwin in 1927, which made general strikes illegal; or the Public Order Act of 1936, which enabled the police to ban political marches and demonstrations.[144] All these were seen by the Surrealists as signs of an institutional desire to homogenise and standardise society, to prevent people from "taking sides" in political matters. On the other hand, many of these measures could hardly account for a "pacifist" stance on the part of the British Government, and were seen to camouflage its imperialist aims. This was in fact related to the concept of ideology as false consciousness, which the Surrealists intended to fight by expanding awareness of the mechanisms used to control ideology. The Surrealists' rejection of the Government's false pacifist stance implied that their abandonment of pacifism was only strategic, for they understood that intervention in Spain and the subsequent halting of the Fascist advance in Europe would secure peace by preserving democracy: following George Santayana, Herbert Read stated that "the only rational war is a war to end war" (Read 1947: 70). It is in this sense that their abandonment of pacifism can be seen, in the context of Surrealist ideology, as morally inconsistent whereas, in the context of the Spanish War, it was an ideologically responsible act. This shift of the ideological left from pacifism to the advocacy of war prompted by the Spanish Civil War has been explained by Charles Loch Mowat as common at the time:

> Such events, and the reports on them, produced a crisis of opinion in Great Britain; it is this which gives the Spanish Civil War its tremendous importance in British history in the late thirties. It widened existing divisions, between government and opposition, between right and left (terms hardly used in the political sense in England before this). [. . .] Division of opinion over the war in newspapers and pamphlets reflected and enlarged the wider cleavage. It led to a changing of sides over peace and war. The left became war-minded. [. . .] Non-intervention and pacifism crossed over from the opposition to the government: 'no war' became the slogan, not of the left, but of the right. (Mowat 1955: 577-578).

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[144] Although purportedly passed to prevent the proliferation of Fascist demonstrations, the 1936 Public Order Act was seen by the Surrealists as the first step towards the restriction of ideological liberties in Britain.

We Ask your Attention served the Surrealists, not only to further theorise on the nature of ideology, but also to stress the fact that, in the context of the international consequences brought by the Spanish Civil War, it was no longer possible for artists to act as individuals. Thus, they showed their willingness to ally with organisations such as the Artists' International Association, Aldous Huxley's For Intellectual Liberty, the Labour Party and the Trades Union, in order to support the creation of a United Front.[145] Already in November 1936, Cecil Day-Lewis had criticised the Labour Party for rejecting cooperation with the Communist Party, which hindered the formation of a People's Front in Britain (Day-Lewis 1936b: 732), an idea also explored by Roger Roughton in his political writings.[146] For all progressive artists, this was the only way to put a stop to Non-Intervention, as they understood that democracy in Spain could only be aided by a truly democratic Britain. Hence, cooperation and collective action was central to Surrealist activity from the outbreak of the war. It was then that the Surrealists joined the A.I.A. and took part in a series of fund-raising events organised by the Association throughout the war: exhibitions (such as Artists Help Spain in December 1936), public meetings (such as Spain and Culture at the Royal Albert Hall in 1937, for which Picasso designed the pamphlet and donated an original drawing), demonstrations (such as May Day 1938) and the designing and making of billboards (such as those to send food to Spain, painted in 1939). In October 1936, they also engaged in conversations with Harry Pollitt, the leader of the Communist Party of Great Britain, to discuss anti-Fascist activity and took part in the anti-Mosley demonstrations in London's East End, which put a stop to a march organised by Oswald Mosley's British Union of Fascists.[147] But the Surrealists did not only ally with the

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[145] For Intellectual Liberty was a non-party political association founded in 1936 by Aldous Huxley. Its aim was to unite a broad popular resistance against Fascism, in favour of progress and democracy. In a letter sent to all Liberal and Labour M.P.s, which was signed by E.M. Forster, Raymond Mortimer, Eric Gill, Stephen Spender, Cecil Day-Lewis, Barbara Hepworth, Ben Nicholson, Herbert Read and Roland Penrose among others, they asked "the forces of progress" to unite in order to secure freedom: "freedom from the catastrophe of war and the long-drawn slavery of preparation for war, freedom from poverty and social humiliation, freedom from the multifarious oppressions exercised by a totalitarian government" (Huxley et al. 1936: 10). This is yet another sign of the extent to which the British Surrealists took active part in political action and of their alliance with other left-wing intellectuals.

[146] The Unity Campaign, or United Front, collapsed in the spring of 1937 and it was reconfigured as a Popular Front Campaign in 1938. However, any movement towards the establishment of a People's Front in Britain was eventually sabotaged by the Labour Party, whose maintenance of an increasingly coercive and rigid party ideology prevented an alliance with other political groups. An extensive account of the formation and failure of the United Front and the People's Front in Britain is offered in David Blaazer's *The Popular Front and the Progressive Tradition* (2002): 147-192.

[147] The fear that Fascism could settle in Britain mainly derived from the situation in Spain: the precarious condition of the Spanish Republic found echoes in Edward the Eighth's abdication crisis the same year. Also, mass unemployment, increasing poverty (made visible in the hunger marches of the 1930s), economic depression and the insecurity of the otherwise prosperous middle classes were elements

Communist Party: in 1938, the exhibition of Picasso's *Guernica* at the New Burlington Galleries had as its patrons Pollit and also Fenner Brockway, of the Independent Labour Party. At the Whitechapel Gallery, it was Clement Attlee, of the Labour Party and leader of the opposition, who opened the exhibition.[148] However, this collective activity did not in any way imply the abandonment of their particular stance as Surrealists for, together with the urge to "intervene in the field of politics", they also urged writers and artists to "intervene in the field of imagination", which was for them the most effective activity that writers and artists can perform to assist the revolution, reinforcing thus their belief in a truly Surrealist ideology:

> The revolution which we can bring about must have as its object the development of consciousness and the wider satisfaction of desire. Economic justice is the first object of our intervention, but we demand also the vindication of the psychological rights of man, the liberation of intelligence and imagination. (The Surrealist Group in England 1937b: n.p.)

The Surrealists' evolution from pacifism to a non-pacifist stance was exemplified by the visible change produced from May Day 1937 to the demonstrations of 1938, in which their position was radicalised: it evolved from a rather modest and pro-pacifism banner with Blake's quotation "A warlike state cannot create" in 1937 to a spectacular and aesthetically aggressive display of Surrealist imagination in 1938. Parallel to this change ran the equally visible evolution from Baldwin's non-interventionist Government to Neville Chamberlain's active involvement in an Appeasement Campaign with Hitler. Thus, for May Day 1938, Roland Penrose, Julian Trevelyan, James Cant and Geoffrey Graham dressed up in Chamberlain masks by the Surrealist artist F.E. McWilliam. They performed the Nazi salute, wore banners with the inscription "Chamberlain must go!" and were accompanied by a van playing Spanish Republican songs and the *Internationale*. On top of the van there was a gilded cage carrying a skeleton inside with the caption "A present from the dictators". This was followed by a structure of wire-netting which contained a stuffed horse's head and coloured balloons. With this display it became clear that the Surrealists had their own image-making mechanisms to counter the false ideology of power and Fascism: in acts like these the British Surrealists resolved what has been seen as "Surrealism's eternal [. . .] discrepancy between its political philosophy, based on releasing repressed desires into the social realm, and concrete political

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which seemed to call forth, in Britain and in Germany and Spain before, a messianic figure to restore social equilibrium.

[148] Penrose later resented that the people involved were often more interested in the political element than in the painting (Penrose 1981: 87). Attlee's intervention was in fact part of a political strategy to clean up the public image of the Labour Party, which had initially supported Non-Intervention and hindered cooperation among the parties of the left towards a United Front.

action" (Greeley 2006: 83). Another very graphic example of how such a discrepancy was erased occurred in 1939 during a joint exhibition of the works of Roland Penrose and Ithell Colquhoun at the Mayor Gallery, when they *commissioned* a tramp to be part of the display. The anecdote was later recalled by Penrose in a BBC interview:

> [. . .] a charming old man who was a sandwich man, and we got him just to sit there as the real thing [. . .]. And he sat there all afternoon with a bottle of beer hidden underneath him, and he went to sleep most of the time. But we did get blamed, this was something –cruelty to men, sitting them up in a window and showing them off like that. He didn't think so at all –he was delighted. (in Antony Penrose 2001: 97).

Indeed, the Surrealists managed to bring together image, ideology and action through these calls for wider consciousness.

Also, their violent message was in accord with the Surrealist spirit, for Surrealism was not, in spite of the Surrealists' pacifist stance, a *pacifist* movement in itself: it did not advocate peace *per se*, in the sense that it did not seek contentment with or acceptance of the established order; rather, it was disruptive and destructive and its concept of ideology implied constant movement and struggle, similar to what Trotsky had called *permanent revolution*: a continuous opposition to established power relations and social structures, and to the creation of new ones. In 1938, when the young German Jew Herschel Grynsban shot a Nazi diplomat in Paris as a result of his family's persecution, Herbert Read, a pacifist at heart, reacted with a deeply felt poem in which he identified with the assassin ("This beautiful assassin is my friend / because my heart is filled with the same fire"), and extolled the violence of the act as a form of insurgence against authority and a call of attention to the world: "Violence is answered by violence / until the sluggish tinder of the world's indifference / is consumed, consumed to the end" (Read 1938-1939: 25). Also in 1938, in a letter to the editor of *The Listener*, Read advocated the end of culture and society: "It is better that art should perish altogether than that it should be kept alive artificially; for the sooner art dies, the sooner the society that scorns it will die" (Read 1938a: 904). Read's disgust at the incomprehension of the revolutionary and the artist underlies both statements.

For the Surrealists there was never an end to the problem of the individual's freedom, and Surrealism itself, although a step in this direction, was not the promise that this end could ever be achieved, for there are always conservative forces in society that seek permanence in a given state.[149] It is for this reason that, in the context of the Spanish War, pacifism and

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[149] This is what Herbert Read, addressing the proletarian revolution, would call "a Thermidorean reaction", inherent in all revolutionary movements (Read 1939c: 317). Even Surrealism was subject to

neutrality were unlikely options for Surrealism, whose very ideology rejected those terms for their lack of dialectical engagement in the historical process. Furthermore, their experience of the Spanish Civil War gave them an insight into the conflict which transcended the view, generalised in Britain, that it was a war between two opposing (and equally dislikeable for many) ideological factions, namely Fascism and Communism and, as a religious derivation, between Christianity and atheism. Indeed, it was this oversimplified vision of international political affairs in general, and of the Spanish situation in particular, that appeared in many of the answers in *Authors Take Sides* and that was perpetuated in the national press. In Britain, it was an inherent distrust of radical politics that probably led to a third option, that of neutrality, which, contemplated for a while, was only so in appearance, for remaining neutral soon became a form of passive support of Fascism.[150] Similarly, public condemnation of Fascism seemed to necessarily imply sympathies with Communism, an option which was equally disliked.[151] Intervention in Spain was, to say the least, a prickly matter for, whereas Labour attempts at mediation through an armistice that placed the insurgents' position on a par with that of the elected government were seen by Spanish and British anti-Fascists as a form of capitulation and surrender (Buchanan 1991: 112), the British Government feared that intervention would turn the Spanish War into what Upton Sinclair called "a war of half a dozen great nations on Spanish soil" (Sinclair 1937: 34), at a time when Britain had not yet finalised its rearmament process. For the Surrealists, pre-existing or imposed ideologies and party

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these commoditising forces and it would eventually become, much to its own dismay, a fairly mainstream and commercial movement in the 1960s when lobster telephones became *chic* household appliances and Surrealism was used for advertising fashionable products. In moments of intense economic crisis such as those that assail Postmodern capitalism at the present time, Surrealism's recycling aesthetics, which rearranges parts and wholes with comic effects and plays on the boundaries of high and popular art, is commonly used in graphic and interior design (cafés and pubs, websites, posters) by companies that have been forced to cut down on the costs of advertising and corporate imaging. It may be argued that these are commercially successful due to their exploitation of the element of revolt against established powers that Surrealist aesthetics has recently regained. At the end of the day, however, their underlying philosophy is one of capitalist consumerism and, in Adorno's terms, a nostalgic fetishisation of a better past: to exploit people's current rejection of snobbish aesthetics in order to continue selling, and at a lower cost. Ian Walker's words, used to describe the use of Surrealism in 1970s advertising, acquire new relevance in the present economic state: "Once again, the dominant culture has proved its efficiency in turning 'revolt into style,' in adapting radical or oppositional stances to the smooth functioning of the system –surrealism as the opium of the people" (Walker et al. 1986: 14).

[150] For this argument I have drawn on Andrew Thorpe's *The Failure of Political Extremism in Inter-War Britain* (1989).

[151] This is partially Hugh Ford's argument to justify the conservative politics of the British Foreign Office during the Spanish Civil War in his study *A Poet's War: British Poets and the Spanish Civil War* (1965). A recent study edited by Nigel Copsey and Andrzej Olechnowicz, *Varieties of Anti-Fascism: Britain in the Inter-War Period* (2010), sheds light on the varying degrees of anti-Fascist attitudes that emerged in 1930s Britain.

programmes were, for the most part, suspect, especially due to the implications that they bore: they were seen as closed systems of thought which, by not allowing reconfiguration, were likely to restrict individual freedom and hinder dialectical movement within them. In this sense, Roland Penrose's own ideological development from pacifism to camouflage, delineated in a series of lectures and essays throughout the thirties, was representative of the Group's continually evolving stance, as will be seen. And this was so even in the rather stern case of Roger Roughton: even if he remained a committed Communist until his death in 1941, he tended to see in Communism ideological possibilities which the gradual Stalinisation of the Party blocked. Thus, the Surrealists' stance may be seen as the most appropriate for a group of revolutionary artists and writers in 1930s Britain, for it implied, not only a strong rejection of Fascism, but also a reconfiguration of Communist tenets, ignoring and sometimes challenging their dogmatism, which verged closely on totalitarianism.

Around the time that the "Declaration on Spain" was published, the Surrealists also issued their pamphlet "To the workers of England".[152] Although the date of the text is uncertain, there are several references which help locate it chronologically, such as the rearmament programme (central to Baldwin's third term in office) and the demand for arms for the Spanish people (a demand that recurs in the British Surrealists' political texts of late 1936).[153] "To the workers of England" presents short, staccato sentences and disrupted syntax which contribute to recreating the chaos of international political affairs and to highlighting the urgency of its message. Its collagistic style, which contrasts with the well-structured rhetoric of other political tracts issued by the Group, suggests that this is the result of a process of collective writing:

> To the workers of England. The government is asking you to carry out its re-armament programme for what purpose? Are our efforts to be to help fascism? Power is in your hands. Unite and use it. Make your conditions. Insist on a democratic foreign policy and arms for the Spanish people. Unite! Dictate your terms. The world is already at war. Fight for: freedom of speech, thought, and expression. Cooperation with Progressive Parties and Democracies. Disarmament moral, material and universal. International understanding and interests. Rights of minorities and small nations. Revision of antiquated systems: education, the churches, family life, marriage and divorce, charity. Wider consciousness. Revolution. Against: repression or

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[152] The text has not been reproduced since. It is kept in the Roland Penrose Archive at the National Gallery of Modern Art in Edinburgh. Archive Reference GMA A35/1/1/RPA641/10.
[153] The back cover of the November and December 1936 issues of Roger Roughton's *Contemporary Poetry and Prose* contained similar statements.

encroachments on the rights of individuality. Fascist ideocracies, aggression wherever it may occur. Militarism in all its forms. Nationalism, economic wars, national jealousies. Imperialism, military or commercial. Reaction. The safeguarding of high finance, imperial and vested interests, hereditary privileges. Blind acceptance of the present state of injustice and misery. Beware! The next 'War to end War' will be fought for 'Democracy' and the 'Empire.' Remember what to fight for.

In spite of its early date, "To the Workers of England" already anticipated concerns which would become central to Surrealism's ideological position regarding a second international conflict. As we said, by presenting too simplistic a vision of the conflict as one between Fascism and Communism, or between Christianity and atheism, which had to be resolved domestically, the British Government and the media had instrumentalised ideology in order to justify Non-Intervention in the Spanish Civil War. In "To the Workers of England", the Surrealists foresaw that a similar ideological instrumentalisation would take place to justify the end of institutional pacifism and Britain's declaration of war against Germany, and they were not wrong in their predictions: as Chamberlain's Appeasement Policy proved ineffectual in securing international peace, war was not only deemed inevitable but necessary, an argument which was based on the ideological grounds that this was a war of good against evil, that is, of democracy against Fascism. In a BBC broadcast on 3 September 1939 in which Chamberlain explained Britain's declaration of war on Nazi Germany, he stated that "it is evil things that we shall be fighting against, brute force, bad faith, injustice, oppression, and persecution. And against them I am certain the right will prevail" (in Taylor 1999: 109). In due course, the Surrealists would criticise the British Government for not using this same ideological argument to justify intervention in Spain. Their understanding of the mechanisms behind institutional reactions to the Spanish Civil War allowed them to denounce this ideological eyewash three years before it actually happened, and reveal the economic and imperialist motives behind what would officially become an *honourable* war fought to preserve *freedom* and *democracy*.[154] These motives were eventually revealed in a series of pacts through which Britain allied with Fascist powers with the conviction that non-aggression would secure its imperial territories, or at least give Britain more time to prepare for war, such as the Anglo-Italian Mediterranean Treaty of 1937 or the Munich Agreement of 1938. The Surrealists were unwilling to commit to the Government's ideological manoeuvres, whether for or against war, and this was precisely what prompted the

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[154] Similarly, the Popular Front would eventually oppose Britain's involvement in the fight against Hitler because, as it was argued in the 3 June 1938 issue of Tribune, this was not done in defence "of Democracy, of Collective Security, or the League of Nations Covenant, or Spanish Liberty, but of the interests of British Imperialism" (in Blaazer 2002: 185).

constant re-elaboration of the Group's pacifist stance, but also what granted it ideological coherence throughout the thirties.

The consequences that Britain's subsequent Appeasement pacts with Italy and Germany had in Spain were denounced in the *Daily Worker* in October-November 1938, especially the outcome of the Battle of the Ebro, which would be crucial for the eventual fall of Barcelona in January 1939. Since Penrose and Gascoyne's visit in the early months of the war, Barcelona had come to symbolise Spanish freedom, intellectualism and comradeship for the Surrealists. Its fall to Franco's forces, aided by Italian infantry and German bombers, implied for them the loss of all hope that a Revolution was possible and that a second international conflict could be avoided. On 27 January 1939, the *Daily Worker* informed "Barcelona has fallen. The Fascist troops entered the city yesterday. As they stormed with tanks and machine-guns, the last defences at Montjuic, they found the Republican soldiers without shells for their guns or cartridges for their rifles". The reference to the lack of ammunition was probably dispiriting for the British Surrealists, who had so fervently demanded arms for the Spanish people in the several tracts and pamphlets which they had issued since the war broke out. But it was Penrose who was the most affected by the events of 1939, which informed much of his writing of that year, such as his poem "Mentiras" and, in a less explicit manner, also *The Road is Wider than Long*. The ideological element, motivated by the methods of propaganda and subterfuge used by the Fascists in Spain, but also of the repression exercised by Soviet factions within the left, is at the core of these texts. Although very different in form and content, they both presage the tragic end of an innocent and free world and denounce the institutional lies, the false ideologies which had contributed to its destruction.[155]

It was precisely in 1939, after the Civil War had ended, that the first anthology of poems on the Civil War was published. *Poems for Spain* was co-edited by Stephen Spender and John Lehmann and, although restricted in scope, was the first systematic attempt to put together texts inspired by the conflict: as Peter Monteath has suggested, this kind of anthology represented "the Popular Front in aesthetic form" (Monteath 1994: 78).[156] It belatedly showed that the Spanish War had been in fact, in Spender's terms, "the poet's war" (Sutherland 2005: 204), an idea which had materialised with the death of Lorca in the early months of the conflict. In Britain alone, the vast amount of poems and texts prompted by the events in Spain

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[155] The criticism has tended to neglect Penrose's contribution to Civil War writing: "Mentiras" has never been anthologised and the lack of explicit references to Spain in *The Road is Wider than Long* has prevented, as in the case of Roughton's "Lady Windermere Fan's Dance" (1936), its consideration as a poem with a latent Spanish theme.

[156] These poems and many other texts were later collected by Valentine Cunningham in the comprehensive volume *The Penguin Book of Spanish Civil War Verse* (1980).

showed the extent to which Spender's claim was true. In his "Introduction" to the anthology, Spender argues that it was the Civil War that had reconciled poetry and action, by recognising mutuality between them:

> where the issues are so clear and direct in a world which has accustomed us to confusion and obscurity, action itself may seem to be a kind of poetry to those who take part in it. Therefore these poems often seem like hasty transcriptions into words of an experience expressed not in words at all, but in deeds. (Spender and Lehmann 1939: 8)

And, in words that are reminiscent of Herbert Read's statements on the role of poetry in a society which deprecates it, Spender claims that

> In a world where poetry seems to have been abandoned, become the exalted medium of a few specialists, or the superstition of backward peoples, this awakening of a sense of the richness of a to-morrow with poetry, is as remarkable as the struggle for liberty itself, and is more remarkable than the actual achievement. (Spender and Lehmann 1939: 9)

Thus Spender envisaged, like the Surrealists (with the exception, perhaps, of Charles Madge), a future in which poetry would become a form of action, and a society in which science and materialism would not deem poetry unnecessary, but rather of the very essence of the human struggle for the betterment of material conditions. It was this constant struggle, rather than the prospect of achievement itself, that was the motor of social change. Also, Spender's defence of a politically engaged Romantic tradition as a reference for the authors in the anthology serves to highlight the Romantic element inherent too in the Surrealist commitment to the Republican cause.

Poems for Spain included texts by George Barker, Herbert Read and Ruthven Todd, who still were or had been associated with the Surrealist Group. Although none of the texts included are Surrealist, they do present some *surrealising* elements: Barker's "O Hero Akimbo on the Mountains of Tomorrow" (1939) revisits themes which already appeared in his Surrealist poem *Calamiterror* (1937); Herbert Read's "Bombing Casualties in Spain" (1939) presents probably the most lyrically and ideologically powerful Surrealist images of infant murder on Spanish soil, only comparable to the actual photographs of dead children which had inspired Barker's "Elegy on Spain" (1939):

> Dolls' faces are rosier but these were children
>
> Their eyes not glass but gleaming gristle
>
> Dark lenses in whose quicksilvery glances

> The sunlight quivered. [. . .]
>
> They are laid out in ranks
>
> Like paper lanterns that have fallen [. . .]. (in Spender and Lehmann 1939: 41-42)

Retrospectively, the Surrealist aesthetics of dismemberment had acquired, in the face of the harsh reality of war, an almost cruel tinge and it has been generally noted that these processes of aesthetic fragmentation and dismemberment had proven in fact prophetic of the kind of destruction produced by the *experimental* bombings of Spanish cities and the London Blitz. Leo Mellor has recently argued that "for many of the writers, photographers and artists who lived and worked through the Blitz, the cityscape of bombed London continually invited the casual adjectival use of the term 'surreal'" (Mellor 2011: 85-86). This was true, among others, of Lee Miller's photographs of the Blitz; also of Humphrey Jennings's documentary films, which he produced for the GPO and the Crown Film Unit during the Second World War: in *Fires Were Started* (1943), for instance, the image of a one-legged man walking laboriously through the rubble gave a Surrealist twist to an otherwise highly propagandistic production. A similar sense of strangeness and the uncanny was perceived by the novelist Inez Holden who, in *It was Different at the Time* (1945), reflected upon the war as the materialisation of Surrealism's prophetic images:

> One morning I walked back through the park, and saw the highest branches of a tree draped with marabout, with some sort of silk, with two or three odd stockings and, wrapped around the top of the tree, like a cloak quick-thrown over the shoulder of some high-born hidalgo, some purple damask. Below it, balanced on a twig as if twirled around a finger, was a brand new bowler hat. They had all been blown across the road from the bombed hotel opposite. A surrealist painter whom I knew slightly was staring at this too. He said: 'Of course we were painting this sort of thing years ago, but it has taken some time to get here.' (Holden 1943: 70).

In many other cases, however, as in Read's poem, Surrealist dismemberment proved effective in its sabotage of the cosmetic images of social reconstruction, moral regeneration and peace that democratic and Fascist governments alike insisted on maintaining, only at a surface level, throughout the war in Spain. Just as the Spanish War was breaking out, Herbert Read wrote:

> Those who have not experienced war at first hand may perhaps entertain illusions about its comparative evil; they may entertain the idea, that is to say, that even its modern intensity of horror is sanctioned by some nobler effects of heroism, of national awakening, of personal regeneration. Such a belief is a pestilential idiocy. (Read 1971: 35)

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Finally, Ruthven Todd's "Poem for Joan Miró" captures the Spanish painter's capacity to access cosmic Surrealist landscapes: "This was that man who knew the secret line / And the strange shapes that went / In dreams; his was the bewitched vine / And the crying dog in the sky's tent" (in Spender and Lehmann 1939: 96). Although the poem is explicit enough to end with a reference to the destruction of the magician's "peasant pots", the killing of his people and the bombing of his "magic farm", the above stanza, in its grasp of the marvellous in Miró's paintings, reproduces a desire for wider consciousness which Roland Penrose had already explored regarding Miró's *Head of a Catalan Peasant* (1925):

> Have you ever seen an open blue sky in a man's face? Have you ever imagined his eyes as planets? His beard as a string of streamers? His cap as the crest of a cock or a red sail floating aloft? Answer. You are dead if you never wanted to. Because this is the kind of stimulation of the imagination which opens wide horizons – this is poetry. Without which we may as well stop painting and pull down the lids of our coffins.[157]
> (Penrose 1938a: n.p.)

Another strong influence on the development of a Surrealist ideology in Britain was Spanish Anarchism, especially as it evolved in Catalonia in the early months of the Spanish Civil War. One of Read's texts in *Poems for Spain* was in fact his "Song for the Spanish Anarchists" in which he praised their concept of freedom and of public good. Especially in Catalonia, Anarchist and workers' formations such as the C.N.T.-F.A.I. coalition and the Trotskyist P.O.U.M., played an important role in the Republican Administration, being "the most popular and numerous element in Loyalist Spain" (Alexander 1999: 902). The Anarchists had crushed the Rebel uprising in Catalonia on 19 July 1936 and, through the Central Committee of the Antifascist Militias came to dominate large sections of the regional government. The workers' revolution was finally on its way, with the progressive collectivisation of capital and the suppression of regular police authority. Unlike the Communists, the Anarchists saw war and revolution as two sides of the same coin. However, the gradual Stalinisation of Communist policy soon triggered a radicalisation of positions of the parties of the left, and the Communist Party and the Stalinist P.S.U.C began repression of non-Stalinist leftist formations in order to secure for themselves political prevalence in the administrative organs. The Spanish Trotskyites began to be accused of being Fascist agents and traitors, and the Communist Party, following Soviet orders, gradually set itself up as the only organisation of the left which could legitimately represent the interests of the Republic. This process of repression culminated in

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[157] This was part of Penrose's speech at the 1938 Realism/Surrealism debate. Archive Reference GMA A35/1/1/RPA642/3.

the May riots of 1937 in Barcelona, where leaders and members of the P.O.U.M. were murdered while others were later forced to leave their governmental positions. The fall of the prime minister Francisco Largo Caballero, after rejecting the dissolution of the C.N.T. and the P.O.U.M. which the Communists demanded, forced the formation of a new cabinet under Juan Negrín, with no Anarchist representation. These internecine struggles within the left contributed to the destabilisation of the Popular Front Government in Spain, which became largely influenced by Moscow-led Communism, and facilitated the eventual suppression of the Republic by Franco's regime. This was the price paid by the Spanish Communists, and eventually the Spanish Republic, for the aid which, in breach of the Non-Intervention Agreement, had been sent by the Soviet Union during the Civil War.[158] All of this would have its effects on the ideological stance of the British Surrealists.

In late 1936, Penrose and Gascoyne were granted safe conducts by the Independent Labour Party, which was affiliated with the P.O.U.M., to visit Catalonia. They were well received by the Catalonian Anarchists, were impressed by the lifestyle of the incipient Anarchist society which Read would later portray in his poem, and pleased also to see the institutional labour of instruction of militiamen and peasants for the preservation of public wealth which were carried out by the Generalitat. This almost idyllic image would be corroborated after Stanley William Hayter's visit to Spain in late 1937: on 2 February 1938 he wrote in the *Daily Worker* that "The Spanish Government is undertaking schemes of modern education far in advance of any popular education in England" (in Buchanan 2007: 88). But the Soviet repression, which was patent even in the early months of the war, appalled them, an attitude that was later shared by other British writers like Stephen Spender and George Orwell. Orwell himself, who had witnessed the 1937 Barcelona May Days, denounced in the pages of the *New English Weekly* the damaging effect of pro-Communist media in Britain, which "prevented the British public from grasping the real nature of the struggle. For some time past a reign of terror –forcible suppression of political parties, a stifling censorship of the Press, ceaseless espionage and mass-imprisonment without trial- has been in progress" (Orwell 1937a: 307). Just as revolution and war were for Anarchists two sides of the same coin, so were Fascism and bourgeois democracy (i.e. capitalism):

> You can oppose Fascism by bourgeois 'democracy,' meaning capitalism. But meanwhile you have got to get rid of the troublesome person who points out that

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[158] For an extensive account of the role of Anarchist and workers' formations in the Republican Government, the May riots in Barcelona and the Soviet manoeuvres for ousting Anarchist leaders, see Robert Alexander's *The Anarchists in the Spanish Civil War*, Vol. 2 (1999): 739-801 and 901-971.

Fascism and bourgeois 'democracy' are Tweedledum and Tweedledee. You do it at the beginning by calling him an impracticable visionary. You tell him that he is confusing the issue, that he is splitting the anti-Fascist forces, that this is not the moment for revolutionary phrase-mongering, that for the moment we have got to fight against Fascism without enquiring too closely what we are fighting *for.* Later, if he still refuses to shut up, you change your tune and call him a traitor. More exactly, you call him a Trotskyist. And what is a Trotskyist? This terrible word [. . .] is only beginning to be bandied to and fro in England. We shall be hearing more of it later. The word 'Trotskyist' (or 'Trotsky-Fascist') is generally used to mean a disguised Fascist who poses as an ultra-revolutionary in order to split the Left-wing forces. (Orwell 1937b: 328)

In this fragment, which summarises Orwell's position, he already anticipates the expansion of Anarchist ideas in Britain, in which Herbert Read would be central in the late 1930s. By then, the Surrealists had moved from a sort of Socialist pacifism to a more definite Anarchist anti-imperialist stance, a shift marked by the political events surrounding the Spanish Civil War. For them, imperialism, which lay at the core of both the Spanish and the Second World War, was the ultimate materialisation of a hierarchical social structure which they attempted to demolish by means of "organisation of indiscipline", an Anarchist motto which they had learned during the Civil War. In due course, they would reject the portrayals of the Second World War as an ideological, rather than imperialist, war, just as they had rejected the idea of the Spanish conflict as one between Fascism and democracy. In late 1938, and aware of the Moscow trials and the political purges in Spain, Read doubted the legitimacy of the ideological and political measures carried out by the Communists as *temporary* contingencies of the pre-revolutionary period:

A Christian crusade is not fought with the aid of infidel Moors, nor with fascist bombs and tanks. And when a Republic announces that it is fighting to defend liberty and equality, we are compelled to doubt whether these values will survive the autocratic methods adopted to establish them. (Read 1938e: 6)

3.4. The Road to Anarchism.

It was precisely in that space left for doubt and for the possibility of disruption of established powers, which also defined the Surrealist image, that the road to Anarchism opened up for the British Surrealists. In the face of the events that were taking place in Spain, Anarchism presented itself as the only possible ideological stance for a group of dissident writers and artists committed to the workers' revolution who were not willing to submit to any

form of political regimentation or to ideological dogmas, false totalities which would hinder their artistic and creative autonomy or thwart their attempts to enlarge consciousness. In the Anarchist conception of art and politics, the Surrealists found the way to integrate image and ideology at a time when both seemed irreconcilable in existing systems: centralised regimes such as Fascism and Communism subjected artistic expression to the ideological demands of an élite; in democratic systems such as the British, the cultural success of High Modernism as an art of pure form deliberately played down the ideological power inherent in artistic expression. Also, Anarchism was for the Surrealists the only alternative to the imperialist homogenising policies of Hitler, Stalin and the great capitalist democracies.[159] The idea that such a system was at all possible was entertained by many artists and writers for the brief period that it was successful in Spain, regarding which Herbert Read pondered:

> What if, in the west of Europe, there came into existence a form of socialism which presented an alternative to the form of socialism already established in the east? [. . .] What if, in Spain, another system were established which claimed to be a more essential kind of communism? (Read 1947: 42)

But generally, Anarchism was barely understood in Britain, where it was seen as a sign of Spanish individualism.[160] As such, it would prevent submission to extraneous ideological influences, whether German Fascism or Soviet Communism (Buchanan 2007: 8-9). However, its call to organised indiscipline and mass disobedience, its placing of public organs in workers' hands, its irreligious acts and its rejection of vertical power relations and social hierarchies faced the incomprehension of capitalist democracies and their informative organs. Herbert Read in fact complained that

> At the mention of anarchism the bourgeois press conjures up a bearded figure wearing a wide-brimmed hat and carrying a home-made bomb in his pocket, and is quite capable, it seems, of crediting Spain with two million such melodramatic characters. As for our socialistic pressmen, either they have assumed that anarchism was buried when Marx defeated Bakunin at the Hague Congress of 1872, and they will not write or act on any other assumption; or, knowing that in Italy and Spain anarchism has never died, they have deliberately obscured the issue, pretending that anarchism was merely

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[159] Recent studies of the historical development of Anarchist thought in Britain are David Goodway's *Anarchist Seeds Beneath the Snow: Left-Libertarian Thought and British Writers from William Morris to Colin Ward* (2006) and Carissa Honeywell's *A British Anarchist Tradition* (2011).

[160] In March 1937, in an article entitled "Red Spain" and published in the *New English Weekly*, Charles Duff, amazed by the social advancements in Anarchist Catalonia, wondered: "But is all that anarchism or the result of Red progress, or is it just Spanish?" (Duff 1937: 429).

an infantile disorder of the Latin temperament, and not to be taken seriously. (Read 1947: 42)

Since the Communist Party had become the most visible faction representing the Republican side, the suppression of the P.O.U.M. had indeed little or no effect in British left-wing circles. The Communist Party was then in charge of providing and keeping up, for an international audience, an appearance of ideological continuity between the pre-war Republican government (led by Francisco Largo Caballero, sympathetic to the Anarchists) and its post-outbreak cabinet (led by Juan Negrín, sympathetic to the Communists). As we said in the previous section, this contributed to polarising positions and to over-simplifying the conflict as one between Fascism and Communism, which further hindered intervention on the part of democratic countries: the fact that only Communist and Fascist states intervened in the war is symptomatic of this polarisation. Only minor groups and isolated individuals, such as the Independent Labour Party, George Orwell and the Surrealists (Benjamin Péret even fought on the front) upheld the Anarchist position as the legitimate stance of Republican Spain against foreign pressures, Soviet Communism and German Nazism.[161]

The British Surrealists' move towards Anarchism was triggered, it has been stated, by the events taking place in Spain. Nevertheless, this was a move that had already been anticipated by André Breton's laudatory comments on the figure of Leon Trotsky in several texts and lectures, such as the 1934 Brussels lecture "What is Surrealism?", translated by Gascoyne and included in the 1936 book *What is Surrealism?*; or the Manifesto "La planète sans visa", published in the Belgian review *Documents* in 1934. In many cases, Breton's approach was *negative*, in the sense that it was defined by a rejection of Communism, rather than by an unconditional acceptance of Trotskyism: this was exemplified in the alliance of the Surrealists with Bataille's Contre-Attaque group, which signalled a desire to provide a revolutionary leftist alternative to the Comintern-led Communist Party.[162] Also, throughout

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[161] With the exception of Roughton, who disbelieved the atrocities of the Moscow trials and genuinely thought that the Communist Party was not an obstacle to the formation of a Popular Front government in Britain, where he was right, or to the stability of the Popular Front Government in Spain, where he was wrong. This was due mainly to the fact that he had visited and was impressed by life in the Soviet Union, and also to the biased accounts of the Moscow trials that were published in Communist organs such as *Left Review*: in March 1937, *Left Review* published a verbatim record of court proceedings in the Case of the Anti-Soviet Trotskyite Centre which began with the suspicious statement "every trained observer of repute present at the trial [. . .] was unhesitatingly and unreservedly convinced of the scrupulous fairness of the trial and the unquestionable and entire guiltiness of the accused" (Left Review 1937b: 116). A review of the case by J.R. Campbell in the December 1937 issue of *Left Review* even accused Trotsky of dealings with Fascism.

[162] Although Contre-Attaque's inaugural manifesto was included in Breton's *Political Position of Surrealism* (1935), the Surrealists soon left the group in 1936, due to Breton's differences with Bataille.

1936 and 1937, Breton defended Trotsky in several protest statements and speeches *à propos* the Moscow trials.[163] What Breton found interesting in Trotsky's theories, especially as presented in *Literature and Revolution* (1923), was his outline of the influence of psychoanalysis towards understanding the workings of mass consciousness and his proposal that psychoanalysis and materialism could be reconciled in artistic form: "the artistic and psychological peculiarities of form [. . .] may open a path –one of the paths- to the artist's feeling of the world, and may facilitate the discovery of the relations of an individual artist, or of a whole artistic school, to the social environment" (Trotsky 2005: 139). In fact, the Surrealists did in fact agree with Trotsky's contention that verbal form may not be "a passive reflection of a preconceived artistic idea, but an active element that influences the idea itself" (Trotsky 2005: 146), which in a way resolved the tension between image and idea in Surrealist theory. For Trotsky, as for the Surrealists, form was not necessarily an obstacle to content, but rather a path into all the factors (social, political, economic, psychological) which condition creation, whose understanding is necessary in order to transform reality. Above all, Breton was influenced by Trotsky's opposition to the Stalinisation of Soviet cultural and artistic policy and his defence of a truly revolutionary form of artistic expression independent from ideological regimentation and in accord with the political theory of *permanent revolution*. The fact that poetry had a role to play in the revolution, Trotsky insisted, did not entail its subjection to precepts and orders:

> It is not true that we regard only that art as new and revolutionary that speaks of the worker, and it is nonsense to say that we demand that the poets should describe inevitably a factory chimney, or the uprising against capital! [. . .] No one is going to prescribe themes to a poet or intends to prescribe them. Please write about anything you can think of! (Trotsky 2005: 144).

Trotsky, in opposition to the doctrines of the Comintern, refused to reduce art to its ideological message; he believed that it should "be judged by its own law" (Trotsky 2005: 150), and argued that the new art should be based on what Herbert Read would later refer to as "a hierarchy of talent" (Read 1947: 39): this would be achieved by means of education and

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In Britain, however, there was an awareness of their collaborations: in a review of Breton's text and of Gascoyne's *Survey* in the April 1936 issue of *The Criterion*, Brian Coffey stated that, by joining Contre-Attaque, Breton showed that he "has not submitted to the control of the Communist Party" (Coffey 1936: 511).

[163] For an account of the Surrealists' Trotskyist activities, see Helena Lewis's *The Politics of Surrealism* (1988): 140-160. Theresa Papanikolas has traced the Anarchist element in Surrealism back to its Dada origins in "Towards a New Construction: Breton's Break with Dada and the Formation of Surrealism" (2003).

training of the working classes, because "weak and, what is more, illiterate poems do not make up [revolutionary] poetry, because they do not make up poetry at all" (Trotsky 2005: 167). Trotsky based his model on the idea that the Party's role was not to restrict artistic expression and/or access to certain modes of representation, but rather to promote it, in order to secure individual liberties (Trotsky 2005: 184). All these principles, which the Surrealists shared, would later crystallise in the manifesto "Towards an Independent Revolutionary Art" jointly published by Breton and Trotsky in 1938.

In the case of Britain, it was Herbert Read who paved the way to Anarchism for the Surrealists through a series of essays which culminated in the publication of *Poetry and Anarchism* (1938).[164] Read's rejection of Soviet literary and artistic doctrine had been, as we have seen, frequently voiced. In his "Introduction" to *Surrealism* (1936), he was already critical of Communism, which he discredited for having "made the exigencies of a transitional epoch the excuse for an unnecessary and stupid form of aesthetic intolerance" (Read 1971: 89); and in a 1937 article for the *New English Weekly* entitled "Why I am a Surrealist" he reiterated these views; disturbed by Mayakovky's suicide, the Moscow Trials and the Spanish Civil War, he also showed that he was increasingly aware of the physical perils that his position entailed (Read 1937d: 414). *Poetry and Anarchism* was nevertheless much more than a rejection of Soviet policy, which meant that the ideology of British Surrealism transcended Bretonian instrumental (at least initially) Anarchism, defined by sheer opposition to the Communist Party.[165] What was at stake for Read at the time was the need for a revolutionary art to couple with his revolutionary politics. This opposed the stance of several organisations of the left such as the A.I.A., which claimed to be "conservative in art and radical in politics" (in King 1990: 159). For Read, Classicism, artistic conservatism and academicism were "the intellectual counterpart of political tyranny" (Read 1971: 23). Curiously enough, both Fascist and Communist policies put forward neoclassical Realism as the legitimate form of representation of their respective ideologies, and took great pains to put an end to Avant-Garde art and artists as oppositional forces to the state. These questions were addressed by Read in a 1935 lecture for the A.I.A., where he stated that "The true revolutionary artist to-day is not any artist with a Marxist ideology; it is the good artist with a revolutionary technique" (in King 1990: 160). In

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[164] Read also contributed to Vernon Richards's Anarchist paper *Spain and the World*. Read would later continue to develop his Anarchist ideas in *The Philosophy of Anarchism* (1940) and *Anarchy and Order* (1954). For an exhaustive account of Read's activities as an Anarchist throughout his life, see David Goodway's *Anarchist Seeds Beneath the Snow* (2006): 175-201.

[165] Also, Read's Anarchism was part of an already established tradition of Anarchist thought in Britain which harked back to certain Romantic propositions on artistic freedom and to figures like William Morris, Edward Carpenter and Oscar Wilde.

this, he found that Surrealism offered the perfect formula: parallel to Anarchist principles in the ideological sphere, which advocated a social model devoid of power hierarchies, Surrealism implied total liberation in the realm of artistic expression, a revolutionary technique which allowed the exploration of unconscious repressions and rebelled against not only academic impositions on form, but also ideological impositions on content. But it was not just that Surrealism was the kind of aesthetics that best suited the principles of Anarchism; most importantly, as Read pointed out, it was that the true poet was "necessarily an anarchist" (Read 1947: 8), for it is through the artist's individuality that art resists appropriation by state organs. Thus, in *Poetry and Anarchism*, Read defends the central role of the poet, in art and society, in the destruction of pre-established orders, forms and patterns. Individual freedom, which is a prerequisite for art (Read 1947: 15), lies also at the core of the Anarchist conception of social relations. Equity and workers' control, on the other hand, underlie its conception of social structures. In the realm of art, Read argues, these two principles can only be carried out through education.[166] For many of his propositions, Read drew on the literary Anarchism of Trotsky, the ethical Anarchism of Mikhail Bakunin and the Communist Anarchism of Peter Kropotkin. Even so, for the most part, he remained faithful to the essential formulations of Marx and Engels.[167] For example, the idea that pervades all the essays in *Poetry and Anarchism* is Engels's configuration of Communist society as a "withering away" of the concept of state. This idea, which first appeared in Engels's *Anti-Dühring* (1878), seemed to be at the time better represented in the Anarchist demands of a stateless society than in the strongly bureaucratised system of Stalinist Communism. This was for Read the most appealing and promising claim of Anarchism and, borrowing from Lenin's *The State and Revolution* (1919), he stated: "While the State exists there is no freedom. When there is freedom, there will be no State" (in Read 1947: 45). According to Read, only in a society devoid of structural power in the form of state bureaucracy, armed forces, a professionalised civil service and other regulating organs could art be liberated from its servitude to a privileged élite. In the meantime, Surrealism worked towards such liberation.

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[166] Education became a central concern for Read in the 1940s, when he published his study *Education through Art* (1943).

[167] Later in life he would nevertheless acknowledge different sources: "I date my conversion [to Anarchism] to the reading of a pamphlet by Edward Carpenter with the title *Non-Governmental Society*, which took place in 1911 or 1912, and immediately opened up to me a whole new range of thought – not only the works of professed anarchists such as Kropotkin, Bakunin and Proudhon, but also those of Nietzsche, Ibsen, and Tolstoy which directly or indirectly supported the anarchist philosophy, and those of Marx and Shaw which directly attacked it" (in Goodway 2006: 176). Read's statements in *Poetry and Anarchism* contradict some of these claims.

Nevertheless, as Read observed, the conditions for freedom and for artistic creation, in sum, for that "withering away" of the state, were not propitious at a time when state control and rearmament were soaring in totalitarian regimes and democratic countries alike. In both systems, art was instrumentalised and placed at the service of state ideology (racial purity, Proletkult, mercantilism) to the extent that the artist had become "the individualist in conflict with society" (Read 1971: 27). For Read, the situation was even more dispiriting in Britain, characterised by "an immense indifference to questions of art" (Read 1947: 18). This was an idea that had been previously explored by Read in an article published in *Minotaure* in 1935 under the title "Why the English Have No Taste", in which he criticised the fact that *normality* (i.e. standardisation) was the measure of the English character: this is epitomised by the *gentleman*, a figure which, reduplicated *ad infinitum*, would be satirised in Magritte's painting.[168] For Read, the English lack of taste was a manifestation of repression and a lack of social freedom, which prevented the acknowledgement of commonalities among individuals (Read 1935e: 68). In this way, the Surrealists, in spite of emerging discrepancies regarding the adoption of Anarchism, agreed on the need to work towards the destabilisation of the concept of state. In fact, a common trait in their texts is an outward disrespect for British nationalism and the Establishment, either in the form of imperial greed (Charles Madge), the monarchy (David Gascoyne, Charles Madge and Humphrey Jennings), British bourgeois customs (Roland Penrose and Roger Roughton), or even the English landscape (Hugh Sykes Davies).

Thus far, it is clear that there are many points at which the British Surrealists converged. However, the year 1938 marked the beginning of a period of ideological divergence within British Surrealism which culminated in the (unofficial) dissolution of the core Group with the outbreak of the Second World War. Yet, the main point of conflict was party affiliation, rather than any ideological standpoint. Dissensions had emerged as early as 1937 between those who were not affiliated to any political party and therefore more favourable to Anarchism (Read, Penrose and, to a lesser extent, Gascoyne and Barker) and those who were openly Communist (Roughton, Madge, Jennings and, less openly, Sykes Davies).[169] These conflicts intensified in 1938, a time which coincided with Gascoyne's, Madge's and Roughton's definitive break from the Group. Similarly, Breton's meeting with Trotsky and the painter

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[168] "Why the English Have No Taste" is one the essays included in *Poetry and Anarchism*.

[169] Gascoyne joined the Communist Party of Great Britain in a desperate attempt to engage in political action, but would soon drop out of it: in the entry for 8 April 1937 of his *Journal 1936-1937* (1980), he confessed that "At heart I must always have been an anarchist" (Gascoyne 1980: 98). Barker's stance, in spite of the fact that he was never an official member of the Surrealist Group, was much more representative of Surrealism that he was ever willing to acknowledge. Sykes Davies was an undercover Communist until the end of the war.

Diego Rivera in Mexico in 1938 and the founding of the F.I.A.R.I. (Fédération internationale pour un art révolutionnaire indépendant) had already brought about the division of the French group and Paul Éluard, the most prominent Surrealist poet, who remained pro-Stalin, abandoned Surrealism. In Britain, the publication of Breton and Trotsky's manifesto "Towards an Independent Revolutionary Art" (initially signed by Breton and Rivera) in the official Surrealist journal, the *London Bulletin*, also furthered dissent within the Group.[170] Breton and Trotsky's declaration was first published in French (October 1938) and was then followed by the English translation (December 1938-January 1939) when Roland Penrose was assistant editor of the journal. The fact that the declaration was first published in French is symptomatic of E.L.T. Mesens's, the then editor in chief of the journal, and Roland Penrose's desire to hurriedly make the Group's newly developed stance official. In the manifesto, they reject Fascism, Communism and the ideology sustained in democratic countries which, behind the banner of "Neither Fascism nor Communism!", yields to reactionary forces in order to secure the preservation of an intact capitalist system (Breton and Rivera 1938-1939: 30). They go on to demand that

> If, for the development of the material productive forces, the revolution has to establish a planned and centralised *Socialist* regime, then in the sphere of intellectual creation it should from the very beginning set up and assure an *anarchist* regime of individual freedom. There must be no authority, no compulsion, no trace of command!" (Breton and Rivera 1938-1939: 31)

The pressure to publish Breton and Trotsky's text in Britain also responded to recent international political events: Anthony Eden's resignation earlier in 1938, due to his disagreement with Chamberlain's Appeasement policy; the Munich Agreement signed by Britain, France, Italy and Germany in September that year and the subsequent Nazi annexation of the Sudetenland; and the failure of Chamberlain's Appeasement in securing peace, made manifest in Germany's with the occupation of Czechoslovakia in March 1939, in breach of the Munich Agreement. Following the failure of the Appeasement policy and with the imminence of a Second World War, the Surrealists returned to their previous pacifist stance, the final confirmation of their Anarchist position: "Peace is anarchy", Read asserted and, as we said, that "the only rational war is a war to end war" (Read 1947: 70); but the Surrealists knew that this war, mediated and ideologised even before it had started, would only contribute to the

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[170] Robin Adèle Greeley offers a detailed analysis of the cultural and political context in which the manifesto was written and published "For an Independent Revolutionary Art: Breton, Trotsky and Cárdenas's Mexico" (2003).

reinforcement of state power. In this context, Read's words that "War will exist as long as the State exists" (Read 1947: 75) seem rather pessimistic.[171]

In spite of the war, which had a tremendous effect on the configuration of the Group (only Penrose remained after 1945), Surrealist activity was only partially interrupted.[172] In some cases, it was carried, camouflaged, onto to the battlefield: Roland Penrose, Humphrey Jennings, Julian Trevelyan and Lee Miller all had active roles during the war in which their Surrealist *vein* found expression. Many of the recently incorporated Surrealists and other artists who were not so prominent in the 1930s, such as E.L.T. Mesens, Conroy Maddox, Toni del Renzio, Emmy Bridgwater, Ithell Colquhoun and Edith Rimmington, actually gained recognition during the war. However, one of the defining features of 1940s British Surrealism was that it became essentially a pictorial or plastic movement. In the 1940s, painting took over from poetry, and the movement, which in Britain had originated as a poetic phenomenon, never experienced again the profusion of Surrealist writing which was characteristic of the prevous decade.[173] The *London Bulletin* continued to be published under the editorship of E.L.T. Mesens up to June 1940. Earlier that year, Mesens had tried to redefine the Group's stance by establishing a series of artistic and ideological guidelines, but his proposition met the opposition of the other members, who remained faithful to the Group's original tolerant and open position.

It is for all these reasons that 1930s' Surrealist writing became central to the development of a Surrealist ideology in Britain. From the Group's inception, Surrealist image and ideology, language and thought, were connected in these writers' desire to satisfy desire and expand consciousness through their texts. In spite of their often marginal position in the criticism, these authors' contribution to furthering artistic creativity and freedom in the pre-war period is not negligible. They provided the most cohesive and unanimous response to the ideological threats that endangered the autonomy of artistic expression in a world dominated by highly regimented systems, and they formed the only organised group of action that openly

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[171] The fact that Read and Penrose, the most prominent representatives of Surrealist Anarchism in Britain, accepted a knighthood in 1952 and 1966 respectively makes the issue even more complicated. In this, the British Establishment proved its capacity to assimilate radical forms of political and artistic expression into mainstream culture.

[172] In *British Writers of the Thirties* (1988), Valentine Cunningham's discussion of the effects of war and ideological crisis in 1930s writing includes references to Gascoyne, Sykes Davies and Roger Roughton (Cunningham 1988: 36-70). More recently, an insightful study by Leo Mellor has focused on the influence of war and destruction on British Surrealism in *Reading the Ruins: Modernism, Bombsites and British Culture* (2011): 85-137.

[173] With the exception of a few texts scattered in several periodicals, such as *New Road*, *View* and the only issue of Simon Watson Taylor's Surrealist journal *Free Unions Libres* in 1946.

opposed Fascism, Communism and the indifferent mercantilism of European democracies. From their Anarchist stance, which was incipient even before they officially embraced Trotskyism, they took advantage of political convulsion in order to begin a revolution which was successful in the terms in which they understood achievement: constant struggle, the opening up of endless possibilities and the expansion of consciousness. The following chapters present an exhaustive study of the ways in which these authors carried out such a struggle in their texts and poems, and of the ways in which these interactions between image and ideology took place in British Surrealist writing of the 1930s.

CHAPTER 4
SURREALIST IMAGES: THE POLITICISATION OF POETRY

1. The Metamorphosing Image: Hugh Sykes Davies.

> *Significant form* is a form behind which
> we catch a sense of ultimate reality.
> Clive Bell, *Art* (1914): 60.

Hugh Sykes Davies's crucial contribution to British Surrealist writing makes him one of the most interesting figures in 1930s British literature. He became a precursor of Surrealism himself with his novel *Petron* (1935), the only English Surrealist novel (if "novel" is an adequate label for it), which was never republished and reaches ridiculously high prices in the second-hand market nowadays. His work remains unknown, neglected and scattered in manuscripts and publications which are still uncollected. In the "Obituary" which was published by *The Times* in 1984, there is no mention of him as a Surrealist, save a wrong attribution of Herbert Read's *Surrealism* (1936) to him. Nevertheless, Hugh Sykes Davies's poetic experiments, his efforts to trace the Surrealist element in the British literary tradition, his constant attempts to recover old poetic forms and endow them with new meanings, his biological conception of literary creation, his application of the principles of Surrealist collage to literary composition, his use of Dalí's paranoiac-critical method for the exploration of irrational, metamorphosing images and his re-elaboration of a dissident literary tradition contributed decisively to the development of a Surrealist aesthetics and sensibility in Britain. On the other hand, his activities as an undercover Communist reveal his revolutionary ideology and his active involvement in politics and social action during the 1930s. Although he abandoned Surrealism just as it was veering towards Anarchist positions, the fact that he remained a member up until 1938 shows the extent to which the British Surrealist Group was ideologically more tolerant than its continental counterpart.

In Sykes Davies's Surrealist writing, the reconciliation between image and ideology takes place through the use of spiralling structures and metamorphosing images which unsettle the formal stability and disrupt the semantic coherence of his texts, in which the marvellous emerges. It is by means of these structures and images that Sykes Davies defamiliarises reality and the language used to convey it, creating new mythologies to replace the old views of the dominant bourgeois ideology. His images present a world in constant transformation which resists rational categorisation, favouring the collapse of the old aesthetic, social, political and ideological canon and the institution of a new order. However, this new order is neither stable nor permanent: by incorporating formal and semantic

instability into their own configuration, Sykes Davies's images present a view of the world which is in accord with a dynamic and shifting incipient Surrealist ideology in Britain. Thus, his Surrealist texts, complex in references and meaning, are among the most exciting examples of Surrealist writing produced in Britain in the 1930s.

1.1. Premature Surrealist and Undercover Communist.

Born in 1909 in Prescott, Lancashire, Hugh Sykes Davies (like Roland Penrose, Charles Madge and Humphrey Jennings) belonged to what can be called the Cambridge group of British Surrealists. He entered St. John's College in 1928, where he obtained a first in the Classical and English Tripos and won the Le Bas Prize for his essay "Realism in the Drama" (1933). Three years later, already a leading Surrealist, he was appointed lecturer in English at Cambridge. He was a signatory of the most significant manifestoes issued by the British Surrealist Group and was in the organising committee of the 1936 London Surrealist Exhibition, to which he contributed several Surrealist objects, of which unfortunately no pictures or descriptions seem to have remained. Even before he began writing Surrealist texts, Sykes Davies belonged to the Cambridge group "Experiment" together with Julian Trevelyan, Jacob Bronowski, William Empson and Humphrey Jennings, among others, and the group's eponymous magazine, co-edited by Jacob Bronowski and Sykes Davies, contributed significantly to the introduction of Avant-Garde art and literature in Britain. In the case of Sykes Davies, Julian Trevelyan and Humphrey Jennings, the group prefigured in a way their later poetic turn to Surrealism.

Writing within this milieu, there were a great many influences working on Sykes Davies. In 1938, in Paris, he actually met Sigmund Freud, whose theories had significantly shaped his critical work on Surrealism and, later on, on Wordsworth, to whom he would devote much critical effort later in life. Regarding this, in his article "Remembering Prufrock" (2001), George Watson comments on how Sykes Davies and Freud share the same ideas about the nature of time and experience, something that Sykes Davies also observes in Wordsworth:

> Wordsworth, he [Hugh Sykes Davies] once explained in a collection he edited called *The English Mind* (1964), was a precursor of Freud , whom he had met in Paris in 1938 in the home of Princess Marie Bonaparte, 'the only princess I have ever known' and head of the French Freudians. Freud was a refugee on his way from Vienna to London, where he died; and like Wordsworth he had seen experience less as a continuum than as a broken chain of crises and traumas, a shattered record where almost all the fragments are jettisoned as meaningless, the remaining few to be interpreted and reinterpreted into patterns of healing significance. That is what Wordsworth's *Prelude*

is about, and Proust's great novel, and that is how Hugh too saw time, in its aimless passage from a birth you cannot remember to a death you will never recall. (Watson 2001: 579)

As will be seen, Sykes Davies's texts, in which endless chains of disconnected images create spiralling structures whose beginning and end remain difficult to discern, reproduce formally this pattern of thought.

Just as his poetry was influenced by Freudian theories on the nature and import of unconscious and irrational thought, his political stance was from a very early stage characterised by a marked rejection of the scientific rationalism which characterised the discourse of totalitarian ideologies. In a 1930 essay on the League of Nations, of which he was also critical for its inefficacy in the prevention of international conflicts, he denounced the political apathy of his contemporaries: he complained about the academic retreatism of Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot, defended the position of the idealist as a position which found no place in the mercantilist capitalist system of the time, and rejected the scientific creed that war was *a biological necessity*:

The scientist is inclined to war because it allows him the opportunity to produce some of his most convincing conjuring tricks. The god comes out of his temple and works miracles against the Persians. Also he is opposed to movements like the League of Nations because they are idealistic, 'humanitarian.' His romantic pose is that of the inscrutable, implacable interpreter of scientific fact, *Anagke*, silent, strong-jawed and unemotional. The mob love it as they love a dictator. (Sykes Davies 1930d: 8)

In spite of these feelings, however, for a time around 1935 and 1936, his allegiance to politics became secondary to his engagement with Surrealism and, although he had established close friendships with renowned Communists such as Anthony Blunt and Guy Burgess during their time in the Cambridge secret society, The Apostles, Sykes Davies fell out with Blunt on account of the latter's strong attacks on Surrealism.[174] After that, it was not until 1937 that Sykes Davies joined the Communist Party of Great Britain, mainly due to the effect that the Spanish Civil War had on his political convictions. Although a tubercular condition prevented him from fighting at the Spanish front, a hindrance which he sublimated every

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[174] Much later, in 1978, both Blunt and Sykes Davies collaborated in the Surrealist feature of *The Times Literary Supplement*, where Blunt acknowledged his misguided hostility to Surrealism during the thirties: "It seemed to me that it was the last word in individualistic art, the final turning away of the artist from the outside world of reality into his own subconscious, just at a moment when it seemed to me that art should be once again facing the problem of dealing with the great issues of the day. [. . .] but it is certainly the case that in the 1930s we –or at least I- did not fully realize the intense desire of the Surrealists to play their part in 'the Revolution'" (Blunt 1978: 35).

morning by playing the Catalan national anthem on his accordion.[175] Nevertheless, he became a very engaged member of the Party and stood as an undercover Communist parliamentary candidate for the Isle of Ely in the 1940 election, which was eventually cancelled due to the war. In this regard, Watson recounts that Sykes Davies even bought a fish shop in Ely "to keep its manager, another undercover Communist and his election agent, from being moved by his firm to the Midlands" (Watson 2001: 579). In an interview with Brian Silk in 1981 Sykes Davies explained his motives for the deceit: "It was a question of balancing the ethics of the thing against the realities. We thought there was a war coming and that it could be stopped. When they rumbled me they were hopping mad. They sent Morgan Phillips down to get rid of me and he did" (Sykes Davies 1981: n.p.). It was nevertheless partly due to his undercover activities as a secret member of the Party that the Surrealist Group managed to stay together throughout 1937: his insistence that the Group should not be disbanded at the time was justified by his wish to get its more prominent and influential members, such as Herbert Read, Paul Nash and Henry Moore to continue to support the political activities of the Group and to sign its political tracts and manifestoes.[176]

However, the beginning of the Second World War made it inevitable for Sykes Davies to abandon the Surrealist quest. In his 1978 article "An Epilaugh for Surrealism", he recalled how it all happened after having spent one year in a Swiss sanatorium to cure his tuberculosis:

> There I spent some time in reflection, about Surrealism, the Spanish War, the even bigger war that was coming to us. On the day I left Switzerland, Hitler moved into Austria. It felt uncomfortably close. When I found my Surrealist friends still at their happenings, their private views at mid-night and so on, I urgently wanted to warn them that the game was up, that playing with bright images was over. The images had turned around. The new *Ars Poetica* was to be the art of cursing, and we had to learn it. My warning to my friends, and the curse on our enemies, was published in the *London Bulletin*, the last remaining place for Surrealist poetry. Perhaps the editor failed to understand that it was largely anti-Surrealist. But he very rightly printed it together with photographs of Hitler and Mussolini, and one of Goya's birthplace, Belchite, after

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[175] This information appeared in a BBC2 programme broadcast in October 1981, "The Don's Tale", as part of the series *Tales of Twelve Cities*.
[176] This was recounted by David Gascoyne in the entry for 8 April 1937 of his *Journal 1936-37* (1980): 74.

it had been bombed by the German or Italian planes. The statue of Goya himself had wonderfully survived, the only upright thing in the rubble.[177] (Sykes Davies 1978: 34)

As will be seen, Sykes Davies is referring here to his poem "It Doesn't Look Like a Finger" (1938), the last piece of Surrealist writing which he composed and the true epilogue to his Surrealist experience.

Sykes Davies was a premature Surrealist for a British writer. By the time *Petron* (1935) was published, Surrealism had not yet reached Britain officially. When it did, the imminence of war (presaged by many ominous signs such as the rearmament process, the expansion of the German military, the war in Spain or the Munich Agreement) forced reality back into his mind:

I took it for granted that reality was necessarily paramount for the duration; paramount over Surrealism and indeed every kind of imaginative writing. A parenthesis had opened in our lives, and some dearly cherished activities would have to await the final bracket to be pursued again. This was not a theoretical decision, but a purely practical one. For me, the war involved much and varied activity, utterly absorbing in itself. (Sykes Davies 1978: 34)

During the war, like many other Surrealists (although he was no longer one of them), he took a governmental position. The outcome of the Spanish Civil War and the turn of events in the Second World War made him increasingly disillusioned with revolutionary ideas and he abandoned Communism soon after the war ended, adopting a more moderate form of Socialism. Although he had renounced Surrealism with the outbreak of the Second World War, in the seventies he re-discovered his Surrealist texts as faultless examples of the poetic theory he had developed since, where the ideas of primitivism, spontaneity and sincerity, which recur in most of his theoretical texts from the thirties, seemed as current as ever. In the section that follows I discuss a series of aspects of Sykes Davies's poetic theory which are central for an understanding of the ways in which image and ideology converge in his Surrealist texts.

1.2. Sykes Davies's Poetic Theory.

Hugh Sykes Davies was, together with Herbert Read, the most important theoretician of British Surrealism in the thirties. Throughout a fairly extensive corpus of theoretical writing, most of which was published at the time, Sykes Davies established the literary and philosophical background from which British Surrealism emerged, a contribution which is often underrated in the criticism. He developed a sort of *autochthonous* theory of Surrealism, deeply

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[177] The article was published in January 1978 in the Surrealist feature of *The Times Literary Supplement*, "Surrealism Revisited", on occasion of the Surrealist retrospective exhibition, *Dada and Surrealism Reviewed*, at the Hayward Gallery in London.

embedded within the British literary tradition, which drew mainly from the points that Surrealism shared with the British Romantic and Gothic traditions. By doing so, he was not only finding a place for Surrealism in the literary tradition of his country, but also within the broader literary history of the Western canon. In this section, I propose a revision of Sykes Davies's theoretical texts in the light, not only of continental Surrealism, but also of Wilhelm Worringer's ideas on abstraction and empathy and of T.E. Hulme's literary theory. This analysis reinstates the centrality of Sykes Davies's poetic theory in the discussions on Modernist and Avant-Garde literature, especially those centred on the debate on form and content which dominated the literary circles of 1920s and 1930s Britain.

Sykes Davies's theory of Surrealism revolves around two main tenets which help bring together such seemingly diverging poetics as George Barker's and Roland Penrose's. Sykes Davies understood poetic creation as a biologically determined activity and the Surrealist image as the construction of a universal myth, which means there is also a psychological and ideological dimension to his conception of Surrealist writing. One further aspect which is also central to the writings and activities of the other Cambridge Surrealists is his emphasis on the specificity of the British element in Surrealism, which contrasts with the cosmopolitanism and Francophile attitudes of Gascoyne and Penrose, whereas it finds correspondences with the anthropological interest in the British condition of the Mass-Observation poets, Charles Madge and Humphrey Jennings. Nevertheless, as will be seen, there are also some *universalising* aims inherent in Sykes Davies's poetry: his close relationship with the French Surrealist Group, his command of the French language, his knowledge of European literature and his exceedingly acute grasp of continental Surrealism contributed to his re-elaboration of a dissident literary tradition in texts which are nonetheless unequivocally British.

1.2.1. On Form and Content.

Sykes Davies's concern with the relationship between form and content in poetry pervaded much of his theoretical writing, and had a not insignificant effect on his Surrealist poetry. In this section, a discussion of Giambattista Vico's theory of natural poetry and of Wilhelm Worringer's concept of abstraction will shed light on his views on the matter. This shows that Sykes Davies understood form, not as the result of the application of Classical rules, but rather as a mechanism for the liberation of repressed content. For him, Surrealism was a form of primitive or instinctive poetry which, by recovering the patterns and structures of the oral tradition, could reach the collective unconscious. Thus, he found in Surrealism the way to reconcile form and content by means of old structures and pre-existing images which, through displacement, acquired new meanings.

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His essay "Homer and Vico" (1934) appeared in Geoffrey Grigson's *New Verse* as an early example of pro-Surrealist advocacy in Britain. Unlike other early texts by British Surrealists, such as Charles Madge's "Surrealism for the English" (1933) or "The Meaning of Surrealism" (1934), "Homer and Vico" was not an attempt to introduce a foreign movement to a British readership, but rather a finely veiled and authoritatively sanctioned defence of Surrealism as a return to a truer form of poetry, to what Sykes Davies called *natural* or *instinctive* poetry. It is an article based on Giambattista Vico's philosophical system, a system which was rediscovered by the Romantics and re-used by the Surrealists.[178] Vico's concept of *scienza* was based on the idea that knowledge of truth can only be reached through imagination and memory, an idea which opposed Cartesian epistemology, which had reason and intellect at its centre. In a way, Ezra Pound's words in his attack on Surrealism where he rejected irrational forms of knowledge and advocated the use of "WORDS with clear and unequivocal meaning" somehow echoed this form of Cartesian reasoning (Pound 1936: 136). Even so, although Sykes Davies resorted to Vico's theory in order to enlighten discussions on the nature of Surrealist creation as an eminently irrational activity, it is generally the case that a similar sort of binary or oppositional system has been used since as the basis of Marxist critiques of Surrealism. For example, Fredric Jameson, trying to establish a Marxist hermeneutics of Surrealist poetry, translates Vico's system into an opposition between "the state of nature and the state of civilization", between "concrete poetry, that of the 'naive' or primitive poet, and the abstract poetry of modern times, the work of 'sentimental' artists" (Jameson 1974: 92). By "sentimental", Jameson alludes to the "sophisticated", "intellectualistic" and "artificial" poet, in whose work the dissociation between form and content, between the language used and the ideas behind that formal structure, is easily perceived. In Jameson's Marxist criticism, this form of *alienation* acquires a materialist dimension because it is seen as the reflection of the writer's own alienation from the reader, who remains unable to access the work's meaning, and therefore from society. However, there is a basic discrepancy between Sykes Davies's position and that of the Marxist critic, for whereas the former sees primitive poetry as connected to the abstract urges of modern poetry, the latter considers this tendency to abstraction as the result of an artificial process of sophistication and intellectualisation. As we saw in the second chapter, it was Wilhelm Worringer who, in his seminal study *Abstraction and Empathy* (1908), had related modern

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[178] Although Sykes Davies does not acknowledge so, James Joyce also contributed to restoring the currency of Vico's theory with his *Finnegans Wake* (1939), chapters of which had been partially published under the title *Work in Progress* in Eugène Jolas's *transition* (1927-1938). See Donald Phillip Verene's *Vico and Joyce* (1987).

modes of artistic expression to primitive art, because they both responded to that tendency towards abstraction triggered by feelings of unrest inspired in the individual by the material world. Hence, it is not surprising that Dykes Davies draws on Worringer's theory in order to defend Surrealism as a form of natural poetry, the result, not of an intellectual process, but of the myth-making mechanisms of the imagination and memory which lie at the core of primitive art forms. In response to that *dread of space* to which Worringer alluded, the primitive artist displays a mythical imagination, which is understood as his ability to conquer the natural world through the creation of myths by means of analogy, that is, by finding similarities in dissimilar things. So the importance of myth as a form of organisation of sensorial data and interpretation of the material is central to Sykes Davies's theory of Surrealism. The poet, he contends, "will feel the need of explanation of a thing so terrifying, will have no means of rational explanation; and so will judge it by similitude with things which he already understands" (Sykes Davies 1934c: 14).[179] For him, this system of myths requires "a particular form of expression –imaginative expression, or poetry" (Sykes Davies 1934c: 14-15); and he places this mythical language, not in the realm of the rhetorical (which would be contingent forms of expression), but rather in the realm of sheer necessity: poetry satisfies a communicative function, it is the only possible means through which the new reality created by the poet may be expressed. As Sykes Davies acknowledged, Vico had already defended these ideas in *De Constantia Philologiae* (1721):

> So for us, the whole Art of Poetry reduces itself to this, that anyone who wishes to excel as a poet, must unlearn all his native language, and return to the pristine beggary of words . . . ; he will, by the aid of the senses and the imagination, paint the most striking and lovely images of things, manners, and feelings; and just as anyone who wishes to be a philosopher must first purge himself of the prejudices of children and common people, so anyone who would write a great poem must feel and think entirely according to the childish and common views of the world. In this way, he will become really imaginative, and will compose at once sublimely and in accordance with the popular understanding. (in Sykes Davies 1934c: 16)

In the light of Vico's theory, it is in fact no surprise that Sykes Davies defended the importance of myth in poetry as an "uncontracted imaginative construction", as opposed to the "contracted metaphor or conceit", that he resorted to forms and patterns of the ancient and

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[179] In a way, Charles Madge's and Humphrey Jennings's exploration of images of collective significance was also the result of a process of finding similarity in dissimilar realities. It was indeed through textual collage as a myth-making technique that these writers reacted to the fragmentariness of modern experience and to the false continuities of the dominant ideologies.

oral tradition in his compositions, and that the Surrealists favoured the poetry of children and the mentally ill. As he says, "Children are naturally poetic" (Sykes Davies 1934c: 15).

The way in which all these aspects of poetic creation relate to Sykes Davies's concern with form and content was explained by the poet himself in his article "The Cave that Jack Built" (1972), in which he draws attention to the permanent character of form in folklore. Discussing the meaning behind the Lascaux cave-paintings in Southern France, he asserts:

> We can't get back to the ideas. We have to be content with the shapes, rather as with some of the relics of primitive man. His clothes, if he had any, have rotted away, so have his wooden houses. All that we have left is the pattern of holes in the ground where the poles once stood that supported the walls and roofs. So with folklore: the ideas, the meanings, have gone down the wind of the years. We are left with the post-holes, the patterns. We are left with them in a double sense. Not only are they all that remains with certainty of the past, but they are also alive in the present –still capable of having new items, new meanings, poured into them. (Sykes Davies 1972: 304)

Thus, he advocates a return to natural poetry as a way to create new meanings out of old forms. However, his concern with form is not to be understood in the Classical sense of conscious elaboration, formal technique or rational control because, as he acknowledged in a 1979 lecture on the "Avant Garde", form is generally "associated with terribly unfashionable things like Discipline and Order –no doubt with Fascism if you really push your thought to their logical *cul de sacs*" (Sykes Davies 1979a: 2).[180] On the contrary, for him, form is the way in which the individual can re-connect with ancient urges, repressed through ages of exposure to the rule of reason. Also, it is through form that unconscious content can be liberated because

> there is much truth in Freud's central discovery that a large part of each person's mental territory is Unconscious. [. . .] some of the most important parts of that Territory are there because we ourselves –other parts of our mental apparatus- have put them there by the process which Freud called Repression. We have, in fact, on general Freudian theories, to face the fact that parts of our unconscious minds are not readily available to our more conscious selves. (Sykes Davies 1979a: 2)

It is only in unconscious or semi-unconscious states, he argues, that we gain control over those elements which have been forced into repression:

> This is precisely the state, I believe, into which conscious concern with Form, with Technique in its broadest sense, can lead the creative painter-writer [. . .] . In and by

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[180] Unpublished lecture. Manuscript kept at St. John's College Library, Cambridge. The Papers of Hugh Sykes Davies, Box 8, item 58.

itself, control of form does not bring any direct contribution to the value of his work: but it can, and sometimes does, liberate what is of value, and open access to perceiving and expressing it. (Sykes Davies 1979a: 3)

For Sykes Davies, this could be achieved through the use of formal structures from the folk tradition, for he saw in these repetitive and mechanical (i.e. automatic) patterns, such as refrains, incantations and litanies, the potential, not only to reproduce the rhythms of the primitive, but also to connect with the collective unconscious. For example, the cumulative-recapitulative structure of nursery rhymes and other fixed frames of the oral tradition allowed the automatic generation of images, an idea which had already been exploited by Breton in "Manifesto of Surrealism" (1924) and in Surrealist games like *Cadavre Exquis*. In these, the use of a fixed syntactic frame releases the conscious mind from formal preoccupations, allowing the liberation of unconscious and repressed content: for Sykes Davies, this type of linguistic structures emulated that of irrational and obsessive thought, and he used them to present long chains of paranoiac and metamorphosing images. Furthermore, in Surrealist theory, the unconscious is essentially linguistic, an idea that implies that form comes to the poet, as Breton stated, *naturally* (Breton 1927: 141). Finally, and this will be clearly seen in my analysis of Sykes Davies's texts, the passages thus created are, in spite of these formal restraints, potentially uncontrolled, for they can be expanded *ad infinitum*, a fact that reproduces linguistic *recursion* (language's capacity to create infinite sentences by means of embedded clauses), and which was used by the Surrealists to defend the linguistic nature of the unconscious: for them, the unrestrained flow of images in this sort of automatic compositions reflects the very structure of the unconscious. Finally, there is also an ideological dimension to the use of these ancient forms, as Rod Mengham has stressed in his commentary on the resurgence of the ballad form in the left-wing poetry of the thirties: "The ballad", he states, "represented the voice of the people and a cultural legacy whose communal nature seemed to be guaranteed by the anonymous authorship of many of the most familiar examples" (Mengham 2009: 691). Sykes Davies understood that in this form of instinctive poetry, of which Surrealism was the modern representative, the distance between form and content, between image and idea, is abolished. Regarding this, in "An Epilaugh for Surrealism" (1978), he offers a free re-interpretation of Herbert Read's propositions in *Form in Modern Poetry* (1932) which responded to a life-long desire to reconcile form and content:

The relation between form and content was one which –rightly- concerned us, especially Herbert Read and myself. He had written a book called *Form and Modern Poetry* [sic.], which I have always thought one of his best. It develops the distinction

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between form imposed on the material from outside, and the form which grows out of the material, from the inside. Taken thus liberally, form not only reinforces the presentation of the material, but not seldom helps to find it -actively seeks for and locates its predestined partner. (Sykes Davies 1978: 34)

Read had defined *organic form* in the following terms: "When a work of art has its own inherent laws, originating with its very invention and fusing in one vital unity both structure and content" (Read 1938b: 19). He also identified this organic form with the Romantic and Modern phases of poetry, in which form is "imposed on poetry by the laws of its own origination, without consideration for the given forms of traditional poetry. It is the most original and most vital principle of poetic creation" (Read 1938b: 20). For Sykes Davies, this was indeed the character of primitive poetry, and of the Surrealist compositions which he wrote during the thirties.[181] However, Sykes Davies also added a materialist dimension in his revision of this debate on form and content:

These meetings of form and content, or content with form, are found in life as well as in art. There is a sense in which patterns await events, and in the 1930s the pattern of war grew darker and clearer with every month. It awaited the actual event so that in the end war itself came almost as a relief. The reality was better than fear and anticipation. But in this thickening atmosphere, at the time of Munich, there was little chance for imaginative writing of any kind –the images had turned around. (Sykes Davies 1978: 34)

Although these words serve to better explain and understand Sykes Davies's renunciation of Surrealist activity at the outset of the Second World War, they also exemplify how the literary merged with the political in 1930s British Surrealism as the pattern of war (a pattern of fragmentation, dismemberment and displacement) found in the Surrealist image a proleptic figuration of an otherwise unspeakable event.

1.2.2. Biology and Surrealism.

Throughout his life, but especially during the 1930s, Hugh Sykes Davies devoted much critical effort to explaining how and why Surrealism emerged in Britain when it did. This was mainly due to his appreciation of a certain Surrealistic element in the British literary tradition (especially in Lewis Carroll, but also in Ann Radcliffe and Matthew Lewis, in Lord Byron and William Blake, among others), but it was also because he himself had already started writing

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[181] The fault in Read's argument, which he later corrected as he became a champion of Abstract art, lay essentially in his choice of terms for he actually used "organic form" to describe Worringer's "abstraction", and "abstract form" for Worringer's "empathy". As we saw in the second chapter, T.E. Hulme also adapted Worringer's thesis to his own aims.

Surrealist texts before the official arrival of the movement in Britain, arguably not so much under the influence of French Surrealism (as was the case of David Gascoyne), but rather as a response to that Surrealistic element which pervaded much of the British, but also European, literature which he enjoyed. Sykes Davies considered that element to be *biological* in two distinct ways: on the one hand, and without disregard for the role of the French Surrealists in the systematisation of Surrealist practice, because it was indigenous to the British literary tradition; on the other hand, because it was the result of an instinctive activity. In this section I show that for Sykes Davies Surrealism was *naturally* British because it emerged from a historical dialectical movement which forced British writers to adopt a definite position regarding the problem of poetic creation and inspiration. In opposition to Classicist tenets, this position implied the conception of poetry as a biologically determined faculty and as a form of psychoanalytical exploration.

Sykes Davies's interest in the origins of the Surrealist element in British literature led him to write the article "Sympathies with Surrealism", published in *New Verse* just a few weeks before the opening of the 1936 London Surrealist Exhibition. His use of the term "sympathiser" (a term which he would take up again in one of his 1979 lectures on Surrealism) is deceptive, as it may lead to considering British Surrealism as a mere approximation to the French movement. In the aforementioned lecture, entitled "Surrealism", even if he insisted that, having "grown up under the shadow of the French movement", the English could not be Surrealists, but "sympathisers", he also acknowledged that the way in which the British responded to the problems of their time was not entirely different from that of the French Surrealists.[182] Whereas for Roughton the discrepancies within the British Group had a political basis, Sykes Davies saw it mainly as a theoretical question: a question of confronting theoretical problems whose answers shape the very nature of the creative work (this was, for Sykes Davies, the aim of the true Surrealist), as opposed to merely reproducing a foreign mode of expression without a prior theoretical formulation. The latter, he stated, was more often than not reduced to mere verbal renderings of Surrealist paintings or imitations of certain "recognisable tricks of imagery and structure" (Sykes Davies 1936c: 15).[183] The work of the true Surrealist, on the other hand, largely relied on psychoanalytical theories "to furnish a general theoretical background for the solution of his [theoretical] problems" (Sykes Davies 1936c: 18).

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[182] Unpublished lecture. Manuscript kept at St. John's College Library, Cambridge. The Papers of Hugh Sykes Davies, Box 8, item 59.

[183] Although Sykes Davies did not provide specific names, he was probably referring here to the lesser known British Surrealists, such as Ruthven Todd, and maybe to some of David Gascoyne's poems, inspired by Surrealist paintings.

As I have stated before, Sykes Davies was concerned with the peculiarly British manifestations of Surrealism, addressing questions such as the following:

> What is the relation between the group who have worked with this theoretical basis, and scattered individuals who have used the same basis? How different are their conclusions? How similar is their work? These seem to me to be the real questions about surrealist sympathisers. (Sykes Davies 1936c: 18)

In a way, these questions are also indicative of Sykes Davies's attempts to make of Surrealism a legitimate British movement.

Within the broader context of psychoanalysis as a discipline capable of providing clearer answers to questions about artistic creation (how and why art originates in human cultures), Sykes Davies saw art as a biologically determined faculty which satisfies a complex set of human instincts; the work resulting from the liberation of such instincts was then for him a sort of wish-fulfilling fantasy. In Freudian theory, external objects have a life of their own in the unconscious, and the Surrealists aimed at bringing such internal life to the surface. Hence, in the fantasy created in the work of art, as well as in dreams and child play, the fulfilment of desires, otherwise thwarted in external conscious life, takes place:

> The instinctual forces do not seem to care very much if the conditions for their fulfilment are provided in actuality, or in phantasy. That is to say, they will generally be satisfied if the situation to which they are accustomed is presented in the form of vivid memory-traces, worked up into a fairly coherent and life-like imitation of reality. Dreams provide the most universal example of this process. In them, instincts find fulfilment in phantasy-situations. In the waking life of primitive peoples, magic of all kinds does the same thing. And in the waking life of more civilised peoples, art, the lineal descendant of magic and religion, takes over the same function. (Sykes Davies 1936: 20)

As we can see, this psychoanalytical theory of art draws parallels between dreams, primitive myths and rituals, mental conditions and modern art and, consequently, Surrealism, with its powerful induction of dream-like and other unconscious states, can achieve the mental liberation which is necessary for the fulfilment of those instincts (the human need to come to terms with the material world). In this way, the creation, or recreation, of a dream state provides the artist with the ideal situation for individual desire to be fulfilled. However, even if it seems a fairly individualistic process, reaching the unconscious connects the artist with communal desire. Divested of everything that is culturally acquired (such as moral, aesthetic or commercial concerns), the artist arrives at the very core of universal need. Thus, through a

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kind of atavistic regression, the artist also connects with primitive man, and his work integrates and actively partakes in the mythical corpus of universal culture. This is the reason why myth, having substituted the concrete and therefore incomplete and ineffectual metaphor, becomes such an important element in Surrealist production. In the same way Roughton harangued the Surrealists to join under a common political creed, that of Communism, Sykes Davies found in the psychoanalytic theory of art a common doctrine for those artists and poets in Britain who were working on the theoretical problems of poetic creation and poetic inspiration, and finding clearer answers in psychoanalysis and the liberation of the unconscious: "Psychoanalysis", he stated, "may not be the only way of approaching these problems, but at the moment it is the clearest" (Sykes Davies 1936c: 19).

The idea that poetic creation is a biological (i.e. instinctive, innate) function of the individual was central to his lecture "Biology and Surrealism" (1936), delivered at the London International Surrealist Exhibition. In this lecture, Sykes Davies acknowledges that not only social or cultural factors intervene in the processes of repression, but that there is also a biological element underlying these processes. Mental conditions such as hysteria, delusion or paranoia, emerge at points, and to different degrees, so that repressed desires may be satisfied. It is well known that the Surrealists were interested in the creative potential of such states, and even simulated them for poetic purposes.[184] However, Sykes Davies, in spite of the fact that he did resort to Dalí's paranoiac-critical method in some of his texts, tends to stress the differences between poetry and the *asocial* expressions of neurosis (Sykes Davies 1934e: 146-147). For him, the most common forms of sublimation of these repressed forces are the dream and, through Surrealism, also art. The exhumation of the *id* that Sykes Davies advocated would make this private world public and the ineffability of the individual would then come to an end:

> We are to know one another's dreams, and so put an end to human loneliness in the face of this universal human situation . . . The hidden world will become part of our common life as human beings, the anti-social will be made social, synthesised with the rest of our existence. (Sykes Davies 1936a: 15)

In a way, the liberation of unconscious desires and fears through art was seen, not only as a form of reconciliation of aesthetic form and psychological content, of image and idea, but also

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[184] In the present study, the section devoted to David Gascoyne offers some commentaries on the activities carried out by the French Surrealists in this regard, as well as an exhaustive analysis of the effects that this interest in mental conditions had in Gascoyne's Surrealist poems. José Manuel García Arroyo, from Universidad de Sevilla, has recently published a study on the relationship between Surrealism and the simulation of paranoia, *Surrealismo y psiquiatría* (2012).

as a form of social reconciliation between the subject and the object, and between the poet and the *other*.

Just as in the case of Roland Penrose and Herbert Read's search for artists with a Surrealist orientation for the 1936 London Exhibition, Sykes Davies discovered that there was a not insignificant number of British writers influenced by psychoanalytical theories. In "Surrealism at this Time and Place", Sykes Davies's chapter in Herbert Read's *Surrealism* (1936), he analyses the historical and cultural factors which contributed to the emergence of Surrealism in Britain as the result of dialectical forces in British literary history. This idea had already been developed in an article on T.E. Hulme which appeared in St. John's College magazine, *The Eagle*, in December 1935:

> The most striking development of [the] contrast between the Humanist and the religious attitude is given in the theory of art, where the former is regarded as the basis of Romanticism, the latter of classicism. In painting and sculpture, Hulme sees signs of a return to classicism in the Cubists, in the new abstract painters, and in the work of Epstein. In rejecting the naturalistic representation of human vision, they are rejecting the Humanist idea of perfection; in accepting the non-human symmetry of geometrical form, they are recognising the existence of perfection outside humanity. In this change of aesthetic sensibility, he saw the chief evidence of a more general change from the Humanist or romantic to the religious or classical attitude. In verse similarly, he considered that the romantic vagueness and confusion between the finite and the infinite, the human and the divine, would soon be terminated by a revival of poetry of the classical type: 'I prophesy that a period of dry, hard, classical verse is coming.' Hulme's prophecies have, in the main, proved to be correct. We have had a period of abstract painting and sculpture, and we have had a period of hard dry verse.[185] (Sykes Davies 1935b: 86-87)

Once again, Hulme's slanted interpretation of Worringer's theory is to blame for the confusion of terms like Humanism, Abstraction, Classicism and Romanticism. However, following Hulme, Sykes Davies identifies Romanticism and Humanism here because both place the individual at the centre of creation, an identification which is not sustained in Worringer's thesis. Hulme's confusion is betrayed by the association of Romanticism with expressions like "naturalistic

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[185] Although the article is unsigned, John Kerrigan, who has elaborated the most comprehensive list of works by Sykes Davies so far, acknowledges that the attribution is based on Sykes Davies's public admiration of Hulme. Other ideas contained in the text (Humanism and Classicism, the prophecy of a new movement) recur in several of Sykes Davies's articles. See especially "The Enjoyment of Modern Poetry", a series of six articles published in *The Listener* from August to September 1933.

representation" and "the Humanist idea of perfection", ideas which might be more easily applied to Classicism. Furthermore, the ability to recognise "perfection outside humanity" seems more akin to what Worringer described as the humanist confidence in the historical and technological progress of humankind which characterised Classicism, rather than to the Romantic dread of external reality. In spite of the confusion, and the fact that Sykes Davies is as of yet incapable of perceiving the dissociation between Abstraction and Classicism, his final conclusion announces the arrival of Surrealism (although he does not mention it as such), as a continuation of the Romantic tradition, opposing it to the "dry, hard, classical" verse of High Modernism. As will be seen, Surrealism for him does not imply a return to the Humanist idea of perfection, but rather finds perfection in the very imperfection and ugliness of the individual; in the expression of his fears, his obsessions and desires, in his deviations and aberrations.

Sykes Davies's attempts to establish a genealogy of Surrealism in Britain and his statements referring to Surrealism as "the inevitable natural outcome of the historical situation in England" has been understood by Michel Remy as "a defusing of any revolutionary force in the movement" (Remy 1999: 97). Moreover, Remy suggests that the founding texts of British Surrealism, especially those written by Sykes Davies and Herbert Read, fail to acknowledge the challenge to reason and logic that the movement implied. Indeed, for Remy, there is too much emphasis placed on the Romantic (British) origins of Surrealism, understood maybe as a disowning of its French origins. Nevertheless, in all the programmatic texts of the British Group, such as Gascoyne's "Premier Manifeste Anglais du Surréalisme" (1935) and Read's *Surrealism* (1936), the French influence is not only acknowledged, but reiterated.[186] Sykes Davies's phrase that "no act of conversion is needed" to become a Surrealist in Britain, far from negating the movement's radical position, intensifies the very irrationality of the historical context in which Surrealism emerged; it allows the identification of those who are true "Surrealists in spirit" (those who do not need a violent act of conversion because the surreal has become part of their response to the problems of poetry and society), as opposed to the "simple souls" to which Sykes Davies refers (those who merely emulate without further research into the problems of creation). Therefore, Surrealism, in France *and* in Britain, is the result of historical forces, and not of an act of conversion:

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[186] Gascoyne's "Manifeste" was tellingly drafted in French and published in a French journal; on the other hand, Read's volume included essays by three French Surrealists, André Breton, Paul Éluard and Georges Hugnet.

Breton, Éluard, and the rest have not been inspired by a god; and we, the Surrealists in England, have not heard a message from France in a cloud of fire. Surrealism is the natural and inevitable product of historical forces; it is not inspired, it is caused; it did not arise from sudden divine illuminations, but [. . .] from a profound clarification of problems historically handed down to us by the culture into which we were born. (Sykes Davies 1971: 120-121)

These words indicate that Sykes Davies did appreciate the subversive character of the movement, more so for considering it an act of will on the part of the poets and artists, and not simply an act of divine revelation from which human will and action would be absent. This is, then, an understanding of the nature of poetic creation that is necessarily derived from his dialectical account of the origins of Surrealism.

It has been sufficiently stressed that Sykes Davies considered Romanticism as the most direct ancestor of Surrealism. However, he rejected the excessively idealistic propositions and the variations on traditional concepts typical of late Romanticism, and saw in Sir Francis Bacon the starting point to clarify the true nature of imagination. It is precisely from Bacon that he took the following quotation:

Poesie [. . .] doth truly referre to the Imagination, which, being not tyed to the Lawes of Matter, may at pleasure ioyne that which Nature hath seuered, & seuer that which Nature hath ioyned, and so make vnlawfull Matches & diuorses of things . . . The vse of this FAINED HISTORIE hath beene to giue some shadowe of satisfaction to the minde of Man in those points wherein the Nature of things doth denie it, the world being in proportion inferiour to the soule. [. . .] because the Acts of Euents of *true Historie* haue not that Magnitude which satisfieth the minde of Man, *Poesie* faineth Acts and Euents Greater and more Heroicall. (in Sykes Davies 1971: 127-128)

Indeed, as Sykes Davies himself says, "few alterations would be needed to make it a classic manifesto of Surrealism" (Sykes Davies 1971: 129), and its significance within the context of the psychoanalytical or biological theory of poetic creation defended by Surrealism is unquestionable. Bacon's proto-Surrealist ideas, however, were superseded by a return to Classicism and the religious repression of the church, which turned poetry into a mere tool for religious indoctrination and mild amusement. So it was in this atmosphere that the Romantic reaction against the Classicist debasement of the poetic element emerged. Moreover, Romanticism implied a revaluation of this poetic element and a strong reassertion of the imagination. For example, Coleridge's interest in psychology led him to distinguish two main faculties of the mind, fancy and imagination. Without the presence of reason, the former

would become delirium (a disordered perception of experience); the latter, mania (a complete falsification of reality). This relationship naturally leads to a connection between poetry and systematic delusion (of the type paradigmatically seen in Shakespeare's tragic characters, namely Lear, Hamlet, Othello), which is translated by Surrealism in the connection between the poetic image and paranoia, as explained by Dalí in his paranoiac-critical method. In the chapter devoted to the Surrealist image, I explained how this double image, obtained in Wordsworth's mythological system through a "systematic animation of the inanimate" (Sykes Davies 1971: 143), is transcended in Surrealism through an *extension* of the double image, by means of which multiple superimposed images can be obtained in the process of liberation of unconscious obsessions. A whole new mythological system thus emerges which, as Dalí contended, is only limited by the poet's paranoiac capacity (Dalí 1998: 224). As will be seen, Dalí's paranoiac method found correspondences in Sykes Davies's poems, where he uses this type of images of multiple figuration in order to create mythical systems for the representation and interpretation of reality. In Sykes Davies's texts, natural things (the tree is an important natural element in British Surrealist poems) acquire human qualities in a gradual process of metamorphosis that is ongoing. The acquisition of ever-changing forms and identities is also part of this myth-creating mechanism, in which objects and beings acquire protean qualities as they are observed. However, it is not perception that fails, but the essence of the object itself, which is no longer apprehensible, as in Sykes Davies's poem "It Doesn't Look Like a Finger" (1938), in which what does not look like a finger is said to simultaneously look like "a feather of broken glass", like "something eaten", like "an old woman", a filthy estuary, "a feather with broken teeth", a dead "convolvulus", and a succession of dissimilar things (Sykes Davies 1938: 7). Also, it is said to look like and, simultaneously, not to look like a feather and a revolver. This resistance to a unique form of representation geared towards an unequivocal interpretation, combined with the development of a universal myth which encompasses totality and disruption at once, is central to his Surrealist aesthetics, which also has a social dimension: as Sykes Davies indicated in his re-elaboration of Coleridge's epistemological theory, perception is a process of *self-duplication*, a complete identification of subject and object, where the previously unbridgeable distance between the two is annihilated. The means through which this identification takes place is the Surrealist image.

1.2.3. The Social Dimension.

In spite of Sykes Davies's emphasis on the Romantic origins of Surrealism, he clearly established a fundamental difference between both movements based on the materialist inclination of the latter, as opposed to the tendency of the Romantics towards idealism:

> [. . .] Surrealism [. . .] employs a materialist dialectic in place of the idealist dialectic of Coleridge. Where he branched into veiled religion, Surrealism has clung to evidence and experiment; where he considered poetry as abstract knowledge, Surrealism considers it as an essential means of actual living. For us, mythology fills an intensely practical purpose. (Sykes Davies 1971: 148)

Thus, in Surrealism, the creation of new mythologies through the Surrealist image was to help bridge the distance between subject and object, between the subjective world of the dream and objective reality. By expanding knowledge of the self and by debunking the old myths which support the dominant ideologies, these new myths would also contribute to expanding awareness of material reality. This is how Surrealism linked the idealistic propositions of Romanticism with a growing materialist interest. Nevertheless, in British Surrealism, a certain idealistic element was always pervasive. With the only exceptions of Charles Madge and Roger Roughton, the British Surrealists believed that a change in the ideological system, favoured by these new mythologies, would bring about a change on the material plane, an idea which clearly contradicted materialist Marxist theses. Regarding this, both Herbert Read and Sykes Davies observed that a fervent renewal of mythopoeic activity tends to mark periods during which science and technology seem to advance more rapidly in the process of conquering the material world (Sykes Davies 1971: 152-153; Read 1938d: 176): what bears this out is that the industrial revolution was accompanied by Romanticism, and the technological developments of the early twentieth century saw the emergence of the Avant-Garde. In the same way, Surrealism did not only attempt to overcome a given material condition brought about by capitalism, but also, as Breton explained in the "Second Manifesto" (1930), "an attack of conscience" (Breton 1972: 123).[187] This crisis was felt in the Romantic period, and felt again with the arrival of Surrealism. However, while the Romantics disregarded the pragmatic application of myth formation, and focused on the problems of the soul, the Surrealists, on the other hand, saw the social dimension of this crisis:

> It [Surrealism] is rooted in opposition to the capitalist system on all fronts, in its oppression and brutalisation of men as workers, and in its subjection of them as lovers to that lowest of all prostitutions, bourgeois marriage; and its weapons are still poesy and direct political action; which for Surrealism are not two ways to the end, but one way. (Sykes Davies 1971: 166)

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[187] Breton's actual expression was "*une crise de conscience*", which is also a "crisis of consciousness" (my translation).

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Sykes Davies's activities within the thirties' Surrealist movement were by no means reduced to literary theorising. He was also an indefatigable political activist, contributing to several pamphlets issued by the Surrealist Group. Their "Declaration on Spain" was published by *Contemporary Poetry and Prose* in November 1936, in an issue which included a fair amount of Spanish material as well as Communist contributions: among them were poems by Federico García Lorca and Rafael Alberti, Sykes Davies's poem "In the Stump of the Old Tree", fragments from Gascoyne's "The Symptomatic World" and Lorca's obituary written by Cambridge Professor J.B. Trend. The "Declaration", a political denunciation with a clear Marxist orientation, clearly shows their fierce opposition to the British Government's policy of Non-Intervention in Spain. The acts denounced, especially the lack of respect towards the constitutionally elected Government of the Spanish Republic, probably led Sykes Davies to become a parliamentary candidate himself.

Although he was close to the activities organised by the Artists' International Association, and was one of the signatories of the pamphlet *We Ask Your Attention*, issued on the occasion of the A.I.A. Congress and Exhibition in April-May 1937, and was a member of the Communist Party himself, he strongly opposed the Communist position which considered Surrealism as the ultimate form of bourgeois individualistic expression. It was precisely during the years of the Spanish Civil War that Sykes Davies's alliance to Surrealism was undisputed. Thus, he took part as a Surrealist in the debate on Realism/Surrealism organised by the A.I.A. in March 1938. Prior to this there had been a confrontation between A.L. Lloyd and Sykes Davies in February 1937A on the pages of *Left Review* (1934-1938), where Sykes Davies and Herbert Read signed a reply to the Communist's attack on the Surrealists.[188]

Read and Sykes Davies's article was a reply to Lloyd's review of Read's *Surrealism* (1936) in the January 1937 issue of *Left Review*. In accord with the position of the Comintern, Lloyd had assigned himself the task of systematically attacking the Surrealist stance, as he had already shown in his review of the 1936 London Exhibition in the pages of *The Spectator*. The conflict centred on the need to adopt Socialist Realism as the only literary programme for the Revolution, a position adopted by most of the members of the A.I.A., so that Lloyd denounced Surrealism because of its lack of revolutionary commitment:

> If Surrealism were revolutionary, it could be of use. But Surrealism is not revolutionary, because its lyricism is socially irresponsible. It does not lead fantasy into any action of

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[188] With this article, Sykes Davies became the first Surrealist other than Herbert Read to contribute to *Left Review*. In *The Surrealist Movement in England* (1971), Paul C. Ray quotes from a letter in which Read suggests that it was probably Sykes Davies who wrote the article, and got Read to co-sign it (Ray 1971: 195n).

real social significance. Surrealism is a particular subtle form of fake revolution. It has no bearing on proletarian problems, gives no twist towards social responsibility. (Lloyd 1937: 897)

Not unexpectedly, Read and Sykes Davies regretted Lloyd's use of the term "lyricism" for, having been intimately connected to religious and idealistic assumptions, it naturally escaped material explanation, which is what led directly to a misunderstanding of Surrealism. Thus, they rejected the "lyrical impulse" as a leading force in Surrealist compositions, considering it a bourgeois critical construction. For them, the problem of poetic creation is, it was reiterated, of a biological nature, and the Surrealists study it,

> not from a literary point of view, but from the point of view of general psychology, taking evidence from mental disease, other abnormal conditions, from anthropology, and from actual experiment. It is obviously impossible to say that we are studying the 'lyrical impulse,' since we have moved so far from the categories to which that word belongs. Our own word for the subject of our study, dream-activity, is by no means free from objections, but it at least indicates that our approach is not literary-critical. (Sykes Davies and Read 1937: 48)

Read and Sykes Davies's main objection to Lloyd's arguments is based on the fact that the lyrical impulse, not being sufficiently defined, dangerously approaches the realm of Romantic idealism. It is worth quoting their response again at this point in order to clarify its significance:

> For the moment, then we isolate the lyrical impulse, not because we are anti-rational, but because we wish to preserve a clear reason. If we have intellectual positions to explain, we shall explain them in the most direct, the most rational, the least lyrical form possible to us. (Sykes Davies and Read 1937: 47)

Even so, Paul C. Ray has seen some controversy in this statement, as Read himself did in a letter which he addressed to Ray in 1964: "I am puzzled by the statement, which is contrary to all I have ever believed in. I have talked about reconciling reason and romanticism, but even then my definition of reason is not rationalistic" (Ray 1971: 195n).[189] The puzzlement is understandable, for the statement has been completely decontextualised and deliberately misread. Although, as has been stated above, the Surrealist position was both idealistic and materialist at once, poetry could never become an explanation of this position. Furthermore, Surrealist poetry, being inherently a political act, a political position and a political statement,

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[189] It is in this letter that Read suggests that the text was entirely written by Sykes Davies. Effectively, the statements contained in this article are more in the line of Sykes Davies's previous theoretical texts on Surrealism than in the line of Read's.

does not need to *talk* politics, denounce social injustice, clarify a political stance or record the conditions of the working classes. Thus, the interpretation of Surrealist poetry largely relies on its performative power, that is, not on what the text says, but rather on what the text does by saying it. The difficulty of understanding what a Surrealist text says is counteracted by the comparatively easy task of knowing what it *does*: it destroys deeply-seated beliefs; it liberates unconscious fears, obsessions and desires; it creates myths; it shocks bourgeois readers out of their complacencies; it broadens consciousness; it unsettles the organisational system on which the material world is based; it alters the social order. Apart from that, in an intertextual sense, the Surrealist texts are also a rotund reply to the stultifying bourgeois cultural productions of the time, as they imply a return to what Sykes Davies called natural poetry. Hence, Lloyd's attacks on Surrealism's lack of social responsibility remain unfounded in the context of Surrealist theory because they do not consider Surrealist art and poetry as an inherently political activity. Also, as in the case of the first reviews of Picasso's Guernica by Communist critics, the problem may lie in the very understanding of terms like *responsibility*: "we are conscious as Mr. Lloyd himself that one of our main concerns must be with the development of a socially responsible lyrical tendency, though we may come to conceive it differently from what he would wish" (Read and Sykes Davies 1937: 48). Regarding the kind of attitude expressed by Lloyd, in "Sympathies with Surrealism" (1936) Sykes Davies had already denounced the restrictive nature of the Marxist approach to artistic creation: for him, every analysis of poetic creation should start in psychoanalysis and later draw from and develop into a Materialist application. However, as he acknowledged, "with the present official Communist attitudes, the process is not reversible –unhappily" (Sykes Davies 1936c: 18n). In spite of his open rejection of the official literary doctrine of the Communist Party, he remained a member of the Party up until the end of the war. Moreover, his defence of an instinctive form of Surrealism, together with his political alliance with Communism demonstrate, not only that he was a British Surrealist of the first period, but also, and most importantly, that for him, as for David Gascoyne and George Barker, the reconciliation of image and ideology came through a process of politicisation of poetry for, as he stated, first was the psychological and only then, the material.

1.3. Sykes Davies's Surrealist Texts.

In this section, an exhaustive analysis of Sykes Davies's Surrealist writing shows the ways in which his work brings together the several elements of his poetic theory: the importance that he placed on form; his defense of natural poetry and the recovery of the primitive rhythms and patterns of the oral tradition; his conception of poetic composition as a

biological activity and the result of psychoanalytical exploration; and, finally, the ideological content inherent in his use of form. First of all, I focus on an analysis of his most important Surrealist work, *Petron* (1935), particularly in terms of *premeditation* and *automatism*. These are two seemingly antithetical concepts which are central to the limited criticism that exists on the text but which, it will be argued, have hindered a fuller understanding of it. Moreover, by studying it from the point of view of Surrealist theories on automatism and collage, and also by placing it within the context of Sykes Davies's own poetic theory, it becomes clear that there is no incompatibility between the use of pre-existing and formally coherent patterns and the liberation of automatic and unconscious content. Furthermore, paradoxically, for Sykes Davies, the use of patterns from the oral tradition is in fact unconscious and automatic, whereas the ideological content with which they are invested is the result of a conscious process of production of meaning. But this is a paradox only in appearance: this analysis questions the formal coherence of such patterns, a coherence which is constantly interrupted by the inconclusive, self-disruptive and unrestrained nature of the forms that he uses; by the clash of disparate elements and contradictory traditions; and by the emergence of irrational, ambiguous and metamorphosing images which prevent any sense of closure. Finally, this analysis also focuses on the sources, nature and ideological implications of those metamorphosing images, and how these are used by Sykes Davies in his particular re-elaboration of a dissident literary tradition as sites for the liberation of unconscious content and for the production of ideological meaning.

1.3.1. Premeditation and Automatism in *Petron* (1935).

Petron (1935) is Sykes Davies's major achievement as a Surrealist writer. Although generally considered a poetic novel, the text poses a series of theoretical problems which invalidate any attempt at categorisation. Let us begin by simply stating for the time being that *Petron* is a dream, or rather a nightmare. But it is not the narration of a nightmare, or the poetic description of a nightmare, but a nightmare *per se*, as the act of reading it vividly transcribes the nightmarish experience at different levels.[190] In an analysis of Sykes Davies's poem "It Doesn't Look Like a Finger" (1938), Peter Stockwell has recently argued that

> Surrealism is the depiction of thought rather than the communication of thoughts, but readers find it almost impossible not to treat the language we encounter as

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[190] Curiously, in a review of *Petron*, the editor of *Life and Letters Today*, Robert Herring, affimed that "To read it is to experience anew that proverb of hope deferred, and the work as a whole reminded me of an attempt to stage a Sevillian Easter [parade] in a Methodist chapel" (Herring 1936: 198). Herring's somewhat *fanciful* reading points to the tensions between premeditation (formal composure) and automatism (inordinate, or extravagant, flow of images) to which this section is devoted.

communicative. It is the readerly attempt to resolve this mismatch between appearance and content that generates the convulsive moment. (Stockwell 2012: 58)

Certainly, in the act of reading *Petron*, the reader tries to fill those gaps left in the text in order to make sense of it. Similarly, in the ordinary narration of a dream, the narrator, who is also the dreamer, imposes a logical structure on the increasingly formless content of the dream, in order to make it intelligible. Thus, both the reader and the dreamer are unfaithful to the text's (the dream's) internal logic, to its laws of causality, to its spatial and temporal coordinates and even to the characters that take part in it. In a faithful analysis of *Petron*, narration itself becomes a useless category as the book tells no story in the traditional sense of the term. In this regard, one of the quests which *Petron* proposes may be considered to be of a linguistic nature, and it is intimately related to the possibility of conveying the dream in a way which is both formally feasible (intelligible) and ideologically significant (meaningful), something which, according to the narrator, can only be done through "the vertigo, the falling, the precipitate descent itself" (Sykes Davies 1935a: 4). The internal logic of the text defies all rational categories of causality, temporality, spatiality or agency, as the causal relations that are established in it are dominated by the secret dictates of unconscious desire; the temporal and spatial coordinates enter the mythical sphere of the eternal return; the characters (but also the landscape and the objects in it) metamorphose continuously, so that essences remain fluid, and are led by forces alien to their conscious selves; the collective memory takes on all the agency; and the reader becomes the dreamer and, therefore, the narrator. This process of identification of narrator and reader, who share the experience of this painful descent into the unconscious, is even verbalised in the text: in one of the nightmares recounted in the third part of the book, a cattle-dealer lies dead on a bank by the road, cries of help issuing from the five wounds which can be found on his body. These eerie cries are not recognised by the cattle-dealer's dogs, but serve to attract a party of ravenous wolves to the corpse, which turn out to be the narrator and his four readers (65).

Petron cannot be traditionally described as lyrical either, although it has a share of the macabre lyricism of Walt Disney's darkest *Silly Symphonies* (1929-1939) of Francisco de Goya's *Caprichos* (1799) or of Edgar Allan Poe's tales. Its lyricism is not conventionally beautiful: "Beauty is not essential to poetry", Sykes Davies states in "The Problem of Beauty and Sincerity" (Sykes Davies 1933d: 217).[191] And it seems that not even poetry is essential to poetry for "poetry, or beauty, if it comes at all, comes as it were accidentally, not as the result of any

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[191] "The Problem of Beauty and Sincerity" is the second of the six articles which Sykes Davies wrote for *The Listener* in 1933 under the general title "The Enjoyment of Poetry".

conscious device of writing, but by the grace of inner sincerity, 'The Poetry is in the Pity'" (Sykes Davies 1933d: 218). If a perversion of Wilfred Owen's statement be allowed, it may be concluded that in *Petron* the poetry is in the pain, for indeed that is precisely what Petron recounts: the beauty of a nightmare in which collective fear and pain are constantly relived. Certainly, *Petron* offers the reader a vertiginous descent to the unconscious in order to explore repressed fears and desires through the recollection and re-enactment of a series of painful experiences which lie in the collective memory. The text, which is divided into three main sections, begins with a poetic description of a mythical landscape and the introduction of Petron, followed by a random succession of short episodes in which he encounters a variety of monstrous, metamorphosing beings and idiots, becomes the victim of several misfortunes and is assailed by what his paranoid vision perceives as ominous threats and signs of doom. His wanderings continue as he enters a city in which a strange murder has been committed, and out of which he leaves having become the perpetrator. Finally, a series of disconnected nightmares are presented and the text comes to an end as Petron continues his journey into an uninhabited land. This is a text that denies resolution, and something similar happens with many other sources for intertextual allusions in it, as will be seen.

So, if neither beauty nor poetry is essential to *Petron*, the question remains whether sincerity is its central element: that is, whether the text is the result of a sincere exploration of collective fears and anxieties, following Sykes Davies's own biological theory of Surrealism. The question of sincerity is indeed one of the most urgent theoretical problems that *Petron* poses. This issue was first approached by David Gascoyne in a not entirely sympathetic review of *Petron* published in *New Verse* in December 1935:

> *Petron* is cousin to Chirico's *Hebdamoros* [sic.], and second-cousin-twice-removed to Lautréamont's *Maldoror*. [. . .] One cannot help wondering whether Petron genuinely is an 'interior hero,' a projection of genuine obsessions and inner conflict, or whether he is merely an ingeniously manipulated puppet, made to dance to a fantastic tune that Mr. Davies once overheard in a library. (Gascoyne 1935h: 19)

With these words, Gascoyne questioned the sincerity of Sykes Davies's text by suggesting that it was the result of a process of imitation and emulation of Surrealist masterpieces. For Gascoyne, the calculated intertextuality of Sykes Davies's text, to which part of this analysis is devoted, contradicted Breton's definition of Surrealism as "pure psychic automatism" in the 1924 "Manifesto of Surrealism". As will be seen, Gascoyne belonged to that intuitive phase of Surrealism characterised by experimentation with automatism which Breton had described in his lecture "What is Surrealism?" (1934). However, his claims about Sykes Davies's work invite

reconsiderations regarding automatism and intertextuality (which is, ultimately, a form of collage) as contradictory processes of composition: the former leading to liberation of unconscious fears and desires (in connection with Romantic subjectivity); the latter being the result of conscious elaboration (in connection with Classical technique). By comparing *Petron* to Paul Éluard's *Facile* (1935), a text of "perfect spontaneity" as he puts it, Gascoyne exposes what he sees as Sykes Davies's "premeditated style or imagery" (Gascoyne 1935h: 19) and clearly wants to present the two manners of composition as irreconcilable (favouring the former), even discounting intertextuality as a Surrealist strategy or technique. However, in relation to this, Elza Adamowicz persuasively deals with how intertextual and collagistic form may lead to liberation of unconscious content in her study *Surrealist Collage in Text and Image* (1998), where she argues that automatism and collage are presented as "two distinct techniques for producing a surrealist text" (Adamowicz 1998: 5). Whereas the former responds to Breton's model of *spoken thought*, the latter complies with Breton's definition of the Surrealist image as the encounter of disparate realities; in Breton's programmatic texts, Adamowicz argues, both are encompassed within the "overarching concept of 'psychic automatism'" (Adamowicz 1998: 6). In spite of the differences that Adamowicz quite rightly observes in both techniques (she associates automatism with immediacy, fluidity and the graphic impulse, and collage with mediation, re-assemblage and laborious work), she acknowledges that Breton's emphasis on the element of chance in Surrealist composition, an element which is central to that process of bringing together, suggests an automatic genesis in collage too:

> Collage [. . .], tapping the resources of the unconscious mind, [is considered a process] parallel if not equivalent to automatic writing, in [its] capacity to stimulate the hallucinatory powers of the artist and generate a flow of multiple, contradictory images, as in hallucinations or visions of half-sleep. (Adamowicz 1998: 7)

Even Gascoyne himself, in his *A Short Survey of Surrealism* (1935), praises the Surrealist collages of Max Ernst who, he states, "creates pictures entirely from pieces of other, ready-made, pictures by forgotten or anonymous artists" (Gascoyne 1935a: 80). However, it is clear that he failed to judge Sykes Davies's re-elaboration of a dissident literary tradition on parallel terms. One final issue which he broaches in relation to *Petron*, and which is intimately connected with that of sincerity, is that of the relation between form and content. His quotation from Rimbaud's *Une Saison en Enfer* (1873) allows him to denounce what he understood as *Petron*'s excessively controlled form: "If that which comes to me from down there has form, I will give it form. If not, I will leave it formless" (in Gascoyne 1935h: 19). So,

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clearly disregarding Breton's distrust of formlessness in automatic compositions (because, as we have seen, for Breton the unconscious is necessarily linguistic in nature and therefore automatic expression responds to existing grammatical structures), Gascoyne observed a basic discrepancy between *Petron*'s purported automatism and its cogent form.

Recently, Gascoyne's cue has been taken up by Rod Mengham in an enlightening study on thirties writing, "The Thirties: Politics, Authority, Perspective" (2004), where he sees Petron's erratic wanderings and encounters as continually counteracted by

> the balanced antithetical formulae of a neo-Classical decorum. Sykes Davies typically combines two distinct modes of composition: a primary process of composition that generates material whimsically on the model of automatic writing, and a secondary process that renders this material into a condition of rhetorical shapeliness. (Mengham 2004: 371)

Mengham sees in Classicism (rather than Romanticism) a source for the Surrealism of Sykes Davies, in whose work language is subjected to a strict process of regulation, even though the material regulated has an automatic genesis.[192] In this sense, Sykes Davies's poetic technique would come closer to Giorgio de Chirico's architectural paintings: composed, detached, lucid, neo-Classical. Nevertheless, both de Chirico and Sykes Davies make use of this Classicism of forms only to undermine it, juxtaposing it with the surreal, the oneiric and the subjective. Hence, their Classicism, if it does exist at all, is merely formal, for both Sykes Davies's composed syntactical structures and de Chirico's sober architectural constructions lead to the exploration of the marvellous, as they are constantly neutralised by highly Freudian dream imagery and the unnatural perspectives of the unconscious. Nevertheless, the use of a composed formal structure, whose perfectibility and sense of stability is continually sabotaged by the interference of a series of inconsistencies (subjectivity, oneirism, hyperbole, the juxtaposition of dissimilar fragments, semantic incoherence and even narrative instability), creates a tension which effectively transmits the strain between repression and the liberation of desire:

> On his way Petron came upon some boys throwing stones at an old twisted tree, and stopped them, saying that it was wrong to inflict wanton harm on any living thing. When the boys had gone away repentant, hanging their heads, the tree turned to an old man, who thanked Petron fervently for his kindness, and said he hoped to repay him before long. Two days later, the old man caught up with our hero, and presented him with a sack full of butterflies, which he had been catching ever since his

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[192] Mengham, in personal interview with Yiyi López Gándara (12 November 2010).

metamorphosis. Petron received them graciously, but when the old man had gone, 'What on earth,' he said, 'am I to do with all this beauty?' and he pitched the whole sackful down the cliff. (Sykes Davies 1935a: 19)

This passage, which is interpreted by Mengham as a parody of the exemplary character of the parable and, by extension, of the literary text, effectively subverts, not only the internal logic of the moral exemplum, but also satirises its teleological dimension (i.e. the fact that the parable exists only in terms of its moralising purpose): "The routinely pious injunction not to destroy life is followed almost immediately with a summary insecticide" (Mengham 2004: 372). The cruel irony of the passage, and its comic effect, mostly rely on the initial expectations that the text creates in the reader by means of an intertextual process in which Miguel de Cervantes's *Don Quixote* (1605) becomes the source text.[193] In the fourth chapter of *Don Quixote*, a book in which, like *Petron*, much beating occurs, a similar passage takes place: Don Quixote rebukes a farmer for flogging a young servant for stealing some money. As the matter is settled, with the farmer giving his word that he will pay the boy the money that he owes him in arrears, Don Quixote sets off briskly, naively trusting the farmer's word for it, and proud of having righted a wrong. When he is out of sight, the farmer ties the boy again and resumes flogging him, even harder this time. As in *Petron*, the expectation created by the hero's exemplary behaviour is thwarted by his failure of commitment to the principle that he initially set out to defend. In the case of Don Quixote, delusion easily accounts for the irony, which serves Cervantes's own moral. In the case of Petron, the matter is more complicated, for his social dysfunction is not the result of his delusion or paranoia only; by adopting an excessively pragmatic and rational approach, which clearly contrasts with Don Quixote's irrationally romanticised disposition, he fails to partake in the shared cultural premise that beauty does not need to be useful: "What on earth [. . .] am I to do with all this beauty?" (Sykes Davies 1935a: 19). Sykes Davies had already advised that beauty is not essential to poetry and his rejection of Classicism was partly derived from his opposition to poetry as "a cosmic cosmetic" (Sykes Davies 1971: 132). The beauty of the butterfly, like the beauty of poetry, is thus presented as a bourgeois construct which is shattered by Petron's deliberate act of murder. Both butterfly and poetry are traditionally understood to originate from the ugliness of biological necessity: the larva-caterpillar stage in the former, basic human communication in the latter. Both are the result of a process of metamorphosis which turns ugliness into beauty, necessity into contingency. However, in *Petron*, as Mengham rightly points out, "the

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[193] The irony is further reinforced by the following section of the book in which Petron, after accidentally stepping on a toadstool is described as "the gentlest of men" (Sykes Davies 1935a: 20).

proposition that the aesthetic transformation of the ordinary, like the development of the caterpillar into the butterfly, involves a refashioning of the ugly into the beautiful, is dismissed as pointless" (Mengham 2004: 372). By rejecting the contingency of poetry (i.e. by restoring poetry's primitive condition as a biological necessity), the poet welcomes ugliness back into the poetic composition: the beauty is in the ugliness. Thus, when Petron disfigures his face with hammers and mallets, he does so in order to "infer honesty" and acquire a "proper civic quality" (Sykes Davies 1935a: 35). Here, Sykes Davies uses physical disfiguration to subvert the convention that associates social respectability with a genteel semblance and, by extension, with notions of symmetry and fairness:

> he knocked out one of his teeth, and bent another back in such a way that his smile would convince and infer honesty. With a heavier instrument he knocked at his chin for half an hour until all signs of human power were effaced. With a large wooden mallet he so beat upon his brow that its force was no longer apparent, and with the same tool and a billet of wood he blunted the glance of his eyes to a proper civic quality. Finishing off the whole with a well-balanced tacking hammer, he brought himself to break his nose, which at first he had intended to leave as it was. (Sykes Davies 1935a: 35)

Paradoxically, while facial disfiguration turns Petron into a civic man, it also allows him to enter the city in which he will become the perpetrator of a horrible collective crime. But before considering the implications of such a crime, let us finish the discussion on the question of premeditation and automatism in *Petron*.

As Gascoyne and Mengham point out, Sykes Davies does subject his writing to a considerable degree of formal elaboration. In spite of its apparent irrational blurting and randomness, on a closer look, Sykes Davies's poetry reveals itself as neat, almost mathematical. His interest in language was of this order, and his personal papers and annotations contain word-counts for Wordsworth's poems and page-counts for *Petron*, among other cryptic numeric annotations.[194] The formal configuration of *Petron*, with its sections, subsections and sub-subsections, all of them numbered, displays a meticulous mathematical structure in which the number three becomes central. The book is composed of three main parts, each of which is subdivided into sections of variable length. The first part contains nine sections. The second part contains two sections, the second of which is divided into two further sections. Finally, the third part contains three sections, the last of which is divided into nine numbered subsections. These formal divisions reflect the marked episodic character of

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[194] St. John's College Library. The Papers of Hugh Sykes Davies, Box 6.

the text, in which there is no progression in the traditional sequential sense of the term: the three main parts are only vaguely connected to each other, and the same occurs with the different subsections. This creates an effect similar to that of collage, because the text, composed of a series of disconnected fragments, seems to be the result of a process of bringing together disparate material in which all the seams and gaps remain visible, underscoring its fragmentary and incoherent nature. Nevertheless, there are also elements which provide some kind of coherence in the text: for example, Petron is the only presence in the book which links the three main parts together; also, syntactic coherence (reinforced by the use of connectors and temporal references) creates the illusion of a consistent narration; finally, Sykes Davies's recovery of pre-existing formal structures (from other authors, genres, periods and traditions) contributes to the coherence of certain fragments. However, as will be seen, all of these are subverted to different degrees in the text. Another method of arrangement that he uses is the creation of a metaliterary structure in which Petron's story is contained. In this narrative frame, a third-person narrator announces the beginning and the end of the narration (not of the dream), and nevertheless Petron's wanderings remain atemporal, not following a chronological or causal order. In this sense, Marc J. LaFountain's comments on Salvador Dalí's *Endless Enigma* (1938), and also on Giorgio de Chirico's *Hebdomeros* (1929) and Louis Aragon's *The Adventures of Telemachus* (1922), works with which *Petron* is connected, may be applied to Sykes Davies's texts too:

> The journey is endless, leading nowhere and everywhere. Hebdomeros is still wandering, and Telemachus has yet to reach home, even in death. What Dali discerned in de Chirico was not the possibility of liberation from ignorance and unfulfillment, but a liberation from the myth that unity and wholeness are in fact a solution –that coherence is phantasy and the 'laws' of Surrealism are fibs. (LaFountain 1997: 20)

Thus, most of the sections in *Petron* seem to occupy arbitrary positions within the book's structure, as their actual order does not obey the rules of internal causality, but rather seems to respond to an unconscious capricious logic, to the same objective chance which underlies the marriage of disparate elements in Surrealist collages. The combination of a quasi-symmetrical, conscientious structure with the seemingly random and automatic character of the overall composition creates a sense of premeditated magic which resembles the neat, mathematical structure of many folk tales and popular rhymes which, for a contemporary reader, also exhibit a significant degree of imaginative entropy. The following section analyses Sykes Davies's recovery of certain patterns of the folk and oral tradition, drawing attention to the way in which old structures are used to create new images in his texts. This analysis sheds

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some light on the nature of Sykes Davies's metamorphosing images, which emerge from the use of those primitive patterns.

1.3.2. Old Forms: Recovering Primitive Patterns.

Hugh Sykes Davies devoted several articles to the study of primitive art and poetry and the analysis of folkloric literature.[195] "Magic and Meaning" (1933), which is probably one of the most acute in its interpretation of ancient rituals and myths, resembles in many ways Roland Penrose's theories of the primitive.[196] In this article, Sykes Davies explains the significance of myth in ancient cultures in the following terms:

> the myth creates a situation which can be controlled, in place of one which cannot be controlled. Thus the primitive man cannot really control the winds, or bring rain, but if he believes that the wind and rain are controlled by beings like himself, he can pray to them and placate them with offerings. [. . .] Now these myths are, in a sense, poems. They are built up of words; these words are not the words of prose, which merely describe –they are more than words. To the savage, a word is not distinguished from the thing; words are things. Thus he will be known by a false name, and tell his real name only to the priest, for if his enemy should know his real name, he could damage him by means of it; because his name *is* himself. [. . .] Now this attitude to words is at the bottom of all poetry. Poetry is the process of giving the real names to things, so that we have them in our control. (Sykes Davies 1933e: 254)

Breton's own poetic theories on the alchemy of the word also reproduce this process of primitive naming which renders reality its true essence. Thus, Poetry is, like the primitive act of naming, essential and necessary; in Sykes Davies's own terms, it is *biological*. For him, the poetic word which, echoing Breton, he called "the magical word", is unexplainable and untransferable:

> The magical word must be fresh, new; the non-magical word is old, familiar: the magical word has no exact meaning, or, rather, its meaning is so exact that it cannot be explained because no other words will paraphrase it or describe it; the non-magical word can be explained, because it is public property, known and understood. In this difference lies the difference between poetry, the magical word, and science; and

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[195] His most relevant studies on the primitive are "The Primitive in Modern Art" (1929), "Magic and Meaning" (1933), "Homer and Vico" (1934) and "The Cave that Jack Built" (1972).
[196] "Magic and Meaning" is the third article in the series for *The Listener* "The Enjoyment of Modern Poetry". Penrose presented his ideas on primitivism in his lecture "Why I am a Painter" (circa 1938-1939), reproduced in *The Surrealist and the Photographer* (2001): 31-32.

science, not prose, as Coleridge said, is the real opposite of poetry. (Sykes Davies 1933e: 254)

If the poetic word could be explained, Sykes Davies sustains, then it would not be poetic, but "an unnecessary piece of perversity" (Sykes Davies 1933f: 291). The poetic word cannot be explained because it is magical: it names "something new, something never named before" (Sykes Davies 1933f: 291).[197] The poet thus becomes the magician, the alchemist, the creator of the new reality and of the new language that names it. In *Petron*, poetry also becomes a form of incantation and indeed, although the hero's adventures seem impossible and illogical, the readers must, in Coleridge's own words, *suspend their disbelief* and let them pass unquestioned, understanding them, Sykes Davies states, as we understand *abracadabra*:

> For if poetry is essentially an incantation, it must be approached in the way appropriate to incantations. That is to say, we must not expect to understand it in the same way that we understand statements like 'Two and two make four,' 'I think therefore I exist,' but we can only hope to understand it in the way in which we understand 'abracadabra,' or the country charms against warts and the like. (Sykes Davies 1933e: 254)

Thus, it is through the name of "our hero" that the reader gains access to Petron's nightmarish experience, which is shared because it lies in the collective memory: "All his adventures, all his sufferings flash before you at the mention of his name, as do the events of your own life when you fall down the cliffs" (Sykes Davies 1935a: 4). In a reverse process, one of Sykes Davies's Surrealist poems, "It Doesn't Look Like a Finger" (1938), is a constant attempt at naming an elusive appearance. In this poem, the creative and alchemical power of the poet is somehow frustrated, as the overwhelming reality of war overpowers him and the magical word ceases to have an exact meaning:

> It doesn't look like a finger it looks like a feather of broken glass
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> It doesn't look like something to eat it looks like something eaten
>
> It doesn't look like an empty chair it looks like an old woman searching in a
>
> heap of stones
>
> It doesn't look like a heap of stones it looks like an estuary where the drifting
>
> filth is swept to and fro on the tide

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[197] These words are from "New Words for Old", the fourth article in the *Listener* series, "The Enjoyment of Modern Poetry" (1933), and they refer to Eliot's line from "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" (1917): "Like a patient etherised upon a table" (Eliot 1999: 3).

It doesn't look like a finger it looks like a feather with broken teeth. (Sykes Davies 1938: 7)

In this poem, reality is not static or stable, but in constant flux: the object that is sought shifts in appearance and is transformed as it is observed and it is the role of the poet to perceive and reproduce the exact moments at which those metamorphoses occur. Thus, the poet becomes a sort of visionary who foresees the impending catastrophe.

Magic and alchemy are also central to *Petron*. The mathematical exactitude of the text, but also of Petron's fate, is that of the medieval mathematician, for whom magic and science were indistinguishable. In an article on "Some cures and Recipes of the Tenth Century" (1932), Sykes Davies showed the fine line that separates science and alchemy, as the superstitious and irrational character of the remedies he presents contrasts with the excessively rationalistic and precise nature of their instructions:

Against Tiredness. On a long journey across country, to prevent himself tiring a man should take mugwort in his hand or fasten it on his show [sic.], lest he weary. And when he would pluck it, before sunrise, let him first say these words: 'Tollam te, Artemisia, ne lassus sum in via.' Sign it with the cross when you pull it up.[198] (Sykes Davies 1932a: 72)

For Sykes Davies, poetry is, then, like these medieval cures, a form of incantation; it cannot be understood as a logical statement, but rather as an ancient charm. Thus, a text like *Petron* is, in all its apparent elaboration and precision, nothing but a charm: it is the *cure* that Sykes Davies proposes for the crisis of consciousness that assails the modern individual, and which is no other than the liberation of unconscious fears and desires. At the diegetic level, the contrast between the magical and superstitious element in Petron's attitude and the mathematical precision and rational explanation of his actions functions in a similar manner in the text. In his wanderings, the protagonist resorts to random and irrational mechanisms which not only remain coherent within the internal logic of the dream, but are also carried out with the utmost exactitude, or explained (quite casually) as the result of the application of rational laws. As happens in dreams, the most bizarre and capricious events are presented as if they were ordinary. Thus, physical disfiguration is the reasonable remedy which Petron finds in order not to be recognised by other people, or himself. The logic of this remedy is similar to that of medieval cures, and it is sanctioned by the fact that it proves effective, as he is not recognised by the carpenter from whom he had borrowed the hammers and mallets, and who

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[198] The article, published in *The Eagle* in 1932, is unsigned, but attributed to Sykes Davies by John Kerrigan on account of subject and style.

actually "treated him with much respect, supposing that the vagabond had asked this very solid person to return what he had borrowed, and thinking more highly of the vagabond for having such an acquaintance" (Sykes Davies 1935a: 36).

Also, one of the passages in *Petron*, heavy with esoteric references, shows the protagonist taking a series of auguries from prophets and practitioners to whom he has entrusted his fate.[199] Petron awaits patiently, but none of the omens finds correspondences in the nature around him. For this passage, Sykes Davies drew on a textual source so that the auguries of those prophets are based on actual beliefs of the Indian Thug gangs, collected by William Henry Sleeman, officer of the East India Company and commissioner for the Suppression of Thugee and Dacoitee, in his book *Report on the Depredations Committed by the Thug Gangs of Upper and Central India* (1840). The Thugs were gangs that perpetrated organised criminal acts, especially murders, against travellers in India during the colonial period. In Sleeman's text, Thugs are depicted as extremely superstitious, entrusting their undertakings to a series of complex auguries which were scrupulously respected. However, it was Sykes Davies's interest in magical primitive beliefs and rituals, rather than in the historical suppression of the Thug tribes, that led him to use this particular text. Thus, the passage from *Petron* in which the omens are described clearly echoes excerpts taken from Sleeman's text:

> It is good if the large hill-crow be heard croaking in a tree with water in sight: bad if the bird be perched on a live buffalo, a pig, or the skeleton of any dead animal. Pleasant it is should the cat come to your bed at night, and equally cheering to see a wolf or shrike crossing the road from right to left; or a large male antelope, or a herd of small deer, or a blue jay crossing from left to right. (Sykes Davies 1935a: 29)

This passage combines two fragments from Sleeman's text: "When they arrived at Oundeyra, a most unlucky omen was observed, in a crow calling out while perched on the back of a buffaloe [sic.]. The Thugs of Sindouse, under Zoolfukar and other leaders, being particularly influenced by this prestige of evil, turned back" (Sleeman 1840: 297); and "They went, in the first instance, to Kora Jehanabad, but as they were going thence in an easterly direction, a wolf crossed their path; which being looked upon by Thugs as an exceedingly unfavourable omen, they turned back, and proceeded to Poorra in the Cawnpore district" (363). In both texts, the very specificity of the instructions contrasts with the superstitious nature of the events observed.

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[199] For further analysis of the esoteric references in *Petron*, see Yiyi López Gándara's "Myth, Dream and Poetry. The Occult in 1930s Surrealism" (2011).

Likewise, the irrational and the logical merge as Petron devises a peculiar mechanism to determine the direction which he is to follow. It is a sort of primitive but useless compass which reconciles Petron's unconscious desire and fate with science in a way that is as hazardous as it is objective:

> One end of a tough rope he tied firmly to the topmost bough of a pine tree. The other he set in a tight noose about his own neck. Then he set off briskly due south. As the rope grew taut, the tree bent over, and finally achieved such a tension that it jerked Petron off his feet, swung him through the air, and flung him on the ground stunned and bruised. Coming to his senses, he found that the rope was still firm on the tree and about his neck, and that he was now facing due west. Starting up again, he made off as before in this direction, and walking until the tree was bent almost to the ground, was again swung from his feet and flung on the ground, this time facing due south. Nothing daunted, he rose and tried the experiment again, being flung as before, but facing east. Somewhat discouraged and bruised all over, he nevertheless set off on a final attempt. But this time the tension of the rope did not increase, and he went much further than ever before without being jerked back. (Sykes Davies 1935a: 30-31)

Here we see again the manifestation of the internal logic of excessively elaborated rules being counteracted by the primacy of the principle of irrationality. In *Petron*, there is always this tension between adherence to rule and liberation of unconscious desire, an unresolved tension which is constantly evoked both at the diegetic level (which marks the relationship between the events in the narration) and the creative-interpretive level (which marks the relationship that is established between the writer and the reader, and between the reader and the text). The significance of this passage is sustained by the sheer precision and absurdity of Petron's mechanism, which shows the workings of objective chance where human desire and necessity coalesce, providing the answer to a natural, physical quandary. The precision of the mechanism is further reinforced by Sykes Davies's detailed description of the gradual metamorphosis of the rope, which first stretches easily, then thins into a string and later into a mere thread of gossamer which finally snaps behind Petron. The final irony of the passage relies again on depreciation, this time of the very elements which have led Petron in the right direction (desire, fate and science): all of Petron's efforts have been rendered futile for it is the tree itself, with its benediction, which grants him freedom.

The Surrealist theory of objective chance as the crystallisation of the tension between rule and repression on the one hand, and liberation and free will on the other, serves thus to establish the equilibrium between the Classicist and Romantic pulls in *Petron*, mentioned in

the previous section. We have seen that the elaborate and calculated style to which David Gascoyne and Rod Mengham refer is counteracted by a series of irrational elements in *Petron*, and by Sykes Davies's own conception of poetry as biological, ugly and magical. Nevertheless, when Mengham comments on the composure and control of Sykes Davies's writing, he mostly refers to syntax, that is, the surface structure of language, which is primarily concerned with word order and punctuation. Thus, Mengham argues that Sykes Davies has a very stylised, serene and detached manner of portraying a world of vertigo and horror.[200] In "The Ornate Style" (1931), an article which Sykes Davies published in *Experiment* (1928-1931), he considers Ornament (that is, form) as the "emotional and unconscious part" of the act of writing, whereas Meaning (that is, content) is "the intellectual conscious part" (Sykes Davies 1931: 17).[201] Thus, for him, form emerges automatically in the act of writing, and does not require conscious work, an idea which is in accord with the Romantic concept of genius, defined in 1759 by Edward Young as

> the power of accomplishing great things without the means generally reputed necessary to that end [. . .]. A *genius* differs from a *good understanding*, as a magician from a good architect; *that* raises his structure by means invisible; *this* by the skilful use of common tools. Hence genius has ever been supposed to partake of something divine. *Nemo unquam vir magnus fuit, sine aliquo afflatu divino*.[202] (Young 1918: 13)

Style and syntax belong, according to Sykes Davies, to the realm of unconscious creation. On the other hand, meaning is the result of an intellectual process ("good understanding" in Young's system), and may be described as the set of ideas which underlies a given form, that is, the ideology behind the image: in this way, the irrational and unconscious image becomes the vehicle through which ideology is expressed.

Elza Adamowicz has written convincingly on the ways in which adhering automatically to formal rules (as in Surrealist language games) allows the liberation of semantic relations and references, commenting on the space occupied by Surrealist writing as a space "between a normative syntax and a semantic *dérive*", and drawing attention to the unresolved tension that exists in these texts "between a cohesive syntax and disparate semantics, the simple collation of disparate elements and the push towards novel configurations" (Adamowicz 1998: 57). Paradoxically, ornament (which Sykes Davies considers unconscious or irrational), being

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[200] Rod Mengham, in personal conversation with Yiyi López Gándara (12 November 2010).
[201] This idea appeared later in Herbert Read's *Art and Industry* (1934): "The necessity of ornament is psychological. There exists in man a certain feeling which has been called *horror vacui*, an incapacity to tolerate an empty space" (Read 1966: 40).
[202] The Latin expression is originally Cicero's: "No man was ever great without some divine inspiration" (my translation).

syntagmatic or horizontal in nature, contributes to the rational coherence of the text, establishing links between the disparate elements, securing narrative development and causality, and therefore providing an apparent sense of totality or wholeness in the text. On the other hand, meaning (which for Sykes Davies is conscious or intellectual), exists in the paradigmatic or vertical axis, emerging from the irrational juxtaposition of images, or from the metamorphosis of one image into another, which constantly disrupts that formal coherence: it underscores the fragmentary and episodic nature of the narration, its temporal and spatial disconnectedness and the element of chance inherent in it.[203] This is indeed a double paradox which has prevented a fuller understanding of Sykes Davies's Surrealist writing, but which may nevertheless be resolved if a series of aspects related to his poetic theory are taken into consideration: his understanding of poetic creation as a biological act; his conception of form as unconscious and automatic and his interest in the primitive patterns of the folk tradition; his ideas on the relation between old forms and new meanings in Modernist and Avant-Garde literature; and, finally, his views on the social dimension of meaning as ideology. As will be seen, these considerations also serve to enlighten a discussion of the relationship between image and ideology in his Surrealist writing.

The paradox inherent in the formal configuration of Sykes Davies's texts as both seemingly constrained and automatic pieces is resolved if we pay attention to his interest in primitive form, an interest which, as we have seen, is also connected with his concept of *natural poetry*. Thus, the neat structure of his parables in *Petron*, their mathematical resolutions, and their impeccably coherent syntax derive not so much from a process of conscious elaboration, but from a process of *unconscious influence*. As I have already shown in the example of Cervantes's passage, Sykes Davies follows the structure of a folk tale which, sharing elements with the Biblical Parable of the Good Samaritan, is subverted by both authors.[204] For Sykes Davies, the use of this structure is automatic because it is one of the many collective narratives originating in the oral tradition of whose form we are no longer conscious, that is, it is part of the collective unconscious. In this sense, form is automatic; and, quite reasonably, the unconscious nature of this pattern does in no way contradict the fact that it is formally well-structured, complying as it does with syntactic rules and with the

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[203] *Petron*'s episodic structure in fact derives from the romance genre and the picaresque tradition. In *The Secular Scripture: a Study of the Structure of Romance* (1976), Northrop Frye distinguishes between the "hence narrative", typical of realist accounts, and the "then narrative" of the romance (Frye 1976: 47-48).

[204] A similar passage appears in Ludovico Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* (1532), a fact which is also significant, for *Orlando* is precisely one of the intertextual references acknowledged by Sykes Davies in *Petron*.

conventions of traditional narrative development, having a beginning, a middle and an end. All this creates an appearance of congruity or unity in the text. However, this coherent syntagmatic structure is disturbed by replacing elements in the paradigmatic axis and therefore unsettling the semantic relations in the passage: the moral element inherent in the parable is replaced by deliberate immorality, and common sense and pragmatism, being reduced to absurdity, become forms of irrational thought. This subversion of the semantic references and the teleological dimension of the parable brings forth the underlying idea that absolutes, such as common sense, beauty or righteousness, are cultural constructs that must be questioned because they may lead to dubious ideological positions, as they did in fact in the 1920s and 1930s: in fact, this exposes the dangers inherent in Fascist ideologies. Also, by adopting an apparently coherent narrative mode and then subverting it, his writing opposes the totalising narratives of official discourses of power: his parable is incomplete and flawed, it allows imprecision, incorrectness and fracture into itself, and sets forth an example of immorality, which might not be understood, but with which the reader inevitably sympathises. The result is a passage in which a set of irrational images which spring from a desire to liberate unconscious forms (Petron being outraged by some boys throwing stones at a tree; the metamorphosis of the tree into an old man; the unaccounted second meeting between the old man and Petron; the thank-you present being a sack full of butterflies; Petron's overtly pragmatic view of the present as beautiful but useless) resist assimilation into a coherent aesthetic and ideological whole.

In *Petron*, several frames like this one provide a certain sense of coherence or order, which is nevertheless soon interrupted by the irruption of the unexpected and the irrational (as in the parable above), or simply by structural asymmetries (as in the bandits' passage below) and other *inconsistencies* (as will be seen, formal cogency may also be counteracted by the presence of potentially endless series of metamorphosing images). These frames, which may be structural, syntactic, stylistic, narrative, spatial or temporal, contribute to the apparent unity of the text: as I have stated, the presence of Petron in the three main sections of the book and the temporal connectors that are consistently (albeit nonsensically) used to link the different episodes seem to further narrative development. But this is so only in appearance, for these are also narrative conventions which Sykes Davies subverts: in narratological terms, Petron is by no means an agent pushing action forward, but is rather pushed from one place and one time to another with no purpose, except for the psychic necessity of the journey itself (and it is significant that the journey continues even when the text comes to an end). There are even points at which Petron disappears completely, as in the succession of nightmares and

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metamorphosing images which takes up most of the third section of the book. Also, temporal references such as "For many days" (Sykes Davies 1935a: 5), "Towards evening" (14), "Two days later" (19), "At this point of his travels" (29), "On the next day" (39), "Meanwhile" (74) and "At dusk" (75), underscore the very disconnectedness of the passages, as they suggest no logical progression and therefore lack relevance within the story: these are rhetorical accessories which spring up automatically or unconsciously in the narration (as they do in the tales of the oral tradition) and which reveal the precariousness of our linear conception of time and the futility of our temporal categories. In the end, what *Petron* offers is a succession of fragments which, in spite of these framing or ordering devices, remains inconclusive, incomplete and incoherent, and that is exactly where its subversive power, both literary and ideological, lies.

As well as the foregoing, another framing device that Sykes Davies makes use of in his texts is a cumulative-recapitulative technique which allows the creation of a potentially endless succession of metamorphosing or paranoiac images. This creates apparently neat mathematical structures which Sykes Davies takes from folk tales, children's rhymes and other patterns of the oral tradition, and this is very clearly seen in the bandits' passage in *Petron*, which, as the author acknowledged in "The Scales of Disaster: Elegy for an Endangered Species" (1982), draws on the brigands' endless story.[205] The following version of the story is taken from an oral source: "It was a dark and stormy night. The bandits were sitting around their fire when the Captain said 'Antonio, tell us a story,' so Antonio stood up and said 'It was a dark and stormy night. The bandits were sitting around their fire when the Captain said …'". As with any other tale of the oral tradition, there are several versions of the story. One of them has a narrative frame in which Antonio is a prisoner of the bandits and he is asked to tell a story before being killed. Antonio cunningly devises an endless story which forever postpones his death.[206] The passage from *Petron*, which was published under the title "Banditti" in T.S. Eliot's *The Criterion* in 1934, also uses this framed version. Since the passage is too long to reproduce here, in the following summary I include the main elements necessary to explain the ways in which Sykes Davies draws on and departs from the folkloric circular structure: a moribund man with a "sound of dripping blood and a clatter of bones" (Sykes Davies 1935a: 14-15) warns Petron not to venture into the ruins of a castle, where a gang of bandits is lurking, and towards which he is inescapably being urged by an army of marching trees. On

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[205] Unpublished script of sixteen pages of an interview with Jonathan Smith for a BBC programme in 1982 under the same title. It is kept in St. John's College Library. The Papers of Hugh Sykes Davies, Box 9, item 9.17.
[206] This plot resembles the Scheherazadian *Nights* in the Arabic tradition.

entering the ruins, he encounters two bandits who civilly invite him to join them for dinner, which they are preparing on a fire. When a third bandit appears, sent by one of the name Marmion (supposedly the leader of the gang), he asks: "When can we start on him?" To which the other two reply: "We can't do anything till Marmion comes" (16).[207] Then appears a fourth bandit, and the same routine of questions and answers is repeated. Then a fifth bandit comes in, and then a sixth and so on, until there is a crowd of bandits around the fire. The first bandit, who is now engaged in knitting, asks Petron to hold a skein of wool for him. Understanding this as a sign of friendship, Petron accepts. However, he is soon tied up and entangled by this first bandit, who is revealed to be Marmion himself. At Marmion's signal, the crowd of bandits begins to beat Petron, engaging in such a fierce attack that they soon miss their target and start fighting each other. At this point, Petron manages to leave the ruins "with a dripping of blood and a clatter of broken bones" (18) and, in spite of the warnings of a moribund man who falls dead at his feet, he ventures into the ruins and joins two bandits who are cooking dinner over a fire.

In this passage, Sykes Davies uses and abuses the circular structure of the folk tale, emulates its form and perverts its moral. Whereas the circular structure of the traditional brigands' story, or that of the *Arabian Nights*, is used as a mechanism for escaping punishment and death, Petron becomes the eternal victim of an endless assault which he relives over and over again. And whereas the former set commendable examples of cunning and dexterity, thus providing a moral lesson on the individual's capacity to escape undeserved doom, Petron does not only become an example of human stupidity, but also exposes the individual's inefficiency against natural determinism: this may also have a political reading, for it can be understood in the terms which Sykes Davies used to describe the thirties as a period of "patterns await[ing] events" (Sykes Davies 1978: 34). Hence, the character's passivity at the marching trees' compelling force is matched by his torpid actions inside the castle and, even if he manages to escape death (it is the moribund man, and not Petron, who dies trampled by the marching trees), he does so only to return to his disastrous fate. However, Sykes Davies not only perverts the never-ending tale by subverting its virtuous lesson, but also by making its circular structure imperfect. This is achieved through the intervention of the third-person narrator to provide information early in the development of the story, creating an asymmetry which remains unresolved structurally. The description of Petron's first encounter with the dying man adds a sentence which is not present in the second encounter, and with which Sykes Davies

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[207] *Marmion* is precisely the title of an 1808 epic poem by Sir Walter Scott.

disturbs the internal logic of the passage, disrupts the process of identification of the dying man and Petron and interrupts the circular structure:

> Seeing Petron, the unhappy man advised him urgently not to go on, and above all to avoid the ruins, in which a gang of bandits was lurking. *He seemed to be on the point of explaining that his own condition was not due to these bandits, but to some other cause*, when his breath dried up in a hoarse rattle, and he fell to the ground, to be trampled on by the pursuing trees. (15, emphasis mine)

The use of the verb "seem" contributes to the overall ambiguity of the passage for it remains unknown whether his moribund state is actually due to the bandits. Even if it functions as a prophecy of Petron's own assault, Sykes Davies introduces an illogical element which destroys the symmetry of the passage: basically, the metamorphosis of the dying man into Petron and vice versa is suggested, but never completed. Hence, the disruption of the recapitulative movement, which would act as the ordering principle here and elsewhere in *Petron*, prevents the attainment of a formally, semantically and even morally coherent whole. Similarly, throughout the text, the reader is left with an open-ended succession of disconnected fragments which constantly contradict each other, thwarting the expectations that they create and preventing resolution. The traditions, patterns and devices that he makes use of, which might have provided keys for understanding the text, are counteracted by the presence of too many other traditions, patterns and elements: the Classical is undermined by the Romantic; the epic by the mundane; the moral by the amoral; the beautiful by the grotesque; the exact by the hyperbolic; the lyrical by the humorous; the logical by the irrational; the commonplace by the fantastic; the familiar by the uncanny.

Similar contradictions and the same cumulative-recapitulative structure appear in his poem "In the Stump of the Old Tree" (1936), and it was precisely in relation to this poem that Sykes Davies explained the connection between this type of primitive pattern and automatism:

> The rediscovery of this poem taught me one really interesting thing about the way we use these ancient patterns: we seem to do it instinctively. When I wrote that little piece, I had no conscious intention of using the cumulative pattern. I knew of it, of course, from my nursery upwards, but I knew nothing about it, as I do now. I didn't even know that I was using a particular pattern. (Sykes Davies 1972: 304)

The cumulative-recapitulative structure of the poem is thus the result of an unconscious and automatic process of creation, responding to Breton's own definition of pure psychic automatism. Hence, Sykes Davies's seemingly ordered and well-arranged structures derive mainly from the mnemonic mechanisms of the oral tradition, including not only folk tales, but

also, as he acknowledged, nursery rhymes. Whereas the purpose of the parable is to offer a moral lesson and that of the endless story is to avoid misfortune (both of which are subverted by Sykes Davies), the purpose of nursery rhymes lies in the need to make reality familiar to children through repetition. Sykes Davies's use of the cumulative-recapitulative pattern in "In the Stump of the Old Tree" undermines that very purpose. In this poem, which becomes a beautifully constructed web of intratextual references, associations are created only to be frustrated and, eventually, destroyed. It is an attempt to defamiliarise perception and experience, preventing the reader from feeling at ease with the reality that is presented, a reality always on the brink of transformation and impossible to grasp.

Paul Nash considered the branches of dead trees as Surrealist *found objects* (Mesens 1940: 21) and worked on this idea in some of his montages and photographs of the 1930s, such as *Swanage* (circa 1936) and *Monster Field* (1938).[208] Previously, Nash had used the images of blasted tree stumps and branches of dead trees in his representation of the destruction caused by the First World War, as in *We are Making a New World* (1918). Sykes Davies seems to draw on Nash's idea of the found object and its permanent association with death and regeneration, as the internal world of the poem is reduced to the tree stump, a new found reality where time and space are abolished. The cumulative-recapitulative structure is perceived as each stanza adds a new image which is not present in the previous one: to the rotten hearts, dank pools, rain and leaves of the first stanza, a dead bird, weasels' eyes and a bible are added in the following ones. Finally, all the images are concentrated inside the stump in the climactic recapitulation offered in the penultimate stanza:

> in the stumps of old trees where the hearts have rotted out
>
> there are holes the length of a man's arm where the weasels are
>
> trapped and the letters of the rook language are laced on the
>
> sodden leaves, and at the bottom there is a man's arm. But do
>
> not put your hand down to see, because (Sykes Davies 1936b: 129)

But the appearance of these objects and beings does not remain stable throughout the composition, as they are subjected to simultaneous and constant processes of metamorphosis as they are observed: for example, the old leaves which "turn into lacy skeletons" in the first stanza "turn to lace" in the second one and become "laced leaves" in the third; in the fourth stanza, there are "laced weasels' eyes" and, in the fifth, it is the letters that are laced on the leaves which, like the bible, are sodden. As it can be seen, Sykes Davies makes use of the cumulative-recapitulative structure in order to provide a spiralling succession of images of

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[208] Reproduced in *Architectural Review* (November 1936): 88.

multiple figuration, following Dali's paranoiac-critical method: each element merges and blurs in contact with the other elements, adopting their features and attributes, shifting in appearance and thus eluding rational categorisation. Also, the use of parallelism and incremental repetition enhances the dense and claustrophobic atmosphere of the poem, creating a sense of eternal return which hinders progress: the images metamorphose, but do not advance, for they remain essentially the same and self-similar throughout. For Sykes Davies, this type of formal structure indeed emulates the very structure of the paranoiac and obsessive mind, becoming the most suitable medium for the presentation of these metamorphosing images and hence for the liberation of repressed desire. Thus, the didactic purpose of the cumulative-recapitulative pattern used in nursery rhymes is undermined, for the poem presents a world in continuous transformation which is difficult to grasp: in nursery rhymes, repetition is used to come to terms with and gain control of reality; in the poem, every time an element is repeated, it is defamiliarised and made *other*, a fact which hinders attaining mastery over the reality that is being presented. Also, whereas its images are repulsive, its rhythms are alluring, and it is precisely because of this that "In the stump of the old tree" resists single meaning as traditionally understood. References to decay, death, temptation and fear become central to the poem, but even these avoid univocal interpretation, for fear is constantly counteracted by the tantalising nature of the prohibition "do not put your hand down", which reveals a growing sense of expanding desire: as Michel Remy has noted, the stump becomes "the forbidden zone of desire, as obscure and unreachable as it is irresistibly attractive" (Remy 1999: 48). Furthermore, Sykes Davies not only deconstructs reality, but the language used to portray it, as the real and the fantastic become so intrinsically entangled in the poem that in the end only the fantastic prevails. In this way, he destroys the reader's very conception of reality, a capitalist and bourgeois reality in decay and nearing death, in favour of fantasy and dream. This is how image and ideology are brought together again in Sykes Davies's writing. Nevertheless, dreams and fantasies are not presented as a safe place either, for the tempting nature of the interdiction ("do not put your hand down to see") is counteracted by the terrible menacing consequences of yielding to temptation presented in the final stanza: "if you ever put your hand down to see, you can wipe it in the / sharp grass till it bleeds, but you'll never want to eat with it again" (Sykes Davies 1936b: 129).

A similar tension between temptation and punishment, which underscores the ambiguity of the book, occurs in one of the nightmares in the final part of *Petron*. This vision presents a field "thickly covered with Human Hands, growing from the wrist in the furrowed sand" (Sykes Davies 1935a: 69). The hands move as if they were plants, following the orb of

the sun, contracting their fingers when the sun sets and spreading fully at sunrise, and it remains impossible to know whether the hands are truly disembodied, for their attachment to the wrist would suggest that they belong to people buried in the ground. This is further reinforced by the fact that, the traveller, mesmerised by the cyclical movement of the hands, is condemned to contemplate the miraculous phenomenon day and night until "he too slips to the ground, to die before morning comes again. All about him lie the bones of others who have died in the same manner, white in the moonlight, a moonlight which, they say, once seen can never be forgotten" (70).[209] The hand becomes thus both a tempting and condemning force, a source of pleasure and pain, using its life to cause death.

As we have seen, the ordering principle that governs both "In the Stump of the Old Tree" and the passage of the field of hands is mathematical in nature: whereas in the former it is the process of composition that is based on addition, in the latter it is the uncanny effect of the passage that relies on this mathematical operation, for it creates a cyclical structure through which new victims are constantly added to the equation. In *Petron* there are several other passages whose structure relies on numbers and mathematical operations: the effect of the bandits' passage relies, not only on circularity, but also on addition, as the entrance of each bandit adds a new spin to the yarn without which the story would not be possible; in the passage where a hedge keeper tries to deter Petron from tampering with some signposts, division becomes a form of multiplication as the former "divided each of his fingers with a pruning-bill into a small hand, and subdivided the fingers of these again into smaller hands, and so on until he was possessed of many thousand hands and tens of thousands of fingers" (Sykes Davies 1935a: 8). As can be seen, these mathematical structures differ greatly from that of other poetic forms which also rely on numbers: whereas the sonnet, for instance, is balanced and complete, Sykes Davies's passages are disproportionate and potentially unrestrained, for they can be expanded or reproduced *ad infinitum*, something which, even if complying with syntactic rules or with certain formal restrictions, can hardly be described as normative. As in the patterns of the folk tradition which Sykes Davies relished and in the Surrealists' *Cadavre Exquis* compositions, new elements can always be added, and no sense of completion is ever achieved. Furthermore, many children's rhymes largely rely on numeric patterns for their didactic purpose, which, it has been suggested, is to come to terms with external reality, to put it in order and gain control over it. Sykes Davies's use of this traditional form in the following passage from *Petron* subverts again its original purpose, for although the

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[209] Note the echoes of the incantatory refrain in Petron's narration of the crime. See pages 235 and 245-247 below.

spider is also a typical character in nursery rhymes, he introduces an element, a gibbet, which transforms the seemingly innocent composition into a macabre augury of death:

A spider weaves his web upon a gibbet.

A second spider weaves his web upon the same gibbet.

And a third.

With three more, all spiders, weaving their webs upon the

same gibbet.

Then the seventh spider would seem to be the one at large.

No! See, there he weaves, there he weaves, the shadow of a

web upon the shadow,

the shadow of the same gibbet.[210] (Sykes Davies 1935a: 60)

As we can see, this type of numeric construction, or *number shape*, also favours the occurrence of successive transformations as the composition advances: thus, the unaccounted appearance and multiplication of spiders, webs and shadows is a form of metamorphosis which bears connections with the paranoiac images which appear in other parts of *Petron*. And, similarly, conclusions with ideological significance may be extracted from it: with this brief composition, which is one of the disconnected nightmares that appear in the third section of the book, Sykes Davies subverts conventional and bourgeois mythologies of infancy and childhood by presenting the spider, not as a kind companion (the *incy wincy spider* of the original children's rhyme), but rather as an executioner, an image which exposes the frailties of the dominant ideology and its views of the world. As will be seen, this image also anticipates the perversion of childhood innocence that the Spanish Civil War, and eventually the Second World War, brought about.

The question of whether *Petron*'s apparently controlled syntactic structure and composed voice responds to a conscious process of moulding and shaping is difficult to sustain, considering that much of its structure reproduces patterns of the primitive oral tradition. Considering Sykes Davies's own critical theories on form and matter, the process of poetic creation seems reversed: for Sykes Davies, the form, the shape, is, for the modern poet, chronologically prior to the content, an idea which opposes the principles of Classicism, as does his emphasis on ugliness, pain, disproportion, asymmetry, disfiguration and displacement. Another point worth considering has to do with a different structural ploy.

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[210] In "The Scales of Disaster: Elegy for an Endangered Species" (1982), Sykes Davies provided examples of several folk songs based on the same "number shape" (Sykes Davies 1982b: 11): "This Old Man", "Green Grow the Rushes, O" and "Ten Little Nigger Boys".

Petron is encapsulated between two mirrors, like the infinite reflections of the ringed moon on the pool, simultaneously reflected in Petron's eye:

> in his own eye, the reflection of the cranes and the moon was caught from the pool. (For the eye, besides seeing, reflects on its own surface that which it is supposed to see.) While from his eye, the much diminished image was again reflected in the reflection of his eye that lay in the pool. This eye again, containing its minute depiction of the cranes and moon, was minutely reflected in his real eye, and so on, in an infinity of waning images. (Sykes Davies 1935a: 25)

However, as it happens, Petron fails to notice all this beauty, for he is focused on the menacing flight of the cranes and, soon, also on the miserable vision of a crab engaged in a fight against itself. Indeed, one way of interpreting this is to see it as Percy Bysshe Shelley's poetic mirror set against the distorting mirrors of Ramón María del Valle-Inclán's *esperpentic* tradition.[211] Moreover, in this regard, Sykes Davies's work effectively reproduces the systematically deforming features of the canon of the Spanish picaresque tradition, in which the *esperpento* is also embedded. In *Luces de Bohemia*, Valle-Inclán's master *esperpento*, Max Estrella states: "Mi estética actual es transformar con matemática de espejo cóncavo las normas clásicas" (Valle-Inclán 2009: 169).[212] This systematic deformation of Classical rules (decorum, equilibrium, symmetry, beauty) is also present in *Petron*, where the mirror is no longer a symbol of truth, or the mimetic representation of reality. As the reflections are multiplied limitlessly, reality becomes multiform and deceptive. Also, since each reflection is an attenuated version of the one that precedes it, reality gradually wanes into non-existence. Similarly, the encounters between Petron and several fantastic, metamorphosing, often idiotic, beings are successively distorted replicas of each other: two giants are merged into the landscape, a twisted tree turns into an old man, a toadstool becomes an idiot whose overstretching mouth extends over the horizon. Although these metamorphosing processes would seem to imply change and development, the very nature and structure of the passages, in which everything is a replica of something else (within or outside the text) hinders progress and, therefore, completion.

As I have already stated, in "The Cave that Jack Built" (1972) Sykes Davies insisted on the primitive character of repetitive patterns, as they seem to originate instinctively, without a

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[211] The expression was originally used by Pedro Salinas in his essay "Significación del esperpento" (1947). In "A Defence of Poetry" (1821), Shelley stated that "Poetry is a mirror which makes beautiful that which is distorted" (Shelley 1840: 33).
[212] "My current aesthetics is to transform classical rules with the mathematics of a concave mirror" (my translation).

conscious effort on the part of the poet. Moreover, the automatic use of these repetitive patterns contributes to the liberation of unconscious material (irrational, paranoiac and metamorphosing images), as the poet thus avoids rational engagement with form. If this is so, then the formal structure of *Petron* is not as controlled, or at least conscious, as it may seem. In fact, in many cases, it is disproportionately overflowing, and the fact that some of the more unrestrained passages seem to end neatly is only part of the recapitulative nature of the primitive pattern, as in the nursery rhyme which Sykes Davies uses to illustrate this:

> This is the horse and the hound and the horn
>
> That belonged to the farmer sowing his corn
>
> That kept the cock that crowed in the morn
>
> That waked the priest all shaven and shorn
>
> That married the man all tattered and torn
>
> That kissed the maiden all forlorn
>
> That milked the cow with the crumpled horn
>
> That tossed the dog that worried the cat
>
> That killed the rat that ate the malt
>
> That lay in the house that Jack built.[213]

In *Petron*, as in this type of folk song, a recapitulative principle acts as an ordering mechanism which provides the illusion of cohesion when the accumulation of elements has got, as it were, out of hand. In some cases, this mechanism adopts the form of a refrain or a chorus which, through repetition, emphasises some message or idea which is central to the experience that is recounted. For example, the narration of Petron's crime becomes a sort of liturgy or incantation as it is interspersed with variations of a *sententia* which, as in prayers (another primitive pattern), functions as an element of cohesion and recapitulation. Throughout this passage, references to the place where the crime takes place are always accompanied by variations of the following sentence: "Neither of them had seen it before, but one has now seen it for the last time, and the other will never forget it" (Sykes Davies 1935a: 48). Thus, the whole passage becomes a ritualistic celebration of ancestral memory as the characters (and also the reader) enter the realm of mythical time and space. Here, as in the poem "In the Stump of the Old Tree" (1936), Sykes Davies manages to reproduce the "slowness of beat" which for him was essential in the process of recovery of the primitive rhythm in poetry (Sykes Davies 1929b: 31). In some other cases, as we have seen, the recapitulative principle itself is subverted, by means of structural asymmetries (the bandits' passage); by the irruption of

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[213] Oral source.

irrational, ambiguous and metamorphosing images which prevent closure ("In the Stump of the Old Tree"); or by failing to collect the heterogeneous elements of the aggregate, which become dispersed, eluding recapitulation and, therefore, subjection to a unifying principle, as in the following fragment:

> Searching among the rubble, he finds a battered toy that was once his own, but even as he holds it, it stirs in his hand and becomes a grasshopper, then an old man, a monstrous spider, a woman's breast, a bunch of faded grass, a little heap of bones, and so to a lizard which eludes his grasp, and darts away among the sunlit stones. (66)

Again, in this passage, which belongs to one of the nightmares in the final section, the gradual metamorphoses of the battered toy respond to the dreamer's paranoiac vision, which presents reality, not as fixed and stable, but rather as protean and changeable. As will be seen, this is the view of a multiple and metamorphosing, defamiliarised, reality which Sykes Davies offers as an alternative to the permanent, totalising and homogenising mythologies fostered by the dominant ideology of bourgeois capitalism and, by extension, of Fascist systems of thought.

1.3.3. New Meanings: Rewriting Reality.

In the previous section, the apparent paradox of form as both conscious and automatic, controlled and unrestrained, coherent and self-disruptive, in Sykes Davies's Surrealist writing was resolved by drawing attention to his use of a series of patterns from the oral tradition and to the ways in which the apparent sense of totality achieved by those framing devices is constantly interrupted in his texts. I also pointed to his Surrealist metamorphosing images as sources of this disruption, for they introduce an irrational, ambiguous element in the text which resists univocal interpretation and thus prevents attaining a sense of closure. In this section, I analyse the sources, nature and ideological dimension of these metamorphosing images, and the paradox of content as both irrational and conscious is resolved through recourse to Salvador Dalí's paranoiac-critical method, to Sykes Davies's poetic theory and to the Surrealist theory of collage. Basically, the metamorphosing image is seen as the *content* that fills the blanks in the automatic, spiralling structures taken from the oral tradition and, in this sense, the image not only contributes to the liberation of unconscious material and to the creation of a new alternative reality, but also introduces that element of disruption which is so central to Sykes Davies's writing. On the other hand, these images, which in a number of cases are consciously borrowed from a variety of sources and used towards the re-elaboration of a dissident literary tradition, are studied as pre-existing forms themselves, liable to take on new meanings through displacement. In this case, the images then may be conscious, but the associations that they prompt are of an unconscious

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nature. Either way, I sustain that there is an ideological content inherent in Sykes Davies's use of the Surrealist image, because it is through the processes of defamiliarisation which lie at the core of these metamorphosing images that new mythologies are created. These new mythologies present a constantly changing view of the world: a multiple and diverse reality which opposes the bourgeois constructions of the dominant ideology. In this way, by defamiliarising language, Sykes Davies also defamiliarises reality and our ideas about it: thus, his rewriting within and creation of a new and dissident literary tradition is also a form of *rewriting* reality.

Sykes Davies's texts are full of uncanny animations, metamorphosing beings, double and multiple images and ambiguous identifications. In *Petron*, these are the result of the character's paranoid vision, as he is constantly assailed by ominous threats and visions of doom which he himself creates. As we have seen in the chapter devoted to the Surrealist image, the Romantic double image is transcended in Surrealism by means of Dalí's paranoiac-critical method, a method of interpreting reality devised by the Spanish Surrealist to systematise delirious perception and obtain images of multiple figuration: thus, the double image may be extended limitlessly, as the representation of an object may successively become the representation of several other objects through unconscious associations (Dalí 1998: 224). The use of Dalí's paranoiac-critical method thus offered Sykes Davies the possibility to create new mythologies and therefore to contribute to the demoralisation and discredit of the bourgeois world. In Sykes Davies's texts, a rational, bourgeois view of the world is undermined by the prolonged subjective associations caused by paranoid vision, which transforms and multiplies reality *ad infinitum*. Furthermore, the collapse of the bourgeois object and of the ideological system which sustained it, as Dalí argued, would eventually serve the cause of revolution (Dalí 1998: 226). In this way, Sykes Davies's paranoid metamorphosing images would contribute to the crisis of consciousness announced by Breton in "The Second Manifesto of Surrealism" (1930) and become essential tools in the Surrealist fight against the economic and political offshoots of bourgeois ideology, capitalism and imperialism, of which Fascism was seen as an extreme representation.

In *Petron*, this crisis of consciousness is achieved through the process of defamiliarisation of visual perception. Unlike in dreams, where reality is distorted but the point of view remains fixed, paranoiac-critical activity allows for continuous changes in

perspective.[214] These changes in perspective allow for the kind of uncanny identifications and dissociative mechanisms which are common in Sykes Davies's text, where Petron is described as a maniac whose mind is "unhinged and beside itself. Beside itself!" (Sykes Davies 1935a: 57). However, it is clear that these visions are the creation of his own paranoid mind, as "he continually twists his head about, peering from under contracted and distorted brows, as if he sought something that marched beside him. Yet nothing is beside him, nothing besides himself, beside himself" (57). Also, in the passage where the size of his adventures is measured, the images formed in the mind of the observer are multiplied by successive alterations to the point of view, creating superimpositions in an Expressionistic manner:

> As a means of seizing the scale of these matters, and placing them against a familiar background, I suggest that you hire a milch cow, in colours as striking as possible, and that you take her to the shore below some cliff of considerable height. There, having tethered her to a boulder, contemplate her until the image is firmly embedded in your mind: so firmly embedded that not even a considerable shock will dislodge it. For it is precisely to such a shock that you must subject the image. Pass another twist of the rope round the rock, make all secure, and then ascend to the top of the cliff. Stand at the edge for a few minutes, concentrating your mind on the image of the cow, and occasionally verifying it by a glance at the real cow below. Then, when you feel quite sure of it, cast yourself over the precipice; head foremost lest your body should impede your view. For you must note as you fall the impression which you have of the cow, outlined upon the rocks where you will so shortly be dashed: note how the cow might be considered to have been so dashed already: note its exact size above all. For that is the size of these adventures of Petron. (Sykes Davies 1935a: 27-28)

By means of these changes of perspective, at least three images of the cow are formed: the close-up of the cow, the panoramic image of the cow outlined on the shore, and the image of the cow dashed against the rocks: they all occur simultaneously at the moment of the fall through a process of paranoiac activity. The size of his adventures is measured by the image of the close-up superimposed on the panoramic landscape of the shore, and the image of the whole animal against its dashed image, creating a palimpsest-like effect. What is interesting about this passage is that defamiliarisation, accentuated by the narrator's express intention to provide a "familiar background" for the experiment, is the result of the juxtaposition of the

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[214] This is precisely one of the main differences outlined by Dalí between automatism and paranoiac-critical activity: whereas the former is a form of passive perception, the latter is a method of active interpretation (Dalí 1998: 256-262).

logical and the irrational, of the precision of the instructions that are given and the mere absurdity of the procedure. In this sense, Rod Mengham has referred to the "equanimity and detachment" of the language used to portray the "violent reversal" that the point of view undergoes (Mengham 2005: 373), and here it is significant that what provides the exact measure of Petron's adventures is not so much the vertiginous image of the metamorphosing cow, but indeed the tension that is created by this incongruous juxtaposition. As will be seen, this sort of inconsistency generally emerges in *Petron* from the juxtaposition of multiple and contradictory traditions and sources which constantly subvert and disrupt each other, transforming what Breton described as "the property of uninterrupted becoming" (Breton 1936b: 84) into a sort of *interrupted un-becoming*: it is precisely in the text's ambivalence and in its capacity to resist totalising interpretations that both its aesthetic and ideological significance lies.

Sykes Davies is involved in the creation of an alternative dissident literary tradition in which there are no fixed and stable categories but, at the same time, is also rewriting an existing tradition, for which he draws on a huge variety of sources. Indeed, the degree of intertextuality in *Petron* is not only extensive, but also acutely complex. In a series of annotations which Sykes Davies himself produced, and which are kept in St. John's Library, Cambridge, he provided vital clues regarding the sources that he used for episodes in *Petron* and also comments on the provenance of some of the ideas contained in the book.[215] Also, the introductory paragraphs in *Petron* are full of references which can be traced in the main body of the text: John Milton, William Shakespeare, Edgar Allan Poe, Petrus Borel, Ludovico Ariosto, James Thomson's *Seasons* (1730) and Walt Disney's *Silly Symphonies* (1929-1939) are among the sources from which Sykes Davies draws for the creation of this dream. As will be seen, there are many others, which Sykes Davies uses and abuses, just as he does with the patterns of the oral tradition. However, the introductory paragraphs serve a further purpose, for in them he attacks positivistic science as the real antithesis of poetry, an idea directly inherited from Samuel Taylor Coleridge.[216] Sykes Davies also uses the exordial paragraphs to address, not only those who see the poetic element most conspicuously epitomised by these authors, but also those affected by psychological conditions such as hypersensitivity, insomnia and paranoia: "those who have held for a moment in their hands a wild bird, caught in the hedge, and felt its trembling [. . .] those who are troubled by sleeplessness [. . .] those against whom their neighbours plot" (Sykes Davies 1935a: viii). As will be seen, these elements recur in the

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[215] The Papers of Hugh Sykes Davies, Box 6 and Box 8.
[216] This idea was developed by Coleridge in his *Biographia Literaria* (1817).

text, for these are conditions which affect some of the characters in the book. Finally, the exordial paragraphs come to an end as he establishes a main key to the text, which is essential for understanding his Surrealist poetics and his skilful use of the Surrealist image. Thus, he addresses his book to those who "will read it with the utmost simplicity, not seeking a meaning where there is no meaning, more than contented with the apparent sense" (viii). In this way, Sykes Davies undermines the signifying process in the act of reading, aware that conventional or metaphorical interpretation is useless in a work like *Petron*. Nevertheless, meaning, understood in the sense of ideological significance, may be extracted from the text. Certainly, the significance of the book largely relies on the dialogue which it maintains with the works and traditions on which it draws. As an extension of this, it may be said that it also lies in the relationship that is established with the reality outside the text. However, if much of the raw material of the text is not, as it were, *automatic*, if it is, as Gascoyne states in his review, "a fantastic tune that Mr. Davies once overheard in a library" (Gascoyne 1935h: 19), then it becomes necessary to understand that, just as dreams recollect the images and experiences lived throughout the day and rearrange them, compress them, condense them, expand them, distort them, and so on, in every sort of seemingly irrational and illogical manner, *Petron* does the same with the reality of the dissident literary tradition in which it is embedded and to which it continually alludes. We said at the outset that *Petron* precludes rational categorisation at all levels. It is a dream, and as such it is necessarily based on a conscious reality which it modifies following the dictates of unconscious desire.

For the composition of *Petron*, Sykes Davies made use of a vast number of sources, some of which are explicitly mentioned by him in his annotations and are, therefore, conscious influences in his work. Some others, as will be seen, are either unconscious borrowings or, at least, they are not explicitly acknowledged by the author. One of the most characteristic aspects of his process of poetic composition is the fact that he resorts almost exclusively to literary sources, with the only exception of Disney's *Silly Symphonies*, as opposed to other British Surrealist poets whose work is intrinsically connected with a variety of disciplines, from painting (George Barker, Roland Penrose) and photography (Roland Penrose) to historiography (Humphrey Jennings) and journalism (Charles Madge). The works that have a direct influence on *Petron* range from the Medieval tradition and the European Renaissance to the 19th-century Gothic and, of course, Disney's latest animated creations. This makes *Petron* an inheritor of the vast literary tradition in which it is inserted, no doubt an inevitable consequence of Sykes Davies's literary background. Sykes Davies draws in a very broad and general manner from a series of sources, either emulating the atmosphere recreated in them or refashioning old

themes and ideas through an intertextual play of echoes, allusions and influences. Nevertheless, at points he also includes fragments from other literary works (literally, translated by him, or slightly altered), resembling more closely the literary collages of the French Surrealists, and anticipating the kind of compositions created by Humphrey Jennings and Charles Madge in Britain. I have already dealt with those aspects of literary collage which make of it an unconscious, automatic form of composition, and this is so because the fragments of which it is composed are pre-existing materials awaiting to be found (*objets trouvés*) and liberated of their previous contexts and associations. In this regard, and as an inversion of the general Freudian perspective, Herbert Read referred to the capacity of consciously perceived material to enter the unconscious realm: discussing Coleridge's trance-like state during the composition of *Kubla Khan* (1816), Read stated that "an American professor, Mr Livingstone Lowes, has shown that however trancelike Coleridge's condition may have been, it did nevertheless allow him to make use of fragments of knowledge, words and phrases, garnered during the course of his conscious reading" (Read 1938d: 187). Similarly, in the case of Sykes Davies, it is the association that is automatic, and not the material per se: the process of exhuming library material may be laborious, but the associations and the meanings that emerge from old forms, or from the act of bringing together previously unrelated images/fragments/realities, are spontaneous: "The purpose of automatic writing is to discover the marvellous" -affirmed David Gascoyne in the introduction to his translation of *The Magnetic Fields* (1920)- "but not to fabricate it deliberately" (in Breton and Soupault 1985: 4). As I have already said, this did not prevent in any way a certain degree of rearrangement and reorganisation of the material in a post-automatic stage of elaboration. In addition, I have commented on the ways in which collage responds to Breton's definition of the Surrealist image as the marvellous encounter of distant and disparaging realities in the "Manifesto of Surrealism" (1924), where collage is presented as the recipe for the alchemical word. Thus, through collage, a new and monstrous reality is created from the remnants of old and forgotten creatures, renewing their old and worn-out meanings by giving them a new significance. This is not only reminiscent of Sykes Davies's own poetic theory, but also of the grotesque, which is a central element in his metamorphosing images too: *Petron*, a *monstrous* construction in itself, is also full of this type of hybrid beings as several creatures undergo a series of transfigurations, trees acquire human attributes, an idiot's mouth becomes the sunset and two shepherd-giants become features of the landscape. By re-using literary models (the mythical journey of Homer's *Odyssey*, the picaresque tradition initiated by Cervantes's *Quixote*, the dystopian model of Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, or the psychological journey of

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Joyce's *Ulysses*), rewriting literary clichés (especially of the Medieval and Gothic tradition, such as the journey itself or the murder plot), displacing literary archetypes (the hero-villain dichotomy) and defamiliarising the canon (the juxtaposition of Classical and unorthodox works), Sykes Davies becomes the creator of a new reality. This is only a slight reflection of what we find in *Petron*: the huge number of sources from which the writer borrows responds, like his use of circular and open-ended structures, to his aesthetics of excess, which is only matched by the very excess of his hallucinatory and visionary imagination.

Of all the texts that are present in *Petron*, Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* (1532) is probably the best known of the influences, even if only because Part I of *Petron* is introduced by a quotation from Ariosto's work: "Forse era ver, ma non però credibile" (in Sykes Davies 1935a: 1).[217] The quote is taken from the 56th stanza in Canto I. The first four lines of this stanza show the extent to which *Orlando* and *Petron* are connected. Guido Waldman's English edition provides the following translation for those lines: "This may have been true, but scarcely plausible to anyone in his right mind; to him it seemed quite possible, however, lost as he was in a far deeper delusion" (Ariosto 1983: 7). *Petron* is, like *Orlando* in part, a *eulogy of madness*, even if the origin of their portrayed *delusion* derives from distinct sources.[218] In both cases, inscriptions written on trees are the trigger of a violent obsession: Orlando grows increasingly restless as he learns of the love affair between Angelica and Medor through love messages carved on trunks, which he slashes with his sword; Petron, on the other hand, becomes fixated with the idea of erasing the messages which he encounters on "frequent boards, warning the passer-by of the penalties of even the slightest deviation from the straight way" (Sykes Davies 1935a: 7), an image which has clear ideological undertones. Thus, Petron challenges the ominous threats contained in the signposts by writing little defiant rhymes on them, an act which consequently infuriates a hedger who tries to deter him. Although the hedger's rage at Petron's vandalising act comes closer to Orlando's, his methods to dissuade Petron respond to Sykes Davies's Surrealist indulgence in the fantastic-macabre:

> He fainted. He lay in the road contorted in the most dreadful antics of epilepsy. He leaned over a gate and vomited blood till the grass was all matted together: plunged a pointed flint into his forehead: divided each of his fingers with a pruning-bill into a

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[217] "Maybe it was true, but it was not credible" (my translation).

[218] The original Italian term, *errore*, would suggest deceptive perception as a consequence of being in love. Although the origin of Petron's delusions cannot be deduced from the text itself, it is plausible to suggest that, in the context of 20th-century psychological research, mental disorders and, ultimately, violence emerge as the result of the tensions between the individual's strife for liberation and the repressive forces of civilisation, as Freud explained in *Civilisation and Its Discontents* (1930).

small hand, and subdivided the fingers of these again into smaller hands, and so on until he was possessed of many thousand hands and tens of thousands of fingers. (8)

As we see, the hedger undergoes a series of metamorphoses before which Petron nevertheless remains unmoved, transforming the signposts, as if they were palimpsests, by depicting the successive monstrous agonies endured by the hedger.

Petron is full of magic and fantastic elements of this sort, which Sykes Davies borrows from *Orlando*, but also from Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* (1590), works in which there is a mixture of elements of romance and epic.[219] The epic element is also continually subverted in *Petron*, whose hero is a common hero, "our you and me, our me and you, or if you will our them, our mutual friend!" (Sykes Davies 1935a: 4), wandering the landscapes of the mind and undertaking a series of fantastic quests or nightmares which are not part of an evident, or at least explicit, larger scheme of things. In relation to this, *Petron* may be said to reproduce the myth of *the wandering Jew*, condemned to walk the earth unable to rest or die, which Sykes Davies took from Charles Maturin's Gothic novel *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820), and which in a way inverts or frustrates the search for salvation or resolution in works like John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678).[220] The emergence of the mundane, the comic or the merely absurd (which sometimes is the result of excessive pragmatism, as we have seen) tends to counteract the epic elements in the narration: for example, in his very first adventure, Petron is not deterred by the ominous grandiloquent signposts warning of the dangers of deviating from the straight way: "Beware, through me men go into a dreadful place" (7); and he is unimpressed by the monstrous transformations of the hedge keeper (8). Nevertheless, he is immediately discouraged by a magic trick which, although equally unthinkable, is comparably quite innocent:

Taking from his pocket a length of string, he passed it through his head, in at one ear, and out at the other. Then he placed his fingers to his nostrils, and drew the string out from them in the form of a loop, one end in each nostril. The loop he took between his teeth, and leering frightfully for a few moments, suddenly swallowed it, so that the ends of the string which had been dangling from his ears were drawn in and disappeared suddenly and utterly. (9)

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[219] Other authors such as Wordsworth or Shelley, who also belong to the complex net of intertextual references in *Petron*, have Spenser as a direct influence too.

[220] This theme had previously appeared as a subplot in Matthew Lewis's *The Monk* (1796), and it is significant that both Maturin and Lewis were praised by Sykes Davies as precursors of the Surrealist aesthetics of pain in Britain (Sykes Davies 1971: 160). Later, Sykes Davies would re-elaborate this theme in a Postmodern setting in his novel *The Papers of Andrew Melmoth* (1960).

Nevertheless, the supernatural and the extraordinary are also counterpointed by the commonplace and the ordinary, and their co-occurrence becomes a source of humour in the text. Thus, it is Petron's attempt to depict each of the hedge keeper's metamorphoses on a signpost, rather than the metamorphoses themselves, that interrupts "the ordinary business of the countryside" (8). Moreover, Petron finds it easy to depict the hedge keeper's contortions and epileptic antics, but is nevertheless nonplussed by his behaviour when he lies still on the road, and declares himself "at a loss as to how this new behaviour could be portrayed" (9).

The lyrical element is also subverted by similar devices, as in the case commented above in which the beauty of the butterfly is undermined by its uselessness (19), or when the description of the infinite reflections of the moon on the pool and of the pool on Petron's eye is suddenly interrupted by the image of a crab fighting itself (25). Although the passage of the crab may be considered, in all its symbolic implications, grave, it is the comic relief at the end which undermines the gravity of the symbolism, as the conqueror in the struggle with itself, the crab's larger front claw,

> seemed to collect together all the fragments of his erstwhile opponents, the innards of the crab, and the broken parts of its carapace: set them in a heap as a trophy of his own victory, and, after a decent space of mourning, ascended the steep sides of the pool with wonderful agility, scuttling off among the sand dunes, pirouetting and leaping as he went, and raising little cloudlets of dust. (26)

Another similarity between *Orlando*, *The Faerie Queene* and *Petron*, and which is central to the picaresque genre too, is the use of the journey and the quest as organising principles.[221] As it has already been stressed, *Petron* is a journey to the depths of the unconscious and for the liberation of repressed desires and fears. Structurally, Sykes Davies borrows more clearly from Ariosto's and Spenser's use of romance than from the epic tradition, especially regarding the episodic plot and the treatment of time. However, hes goes much farther than these, for in *Petron* the very chronology of the passages becomes distorted and temporal progression is suspended in the spiralling vortex of the metamorphosing image. At some points, the internal time of the narration is vertiginously accelerated, as in the cinematographic technique of fast-forwarding images: for instance, hours and days pass unnoticed as Petron observes a circling speck under the sun (4-5).[222] Time also becomes iterative, as in the bandits' passage (13-18), or completely suspended in eternity, as in the

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[221] For an analysis of the quest structure in *The Faerie Queene*, see Wayne Erickson's *Mapping the Faerie Queene* (1996).
[222] The magical implications of this passage have been dealt with in my article "Myth, Dream and Poem: the Occult in 1930s British Surrealism" (2011): 225.

succession of oneiric visions in the third part of the book (60-73). As in dreams, time is condensed and expanded, but these compressions and expansions are always subject to the narrator's will, who constantly teases the reader, for whereas we are told that Petron is engaged in watching a self-annihilating crab for a whole night, towards the end, the narrator states that "By the sea he spent many months looking for crabs, but found none" (58). Also, when the end of Petron's journey is announced, it is only our dream of his journey that approaches its end, and the narrator bids the reader to leave Petron

> unobserved to perform those deeds the nature of which we both dimly surmise, and of which we should be unwilling and horrified observers! Let his be the action: ours be but a dream of the action, warned by its effects in him, satisfied, perhaps, that what has been done, needs not be done again. (76-77)

Nevertheless, the sense of closure which he attempts to convey is never achieved, as Petron's atemporal wanderings enter again the circular structure of mythical time: a biblical deluge takes an eagle's golden feather, the feather with which Petron's adventures had begun, to the sea, and he crosses a new frontier into an uninhabited country from which readers are banned, save for, perhaps, in their own dreams (77-79). These sorts of temporal distortions allow, as in the tradition of the romance, for the magical and the fantastic element to appear. Petron's idiotic antagonists belong in this supernatural realm, creating a gallery of distorted, evil and grotesque characters that mirror those in *The Faerie Queene*: not only giants, sorcerers and beasts, but also personifications of trees and multiple metamorphoses appear in the fantastic wild landscapes of both works.[223] In *Petron*, one of the most significant metamorphoses is indeed that of Petron himself who, through the facial disfiguration which he undergoes, resembles more closely the misshaped idiots (antagonists) that he encounters on his journey.

It has been suggested already that his facial disfiguration precedes the moment at which Petron enters a city in which a horrible crime takes place. This is a passage full of Shakespearean echoes, and introduced by a quotation from *Macbeth* (1623): " . . . pity, like a naked new-born babe . . . " (in Sykes Davies 1935a: 33).[224] The quotation anticipates the main theme of the passage, the mysterious murder of a pregnant woman, which occupies the second part of the book. It is an exceptional passage in the context of the book, for it presents a coherent narrative structure in which a chronological development of the action is clearly

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[223] In *The Faerie Queene*, among many other fantastic creatures, we find: Orgoglio (a giant), Archimago (a sorcerer who undergoes several metamorphoses) and Fradubio (a man turned tree).
[224] *Macbeth* I vii 21.

discernible, which turns it into an autonomous unity. The narration begins with Petron's transfiguration into a deformed, albeit respectful, creature. As he enters the city, the narrator informs the reader, "with the deepest reluctance" (Sykes Davies 1935a: 37), of the discovery, made by two children, of a horrible crime in a secluded area in the woods. The place is described as mythical, eternal both temporally and spatially, as the narrator reproduces

> the sense of setting foot upon ground unvisited since the creation of the world, ground where through innumerable revolutions of the heaven, an endless procession of seasons had seen the flowers and herbs grow and fade, and grow again, wither and bloom, and wither again, untended, untilled, and unused by any of the passing generations of mankind. (37-38)

In this place, the children discover the corpse of a woman and return to the city to relate the horrible discovery. All the citizens are guided by the boy and the girl, but are unable to find the place. The search, in which Petron initially collaborates, continues for weeks. As the reader is told, Petron's involvement in the matter is half-hearted, although it is also anticipated that he will be the one to provide the solution and the evidence to solve the mystery. He finally intervenes when, after the search has proven futile, the veracity of the children's story is questioned and they are put to torture. Petron leads the citizens to the exact place where the body lies, but "to their more practised eyes it is but too clear that this peaceful grove has witnessed no ordinary crime" (41). A series of questions, which the narrator transfers to the reader, arise regarding the circumstances of the murder, and the citizens are thrown into mutual suspicion, self-distrust and guilt: "But worse, far worse, than the suspicion of one man against another was the suspicion of each man against himself" (43). The murder thus becomes a communal crime, a terrible deed of collective desire:

> Only too well did each man know, deep in his heart, that what had been done might be his own doing save for the deed itself. [. . .] Many indeed were driven to lay claim to the deed for themselves, hoping to bring certainty at least to their doubting souls, even if it were the certainty of guilt [. . .]. (43)

Then Petron gathers his audience of self-distrusting citizens and here begins the narration of the crime, which clarifies all the mysterious elements previously unresolved, but one: the perpetrator of such a crime. There follows a description of the murder, not scant in gore, which culminates with Petron's final confession to the crime. Finally, the crime remains unpunished as the citizens let Petron go, rejoicing in the (illusory) certainty of their own innocence at the expense of his guilt. The story remains inconclusive, for Petron's assumption of the guilt seems just a form of expiation of a communal crime. As in the case of Macbeth,

who is haunted by Banquo's ghost, some of the citizens are haunted by the vision of the blood-red naked babe, the woman's unborn child, "in the sombre forests of their dreams until their death" (51).

Some of the descriptions in this passage, in which explanatory comments are used to add to the mystery and suspense, are reminiscent of Poe's prose style in his *Tales of Mystery and Imagination* (1839-1850). Thus, in the description of the discovery of the corpse, the remark about the body's position verges on the macabre:

> Hesitant they approach, thinking that she may be sleeping, but as they come near they see that the ground about her is red, the bracken is trampled and broken, and something is the stillness of her limbs tells them, unpractised as they are in the postures of death, that this is no short sleep [. . .]. (38)

On the other hand, the description of the search almost reproduces the Romantic vision of a witch-hunt:

> All day long the search continued, and far into the night by the aid of flaring torches – an eerie scene!- which scorched many a branch as they passed, filling the night with the fragrance of autumn fires, and leaving amid the deepening foliage twigs and leaves brown and withered far in advance of the season. (39)

Finally, Petron's narration of the crime (which is also his confession) becomes a form of incantation in which, through parenthetical references, a *sententia* or refrain is regularly repeated in relation to the place where the crime has taken place: "neither had seen it before, but one had now seen it for the last time, and the other will never forget it" (50). It has been suggested above that this creates a form of liturgical rhythm. Also, the litany-like rhythm of the passage recalls the structure of Poe's poem *The Raven* (1845), whose refrain "Nevermore", Sykes Davies argued, put in the mouth of the dark gloomy raven, allowed the liberation of unconscious desire while the conscious mind was engaged in "its mathematical ratiocinations" (Sykes Davies 1979a: 3).[225] In a way, Sykes Davies's refrain also functions as a form of celebration of collective memory and, through this process of communal expiation, also as an act of liberation. The citizens are redeemed and liberated from their nightmares of communal guilt: by confessing to a crime which everybody has committed but nobody dares to confess, Petron becomes the spokesman for the collective unconscious, and liberates the demons of repressed desire.

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[225] In his lecture "Avant Garde" (1979). St. John's College Library. The Papers of Hugh Sykes Davies, Box 8, item 58.

Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667) is also present in *Petron*'s transcription of the suffering of human existence. The accounts of the shepherd-giants, who narrate their activities during the night on the hills echo the statement on humankind's self-condemnation that puts an end to the hellish counsel in Book II of *Paradise Lost*, which obviously also has biblical undertones.[226] The shepherd on the western hill speaks first, warning the animals and plants on the moor of the futility of their existence, an image which is also reminiscent of humankind's condemnation after the fall:

> And you, O birds of the air, who think that your marriages are somehow blessed, you are wrong to build nests in a country swept by cold and violent winds. The curlew knows not why it exists, the moorhens are already afflicted by a painful tic, a jerking of the head which tortures them, but which they cannot control, the stonechat expresses a desolation which all feel but cannot articulate, and even the eagle grows hesitant, forgetting here his real ambition [. . .]. To no purpose do the stunted bushes defend with dry thorns their shrunken and miserable leaves, for they long ago ceased to afford nourishment to the starving beasts. It is folly in the sundew to entrap the sickened flies in its decaying fingers, and with wasted labour does the ground-beetle seek a path among the innumerable stems, the precipitous hills and valleys of its little world. (Sykes Davies 1935a: 10-11)

After this, the shepherd on the eastern cliff begins "speaking himself, describing how he had amused himself by assisting his flock in infamous and unnatural couplings, and urging them on to bloody and destructive battles among themselves" (12). The shepherd acts thus as a kind of tempting and corrupting figure (Satan), leading his flock (humankind) into sinful behaviour. All this has ideological implications beyond the deliberate subversion of textual sources for, while human existence is presented as purposeless, temptation is also praised here: as will be seen, these are not only the giants' cries, but Petron's unconscious yearning for liberation from the constraining influence of reason and morality. Through the disruption of literary and moral authoritative discourses, form and content echo each other in this fragment.

Milton's description of hell in Book II also finds echoes in *Petron*. The landscape in both is a dolorous universe of sinister and threatening creatures, very much in the tradition of the Medieval *locus horribilis*: "Where all life dies, death lives, and nature breeds, / Perverse, all

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[226] "O shame to men! Devil with Devil damned / Firm concord holds; men only disagree / Of creatures rational, though under hope / Of heavenly grace: and God proclaiming peace, / Yet live in hatred, enmity, and strife / Among themselves, and levy cruel wars, / Wasting the earth, each other to destroy: / As if (which might induce us to accord) / Man had not hellish foes enow besides, / That, day and night, for his destruction wait" (Milton 1821: 49).

monstrous, all prodigious things, / Abominable, inutterable, and worse / Than fables yet have feigned, or fear conceived, / Gorgons and Hydras, and Chimeras dire" (Milton 1821: 53). Similarly, in *Petron*, the narrator also draws attention to the unspeakable nature of the character's misadventures in this horrible place and, in a way which underscores the psychological aspects of this journey, insists on the reader's capacity to recall the events as experiences of the collective unconscious: "For you know so much, my friend" (Sykes Davies 1935a: 4); "With anguish which you can better imagine than I describe" (6); "if I do not explain to you how this curious phenomenon was brought about, will your own tenuous and shifty imaginations be stirred by all manner of speculations and conjectures concerning it" (56); "But who is this? Who is this lonely and ungainly traveller? [. . .] Unhappy man! Driven on by such indescribable and impregnable illusions, can this be Petron!" (57). Finally, the burning lake of Milton's hell in Book I, is evoked by the "saffron-hued waters of a stagnant mere" which Petron needs to cross and with which the narrative comes to an inconclusive end, as a new circle begins and Petron "has still many years, many long years to live" (Sykes Davies 1935a: 79).[227]

Other sources mentioned by Sykes Davies as direct influences on *Petron* which also contribute to the creation of new and alternative realities include the work of Gilbert White, the 18th-century naturalist and ornithologist. Indeed, Sykes Davies had an almost obsessive interest in birds, which become a recurrent element in his imagery. Also, White's scientific accounts of natural landscape verge at some points on the supernatural, an aspect that must have attracted Sykes Davies. For example, in his *Natural History of Selborne* (1789), there is a passage on the curative power of toads against cancer (White 1903: 53), which is in accord with Sykes Davies's interest in ancient remedies, and the description of a historic superstitious ceremony performed on sick children in Tring, Hertfordshire, to show the healing properties of the pollard-ash (160), which also responds to Sykes Davies's interest in primitive magic; White also recounts how a toad was fed by some ladies into a monstrous size (White 1903: 49), which is reminiscent of Sykes Davies's toadstool metamorphosing into a horrible idiot of overstretching mouth (Sykes Davies 1935a: 20); finally, there is an episode, not devoid of a certain *mystique*, in which a couple of ravens which had nested in a tree find a fatal end:

> In the centre of this grove there stood an oak, which, though shapely and tall on the whole, bulged out into a large excrescence about the middle of the stem. On this a pair of ravens had fixed their residence for such a series of years that the oak was distinguished by the title of the Raven Tree [. . .] till the fatal day arrived in which the

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[227] This image also recalls the scene of the biblical exodus and the crossing of the Red Sea.

wood was to be levelled. [. . .] The saw was applied to the butt, the wedges were inserted into the opening, the woods echoed to the heavy blows of the beetle or mallet, the tree nodded to its fall; but still the dam sat on. At last, when it gave way, the bird was flung from her nest; and, though her parental affection deserved a better fate, was whipped down by the twigs, which brought her dead to the ground. (White 1903: 16-17)

White's passage is also one of the sources from which Sykes Davies draws for the Surrealist account of the marching trees in *Petron*:

The trees, which were leafless and mostly dead, silently fell in behind him, as if he were a bitch in heat or the leader of a rebellion, marching in straggling order, out of step, their limbs flung about in gestures at once warlike and unmilitary. As they marched, crows and ravens perched in the jostling branches, with difficulty retaining their equilibrium, calling out the miles to one another, and saying: 'They want to be alone together. They want to be left alone together.' (Sykes Davies 1935a: 13)

Both texts share the anthropomorphic presentation of the tree, a typically Romantic device which Sykes Davies transcends by underscoring its psychological and ideological significance: on the one hand, it responds, not to the projection of a mental or emotional state as in the Romantic tradition, but to the need to liberate unconscious fears, for Petron (and by extension the reader) is constantly assailed by these paranoid visions; on the other hand, the parody of military power is made manifest in the pathetic image of the parade, which is both *warlike* (i.e. aggressive, destructive) and *unmilitary* (disorganised, undisciplined), and the trees march out of time, following a sexually aroused leader and disregarding the pleas of their actions' victims. These images are significant in the context of the British Surrealists' criticism of progressive militarisation in Britain as a response to Hitler's imperialist advance in Europe, which would crystallise in the pamphlet *We Ask your Attention* (1937), also signed by Sykes Davies among others.

Sykes Davies's depiction of exotic flora and fauna and his presentation of nature as ominous and threatening (especially through Petron's paranoid vision) simultaneously differs from and finds correspondences in another Romantic work, James Thomson's *The Seasons* (1730). On the one hand, Sykes Davies's description of nature in the first paragraph of *Petron* seems to undermine the very organising principle of Thomson's *Seasons* by presenting a landscape which, unlike Thomson's, is not affected by the subsequent progress of the seasons, becoming thus a sort of mythical, eternal landscape:

> Prospect a landscape of interminable lawns, a tedious champaign diversified by groves, green savannah where your eye, dear reader, will be as deeply lost as in these pages' whiteness. [. . .] Of flowers, assume abundance, not by seasons of the temperate year, but all in endless blossom; of ferns and grasses, all the known varieties, with specimens of fungus, toadstool, blight, rust, parasite, gall, and insect-eating plant. (Sykes Davies 1935a: 3)

However, it is still possible to perceive in the opening sentence some overt evocations of Thomson's lines in "Summer": "Plains immense / Lie stretch'd below, interminable Meads, / And vast Savannahs, where the wandering Eye, / Unfixt, is in a verdant Ocean lost" (Thomson 1981: 94). Indeed, Thomson's and Sykes Davies's descriptions of nature are not naturalistic, but mythical, in which the landscape and its inhabitants undergo transformations and personifications in an almost fairy-tale-like manner. As we see, the initial description of the landscape in *Petron* is in accord with Sykes Davies's aesthetics of excess, mentioned above, for everything exists in this universe in excess and, although the pathways are "neatly kept" (by the hedge keeper whom, the reader later learns, is a histrionic man himself), these are trodden by

> young innocent love, by ambition, by slouching defeat, by strutting pride, by stealth, by sloth, lurching as he goes: by all kinds of beetles, worms, weevils, and the red ants that war with the black, and the back ants that war with the red: by cockroaches, wireworms, centipedes, earwigs, woodlice, and all the friends of man that bear hard coats and have more than one leg: by young men and women: by boys and girls: and by Petron. (3-4)

It has to be explained that the world described here shares as many features with Alice's Wonderland as with the reality of 1930s Europe. Certainly, the relationship between the menacing, metamorphosing landscape and Petron's misery (and Petron is in a way a universal figure, an everyman) is one of the aspects that are exploited throughout the book (even if we know that it is Petron's deluded vision that transforms and distorts reality), and which is also present in Thomson's *Seasons*. Moreover, Thomson's descriptions, although pleasant at points, also indulge in the terrors of nature, with its wild beasts and menacing and inexplicable phenomena in a way which can only be described, in Sykes Davies's terms, as *algolagnic*, for they seem to take pleasure in the recollection of those painful experiences.[228] Regarding this,

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[228] The term "algolagnic" was used by Sykes Davies in "Surrealism at this Time and Place" (1936) to describe the writings of Gothic and Romantic authors (Ann Radcliffe, Lewis, Charles Maturin, Lord Byron and William Blake, among others), "obsessed with the idea of pleasure obtained through cruelty,

in his introduction to the 1981 edition of *The Seasons*, James Sambrook finds elements of Lucretius's *De rerum natura* in Thomson's work, especially in passages that dwell on human misery (in Thomson 1981: xxiv).[229] So, correspondences are clearly found between *Petron* and these texts, as Petron is constantly assailed by the metamorphosing objects and creatures which surround him, or with which he comes into contact.

I have already commented on the monstrous shepherds who cry at each other about the misery and futility of earthly existence; at the beginning of this passage, they are described through similes which confuse their shapes with the natural landscape: "On either side stood a shepherd of monstrous size, whose mouth was like a cavern, whose legs were like pine trees, and about whose feet lay flocks of gigantic sheep" (Sykes Davies 1935a: 10). However, the metamorphosis is double for, at the end of the passage, we realise that it is not that their shapes resemble the natural landscape, but rather that there are no shepherds at all, but only mountains, and that the cries that Petron hears, like the giants themselves, are his own fabrication:

> in the improving light Petron saw that the giants were not what they seemed. Their mouths were caverns in the hillside, their legs were pine trees, their eyes were dark peat pools, their navels were places where ancient meteors had fallen, their private parts were masses of broken boulders, and their voices were nothing more than the sound of the stream in the bottom of the valley, echoed and contorted in the folds of the hills above and in the two caves which he had taken for giants' mouths. (12)

In this case, as Sykes Davies himself acknowledged, there is also a great deal of Chant I of Lautréamont's *Maldoror* (1869) in this passage, even if only in the general manner: "The dogs howl at the northern stars, at the eastern stars, and the southern stars, at the westerns stars; at the moon; at the mountains which at a distance resemble giant rocks reclining in the shadows; at the keen air they breathe in deep lungfuls, burning and reddening their nostrils" (Lautréamont 1965: 13).

Following this, in spite of Petron's realisation that the giants are actually mountains and that their voices are nothing but the murmurs of a nearby stream, he remains "much disturbed" by their "gossip" (Sykes Davies 1935a: 13). Similarly after the bandits' and the

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inflicted or received, sadistic or masochistic" (Sykes Davies 1971: 160). Mario Praz's study of this element in the French and British tradition, *The Romantic Agony* (1933), influenced Sykes Davies's development of an *algolagnic sensibility* in his texts.

[229] Sykes Davies himself had also worked on Lucretius's *De rerum natura* and he contributed to R.C. Trevelyan's 1937 English edition with his "Macaulay's Marginalia to Lucretius".

beating passage commented above, another disturbing metamorphosis takes place as Petron accidentally steps on a toadstool:

> Turning his head [Petron] saw an idiot rising from the earth where the toadstool had been. Once again poor Petron is involved in a distressing procession, himself walking briskly down the road, the idiot following with curious inarticulate cries. As he moved, his lower jaw, which hung down between his knees, bumped and banged on the road like a loose stick behind a cart, or broken harness on a runaway horse. From time to time he would spit out broken pieces of tooth, and tatters of flesh which the stones tore from his lips and chin. (20)

The moron manages to painfully articulate his thoughts, "talking of antiquity, grief, and the antiquity of grief: of memory, pain, and the memory of pain" (21), as he cries:

> Memory is a dog that returns ever to its own vomit. But you, O my persecutor, my fast-trotter, my fleeing foe, you who turn tail but dare not, though your feet itch, break into the downright run of defeat, you call to memory for the stick you have cast, yet when I bring it to you in my teeth, you make off, mistaking my intentions. Little can you know of antiquity, anger, and the antiquity of anger, and how fury displaces kindness in the man misunderstood. (21)

As we can see, in spite of this creature being one of the most idiotic and repulsive in the book, and in spite of the apparent incoherence and confusion of his speech, he is also one of the most articulate characters. Also, a double image emerges as Petron becomes both the persecutor (looking for answers to his grief, pain and anger) and the runaway (fleeing from them). This passage is not devoid of psychoanalytical significance and, in a way, provides a summary of the quest that the book as a whole proposes: the descent into the unconscious and the exploration of repressed fears and desires in order to come to terms with the ugliness of our reality, which is indeed full of grief, pain and anger. Also, the recollection and re-enactment of distressing and painful experiences responds, as Freud argued in his essay *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), to an instinct for self-preservation which seeks mastery over reality, an idea which is also central to George Barker's *Calamiterror* (1937), as will be seen. The satisfaction of this self-annihilating desire underlies many of Sykes Davies's images, especially those in which temptation and punishment merge: the image of Petron being irresistibly urged towards his death by an army of marching trees; the image of the mesmerised traveller who finds his death contemplating a field covered with human hands; or the image of the tree stump, which is both alluring and repulsive.

The final section in *Petron* is significantly introduced by a quotation from *Hamlet* ("O God! I could be bounded in a nut-shell, and count myself a king of infinite space, were it not that I have bad dreams") for it offers a series of disconnected nightmares and visions of doom which the character experiences throughout an unspecified period of time.[230] This section is full of the murder plots, mysteries, obscure dealings, fantastic phenomena, haunted houses, neglected gardens, grey forests, cemeteries, burials, corpses and ghosts which characterise much Gothic fiction. Lautréamont's *Maldoror* is also present in the macabre oneirism of this third part, an influence which permeates the imagery of the text, like the "haunting charm"[231] of the rhythms of Disney's *Silly Symphonies* such as "The Skeleton Dance", "Springtime" or "Hell's Bells" (all from 1929). Certainly, this haunting rhythm and the sombre atmosphere which is persistently conveyed are the only elements which help bring together the very disparate images in this section: spiders weave webs on gibbets (Sykes Davies 1935a: 60); an old man whose "hands and feet are cut off, so that he cannot move; his tongue is torn from his mouth so that he cannot speak", writes on the walls on his *prison*, which may as well be a castle or a sanatorium, with the bleeding stump of his arm (61); a coffin is sacrilegiously assaulted and shattered to pieces, exposing a disease-ridden body (62-63); eerie cries issue from the wounds of a dead cattle-dealer and are only responded to by a party of ravenous wolves (65); a field of hands mesmerises travellers, who, not ceasing to contemplate the uncanny phenomenon, die from thirst, hunger and lack of sleep (69-70); a ghostly frenzied horse gallops the earth carrying the headless body of his young owner (71-73).[232] However, there are other visions that require further analysis: for example, the aloes passage, in which the blossoming of this plant is described as a supernatural phenomenon, was taken from Pétrus Borel's *Madame Putiphar* (1839). The influence of Borel's work, with its indulgent treatment of pain and torture, which finds correspondences in Sykes Davies's algolagnic sensibility, is to be felt in the work of several Surrealists across Europe. Borel's *Madame Putiphar* (1839), probably not his best work but certainly a Surrealist antecedent, was praised by Breton and Éluard. In *Le poète et son ombre* (1963), Éluard defined the significance of *Madame Putiphar* for Surrealism:

> Tous les héros de Madame Putiphar sont la proie de la plus implacable fatalité.
> Personnages singulièrement vertueux, ils succombent tous de mort violente et leurs

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[230] *Hamlet* II ii 261-3.

[231] The phrase "haunting charm" was used to describe the rhythm of Sykes Davies's poetic prose in a review of *Petron* in *Poetry Review* 27 (1936): 240.

[232] Although not explicitly acknowledged by Sykes Davies, the influence of Washington Irving's *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow* (1820) seems plausible here.

malheurs ne cessent qu'avec leur vie. Le seul que l'auteur laisse subsister devient fou après d'atroces tortures. [. . .] Pétrus Borel se situe admirablement entre Sade et Lautréamont. Son œuvre présente le même caractère d'absolu et d'audace que la leur.[233] (Éluard 1963: 55)

Petron, the character, seems to have been constructed in the image of the author of *Madame Putiphar,* and even the name of Sykes Davies's protagonist evokes phonetically Borel's pseudonym, Pétrus.[234] Also, Breton devoted one section of his *Anthology of Black Humour* (1940) to Borel, in which Théophile Gautier's words, quoted by Breton, apply to Borel as much as to Petron: "We feel that he is not our contemporary, that nothing about him suggests modern man, but rather that he must come from the depths of the past" (in Breton 1997: 76). Similarly, Petron also emerges from the depths of a collective past, as the simple mention of his name recovers the long-lost memories of the common unconscious (Sykes Davies 1935a: 4). On the other hand, Breton's description of Borel's death could serve as a description of Petron's own death, if it were to happen in the text:

> Up to the end, this man, whom life spared so few hardships, never argued with the forces of nature. Under the broiling sun he said: 'I will not cover my head. Nature does what she does perfectly well, and it is not our place to correct her. If my hair falls out, it simply means that my forehead is now meant to go bare.' Several days later, he died from sunstroke. (Breton 1997: 76)

The same macabre irony underlies Petron's misadventures in the book, for in his wanderings he is also led by the uncanny forces of nature, its omens and signs. And by being excessively rational, his attitude verges on the absurd too, leading him to self-annihilation.

Thus, Borel's influence on *Petron* is to be understood in terms of a conspicuous Sadean, algolagnic sensibility. Nevertheless, textual borrowing was also Sykes Davies's way of paying homage to Borel's novel which, as he acknowledged in one of his brief annotations to *Petron*, he enjoyed reading at the time of *Petron*'s composition.[235] The following passage from

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[233] "All the heroes in *Madame Putiphar* are prey to the utmost implacable misfortune. Peculiarly virtuous characters, they all die violent deaths and their afflictions only end when their lives do. The only one that the author allows to survive is crazed by horrible tortures. [. . .] Pétrus Borel is admirably placed between Sade and Lautréamont. His work has the same uncompromising and bold character as theirs" (my translation).

[234] Observe also a possible abbreviation of Petronius, the author of the *Satyricon*, a precursor of the picaresque genre. In *The Land Unknown* (1975), Kathleen Raine remembers that Sykes Davies and herself used to read Petronius, Lautréamont and *Ubu Roi* around the time *Petron* was written (Raine 1975: 70).

[235] He must have read it in French, for there is no English edition of the novel to date.

Chapter XLVI of *Madame Putiphar* was literally translated (presumably by Sykes Davies himself) and incorporated into *Petron*:

> Ces arbrisseaux rampant sur le sol et le long de ces murailles, sont des câpriers, répondait le bénédictin, charmé d'avoir une occasion d'étaler son savoir ; les Provençaux l'appellent encor en grec tapenos, de l'adjectif *ταπεινός*, qui veut dire bas, humble ou rampant. – Voici le lentisque et le térébinthe, qui touts deux daissent fluer une résine, et sur lesquels on greffe le pistachier, qui appartient au même genre. – Ici, sur le bord de la mer, vous voyez le myrte, dont les côtes maritimes de Saint-Tropez sont couvertes, et la belle Barba-Jovis aux feuilles argentées. [. . .] Oh ! pour cette plante bizarre qui vous fait pousser de s cris d'étonnement, c'est l'aloès ! *aloe folio in oblongum aculeum abeunte*; sa fleuraison est très-curieuse, mais extrêmement rare ; on assure qu'elle n'a lieu que touts les cent ans, quoique, par un phénomène inexplicable, en très-peu de temps sa tige s'élève jusqu'à trente pieds et jette quelques rameaux terminés par des bouquets de fleurs. Mais ce qu'il y a de plus merveilleux, c'est la détonation qui précède la naissance de sa tige, détonation tout-à-fait semblable à un violent coup de tonnerre, ou une décharge d'artillerie. (Borel 1972: 234-235)

As it has been anticipated, this corresponds to the aloes passage in Part III, one of Petron's oneiric visions:

> These shrubs which grow along the ground and at the foot of the walls are capers, still called by the natives *tapenos*, from the Greek *ταπεινός*, which means low or creeping. This is the mastic and the terebinth tree, which both exude a rich gum, and upon which we graft the pistachio, a tree of the same species. Here by the edge of the sea we have the myrtle, with which the whole coast is covered, and the lovely silver-leaved Jove's Beard. [. . .] Oh! And as for this bizarre plant which draws from you such exclamations of wonder, it is the aloes*, aloe folio in oblongum aculeum abeunte*. Its blossoming is indeed most curious, though extremely rare, for we are assured that it only takes place once in each century. But then –inexplicable phenomenon! –in a very short time its stem shoots up to a height of thirty feet, and throws out several branches tipped with bouquets of flowers. But most wonderful of all is the detonation which precedes the birth of this stem, a detonation like a violent clap of thunder, an earthquake, or an

avalanche. You may the more easily find other similitudes yourself should you be a frequenter of funerals or athletic festivals.[236] (Sykes Davies 1935a: 67-68)

Although some slight alterations have been made to Borel's text (especially those which contain geographical references), it is kept almost intact by Sykes Davies, who purposefully adds the vocative "madam", a very subtle clue which he offers his readers, and a wink to his source text: "Ah! And do not, madam, touch this sacred shrub which is by your knee" (67). The fantastic element emerges in this passage, otherwise dominated by scientific discourse, as the blossoming of the aloe plant is described in a mystified manner as a *curious*, *rare* and *inexplicable* phenomenon which only takes place once in a hundred years. Conversely, the last line provides a comic relief and an absurd climax to an otherwise serious passage, and is a typical Sykes Davies addition. This addition creates an antithetical juxtaposition in which the almost poetic, grandiloquent description of the explosive blossoming of the plant is counterpointed by the more mundane or prosaic, and apparently irrelevant, reference to the attendance to funerals or athletic festivals. Of course, the connection is established by the detonations which, in the form of salvos or starting signals, generally accompany such events. But also, it must be noted that, whereas in Borel's text a simile is established between the detonation of the plant and a "décharge d'artillerie", a human form of destructive power, in *Petron* the reference is to the destructive powers of nature, "an earthquake, or an avalanche". This creates an interesting effect for, even if Sykes Davies strives to avoid all explicit allusion to material reality in the text, the use of collage as a citation technique contributes to the creation of a web of latent meanings which, not being present in the resulting text, may nevertheless be recovered through intertextual references. In a review of *Petron*, Herbert Read stated that the book "is pure fantasy; never for a moment does it compromise with that half-world which we are pleased to call reality" (Read 1935c: 92), and still the reader perceives in this passage a contrast between the fantastic world of dreams which Sykes Davies offers and the ugliness of that half-world to which Read refers, a world of absurd and meaningless *civilised* customs and immersed in a process of militarisation which would eventually lead to the Second World War.

Another nightmarish vision in Part III presents a house inhabited by birds, each of which is engaged in petty and uneventful actions which become mystified in an excessively detailed description which indulges in the marvellous:

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[236] The section which has been elided includes the Latin names of several plants which are not in Borel's original text. Probably, Sykes Davies was well acquainted with these names through his study of Classical botanical texts.

Throughout the day they fly from room to room scattering the dust into little clouds that catch the sun [. . .]. The smaller birds settle on chairs, tables, the back of settees and sofas, arranging their wings with sudden little flutters of restlessness. [. . .] a crow alights on a chandelier, which for a time wings to and fro with the impetus of its flight so that the bird is thrown off its balance, and falls to the ground. [. . .] A raven flies down to the piano, and produces as it slips along the keys a melancholy soft glissando, a chord which more slowly dies away from the notes held down by its weary weight.

(Sykes Davies 1935a: 64)

The theme of the empty house already appeared in a previous poem, "Music in an Empty House" (1928). Although the poem itself is not Surrealist, it does contain, like some other experimental poems which Sykes Davies published in *Experiment* (1928-1931), certain elements which already prefigure the development of his Surrealist poetics.[237] The passage in *Petron* is a stylistically improved version of the poem, which Sykes Davies described as "a strong phantasy" and prophetic of his later escape into music. In *Petron*'s house of birds, a structural equilibrium is created as the three main motifs (i.e. the empty house, the birds and music) become so closely connected that a new reality emerges. The questions posed at the end of the passage ("Are these birds real or artificial? To whom do they belong?), far from demanding an allegorical or biographical interpretation, which Sykes Davies himself dispelled, impose on the reader the need to question perception as an epistemological tool. Commenting on this passage, Sykes Davies stressed that

My self and its thoughts and feelings are not worth writing about. The last thing I want to do is to express my self. I want to make a shape, a form, so that it stands up, like the moulded clay on a potter's wheel. What fills the pot isn't my concern at all. It's just the debris of my life. It's the shape that matters, that makes the game worth the candle.

(Sykes Davies 1982b: 6-7)

These words, reminiscent of T.S. Eliot's argument that the poet has not a personality to express, but a medium, in his essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (1919), do not only manifest Sykes Davies's particular interest in form, analysed amply in the present study, but they also suggest that it is through shape, which is the only element that is shared by both writer and reader, that a rapport may be established between them, because meaning is not

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[237] In his early poems, such as "Vendice" (1929), "Poculum" (1929) or "Myth" (1930), Sykes Davies experimented with form and unconventional lay-out, silences and blank spaces, and simultaneity. Also, language acquires in them a plasticity which brings them closer to César Vallejo's Avant-Gardism in *Trilce* (1922), as he expands the graphic and phonic limits of the words, creating neologisms and portmanteau forms, a device of which he does not make use in his Surrealist texts.

transferable and is only created as new associations and new contextual parameters emerge in the interpretive process. If the writer creates a shape that, as Sykes Davies asserted, *stands*, then new meanings are always liable to emerge, and that is precisely where the significance of the true literary work lies.

This is very clearly seen in the last Surrealist poem which Sykes Davies wrote, "It Doesn't Look Like a Finger" (1938), in which he used a pre-existing shape in order to introduce notions of moral inculpation and political incrimination in response to a new political context (the rapid advance of Fascism in Europe in the 1930s) which bore no relation to the original context in which the pattern was created. Although Sykes Davies himself considered this poem to be "largely anti-Surrealist" (Sykes Davies 1978: 34), on account of the conscious ideological significance underlying its process of composition, it is in fact exemplary of the way in which image and ideology, form and content, aesthetics and ethics, became reconciled in British Surrealist writing of the 1930s. In this sense, whereas the images in *Petron* resemble more clearly the kind of irrational, convulsive images that we find in David Gascoyne's texts, this poem is closer to George Barker's *Calamiterror* (1937): constructed automatically on a structure which favours the emergence of unconscious associations and striking juxtapositions (a repetitive, spiralling structure, susceptible of being expanded indefinitely, as in those patterns of the folk tradition of which Sykes Davies was fond), Sykes Davies's poem develops a succession of metamorphosing images which attempt to capture the elusive appearance of an overwhelming reality:

> It doesn't look like an eye it looks like a bowl of rotten fruit
>
> It doesn't look like my mother in the garden it looks like my father when he
>
> came up from the sea covered with shells and tangle
>
> It doesn't look like a feather it looks like a finger with broken wings
>
> It doesn't look like the old woman's mouth it looks like a handful of broken
>
> feathers or a revolver buried in cinders. (Sykes Davies 1938: 7)

In "An Epilaugh for Surrealism" (1978), Sykes Davies recalled the anecdote, from which this formal pattern emerged, in which an ice-hockey player was hit on the head while playing and his eye, a glass eye, fell out. The game was stopped and, while everybody was looking for it, the player kept saying "it doesn't look like a marble, it looks like a watch-glass. It doesn't look like a marble, it looks like …" (Sykes Davies 1978: 34). Sykes Davies explained the way in which this structure (or aesthetic form) found its content (or its ideological meaning) with the *Anschluss*, the German annexation of Austria, in 1938: "This pattern", Sykes Davies stressed, "had to wait four or five years till it was joined by its content, and its content was lucky to find

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its pattern waiting for it so patiently" (34). Certainly, this pattern of "image and anti-image", as he called it, served him both as a form of denunciation of the aggression performed by Fascist powers and a warning to his fellow Surrealists. The Spanish Civil War was already a telling sign that the images of pain and pleasure in which the Surrealists indulged, the images of monstrous metamorphoses which liberated unconscious desires and of collective crimes committed as attacks on morality and reason, had turned against them: in "The Scales of Disaster" (1982), Sykes Davies also described "It Doesn't Look Like a Finger" as a "curse on the Spanish fascists, and a warning to my friends that the world was turning nasty, and would turn nastier yet" (Sykes Davies 1982b: 10).

Before we continue with the analysis of the nightmares in the final section of *Petron*, let us focus on the ways in which the metamorphosing image of the finger is used to defamiliarise perception and hence to convey alternative views and ideas of material reality which support a definite ideological stance. This poem is dominated by a reigning interrogation, a kind of enigma hidden behind the ubiquitous pronoun "it", which controls the whole composition. Paradoxically enough, it is the fact that *it* does not look like a finger that makes it a finger. Through this play of image and anti-image and contradictory appearances, Sykes Davies deconstructs the perceived object. His Surrealist images are built on associations which connect dissimilar or irreconcilable realities in the making of a plausible but still elusive meaning, as the finger keeps metamorphosing and its essence becomes ungraspable. By means of this structure, Sykes Davies is not only pushing back the frontiers of meaning and language, but of reality itself, bringing about the crisis of the object which Breton had announced in his "Second Manifesto of Surrealism" (1930). By shaking the foundations of the bourgeois arrangement of the physical and moral world, this poem attacks the dictatorial oppression of the Fascist state. Also, by underscoring the deceitful nature of fabricated worldviews and suggesting the possibility that another reality is possible, it unveils the gaps in the ideological constructions of Fascist discourse. Sykes Davies's images question the very nature of reality and its relationship with language. He deforms and distorts a bourgeois world that has made language fake and unable to communicate meaningfully. Reality itself is presented as protean, lacking in essence, as materialism has eradicated contingency and every commodity (language included) has become necessary but equally useless.

The use of the finger as the leading motif in the poem, gradually transforming itself into a series of unlikely realities, prompts associations with idiomatic phrases such as "the finger on the trigger" or "the pointing finger", which contribute to its inculpatory and denunciatory tone. Its monotonous rhythm, which enacts that of courtroom testimonies, is

abruptly interrupted by an enraged attempt to fight against physical abuse, torture and, eventually, death ("KEEP YOUR FILTHY HANDS OFF MY FRIENDS USE THEM ON / YOUR BITCHES OR / YOURSELVES BUT KEEP THEM OFF MY FRIENDS") and by a police warning ("AND ANYTHING YOU SEE WILL BE USED AGAINST YOU"). By making use of this kind of authoritarian and abusive language, Sykes Davies counteracts the despotic discourse of Fascism, revealing it as a form of aggression. Also, whereas in the former the emphasis is placed on the filthy hands, implying the corruption of those forms of authority, in the latter, the use of the verb "see" instead of "say" is indicative of the atmosphere of anxiety and paranoia of the late 1930s in Europe, at a time when the prohibition to speak (implied by the paronomastic "broken cup" - "like a cut lip") had been made extensive to the prohibition to see, for admitting to having seen the crime became an admission that the crime had actually taken place.[238] The poet, a seer and a visionary, became trapped in a state of ideological persecution and arrest, forced to close not only his mouth, but also his eyes. This emphasis placed on seeing and witnessing was also crucial in Spain during the Civil War and beyond and in Nazi Germany, where the spy became a key figure in the apparatus of the Fascist state.

The image of the digested finger ("It doesn't look like something to eat it looks like something eaten") suggests, not only the metamorphosis of active (or inchoative) into passive, but also a metamorphosis of temptation into disgust. The eater becomes the eaten, projecting the image of the Fascist as a cannibal, an idea which is also recurrent in Salvador Dalí's paintings of Nazi iconography and in George Barker's *Calamiterror* (1937). Sykes Davies elaborates further this food imagery through associations with roundness: the eye (with its Bataillean evocation, which is analysed in depth in the section devoted to Barker) the bowl, the rotten fruit and the old woman's mouth bring in notions of decomposition and putrefaction: physical decay is, as in the image of the rotting donkeys in Salvador Dalí and Luis Buñuel's *Un Chien Andalou* (1929), linked to the moral corruption of the Fascist figure. Sykes Davies's warning against the threat posed by this figure becomes increasingly urgent as the finger becomes his own and also "yours" (his friends'): "It doesn't look like yours it looks like mine / BUT IT IS YOURS NOW / SOON IT WILL LOOK LIKE YOURS" (Sykes Davies 1938: 7). Thus, the accusatory finger may point in their direction, making them become the victims, or they may point it in the direction of others, making them become the culprits: certainly, in Spain and Germany, many deaths were caused by accusations of anonymous pointing fingers. Then, the

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[238] The fear of losing freedom of expression was especially felt by British intellectuals. See, for example, E.M. Forster's opening speech at the First International Congress of Writers for the Defence of Culture (Paris, June 1935), reproduced in *Pour la défense de la culture. Les textes du Congrès international des écrivains. Paris, juin 1935* (1985): 75.

revolver becomes an extension of the pointing finger, creating a total identification between the one who accuses and the one who kills. These instances of identification and ambiguous double and multiple images are, as we have seen, recurrent in *Petron* too, where new mythologies are created through the defamiliarisation of perception and the presentation of alternative realities, or of a constantly changing reality. These contribute to the collapse of the old mythologies on which the power of the dominant bourgeois ideology rests, and serve to unveil the gaps in the apparently coherent worldviews fostered by totalitarian and autocratic systems of thought; also, by rejecting the possibility of absolutes and by incorporating ambiguity and fragmentation as part of their own configuration, these new visions which Sykes Davies proposes, resist assimilation into the homogenising and unifying wholes of Fascist discourse. The ideological dimension of this type of Surrealist images made of Surrealism an impossible idiom for autocratic discourse, and this is certainly one of the reasons why the literary and artistic dogmas of both Nazism and Communism rejected the Surrealist aesthetics as a feasible form for conveying the totalitarian ideas which they pursued.[239]

What also anticipates the effects of Fascist oppression and war are the images which introduce the final section of *Petron*:

> Imagine, dear friend, outlined against that notable and profound blueness of summer evenings, a vast expanse of netting, in the meshes of which are hanging arms, hands, legs, and feet, but recently torn from the bodies upon which they grew, still alive, and twitching a little, so that the expanse of netting quivers in the calm air, much as a spider's web might tremble in the sunny stillness of noon from the struggles of a newly-ensnared fly, not yet numb from the poison which will so soon paralyse it, and still seeking to escape the implacable jaws of its captor, who lurks close by in his filmy lair, arrogantly immobile, sure of his prey.[240] (Sykes Davies 1935a: 55)

This passage, reminiscent of Inez Holden's visions of garments scattered on treetops after a bombing during the London Blitz, conveys the sense of persecution that was felt in the years leading up to the Second World War. The image of dismembered bodies and recently torn limbs painfully anticipated the visions of bodies mutilated by aerial bombings and of piled-up corpses in concentration camps which would become frequent during the war. Also, the image

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[239] Other Avant-Garde *languages*, conspicuously the Futurism of Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, with its strong emphasis on power, on the absolute concepts of beauty and progress and its dehumanised outlook on existence, was more in accord with the aesthetics and ethics of totalitarian regimes.

[240] In his personal notes, Sykes Davies explained this image comically as "produced by a high-speed centrifugal roundabout which Petron made. It whirled people round until their limbs flew off. The netting was put up by order of the Borough Council, to stop the fragments from flying over the town". The Papers of Hugh Sykes Davies, Box 8, item 63.

of the spider, implacable and arrogant, preying on its victim offers a depiction of Fascist officials as devouring vermin, and provides another frame in which to analyse Sykes Davies's re-elaboration of a nursery rhyme theme in which a succession of spiders weave their webs on a gibbet (60). The spider, the reader knows now, is the Fascist executioner and its victims are the children whose innocence is perverted by the horrors of war, if not completely annihilated by it. However, in spite of the seemingly evident ideological implications of these images, Sykes Davies still insists on the need for the reader to become involved in the interpretive process, so that the significance of the passage lies not on a closed message provided by the text itself, but on what readers make of it through the experience of their own unconscious fears and the recovery of long-lost memories. Thus, the narrator, disturbed by the twitching of the mutilated limbs which causes the net to stir, urges the reader to provide an explanation which he himself fails to produce: "if I do not explain to you how this curious phenomenon was brought about, will your own tenuous and shifty imaginations be stirred by all manner of speculations and conjectures concerning it" (56). And finally, a new process of identification between narrator and reader occurs as they share the same fears: "Listen, and do not forget that the random twitching of your imaginations are as fearful to me as the inexplicable motions of the spider's web, or of the net outlined against the sky, are to both of us" (56). In this way, it is not only reality and the language used to describe it, but the reading experience itself that becomes defamiliarised in the text for the reader becomes, as I stated at the beginning of my analysis, the only narrator who, by creating new associations between the disparate and irreconcilable elements of the aggregate, creates a new text and, by extension, a new reality altogether.

As we have seen, image and ideology, language and thought, are inextricably connected in the Surrealist writings of Hugh Sykes Davies, a writer who considered form to be the central element in all literary creation. Given the context of the turbulent historical moment, these texts reflect his concerns with the rise of Fascism, the inevitability of conflict and the dogma of authoritarian discourses. In the following section I discuss the work of David Gascoyne, the most prolific of the British Surrealists, for whom the psychoanalytical aspects of literary composition, also present in Sykes Davies's concept of natural or instinctive poetry, were uppermost. Gascoyne's excessively mystic conception of poetic creation contrasts with Sykes Davies's more materialist approach, and this accounts for the difficulties which the former found in reconciling aesthetic form and ideological content in his poems. Nevertheless, some kind of reconciliation is achieved, and the following pages are devoted to the discovery

of those moments in which the distance between image and ideology, but also between subject and object, is bridged.

2. The Convulsive Image: David Gascoyne.

> Clear night!
> He has no need of candles who can see
> a longer, more celestial day than ours.
> David Gascoyne, "Tenebrae". *Hölderlin's Madness* (1938): 41.

This section focuses on the Surrealist poetry of David Gascoyne, the author of the "Premier Manifeste Anglais du Surréalisme" (1935) and the most precocious and prolific poet of British Surrealism. Gascoyne wrote the first Surrealist poem to be published in English, "And the Seventh Dream is the Dream of Isis" (1933), and his poetry differs in many ways from that of the other poets dealt with in this study in that it is closer to Breton's original definition of Surrealism as pure "psychic automatism" (Breton 1972: 26), at a time when Surrealism had already evolved from its intuitive phase into a materialist stage. In this sense, Gascoyne's poems are anachronistic: written in the mid-thirties, they respond to an early configuration of the movement, based on irrationalism, a mystic conception of poetry and the liberation of repressed desire. This was outmoded by the movement's gradual progression into a materialist stance, and a more systematic deployment of ideological positions through poetic activity. Curiously enough, the reconciliation anticipated in the title of this study remains somehow tentative in the case of Gascoyne, as he struggled to resolve the incipient tension between his increasing political concerns and his transcendental conception of poetry. This chapter shows that for Gascoyne image and ideology were nearly irreconcilable: the closer he got to the materialist stance, the farther away he withdrew from Surrealism, eventually ceasing to write Surrealist verse in order to continue his poetic search for an *unknown* which Surrealism had failed, or so he felt, to recover for him. In these pages I show that this search was not completely sterile and that some reconciliation is certainly achieved in Gascoyne's poems: in moments of convulsive revelation, such as those reached in mystic trance, hysteric fits or orgasmic climaxes, a connection with another reality takes place. These are moments of intense *rapprochement* in which the distance between the material and the immaterial, the conscious and the unconscious, is obliterated. It is in these moments that one witnesses a true, albeit brief, reconciliation of image and ideology in Gascoyne's poetics: his images are read, not only in terms of psychoanalytical exploration and mystic revelation, but also as signs of a definite ideological position regarding the material conditions in which his poetry was written.

2.1. The Poet that Went Mad.

In a 1992 interview, David Gascoyne described himself as "a poet who wrote himself out when young and then went mad" (Gascoyne 1998: 47). Although objectively accurate, this self-portrait is misleading if strictly applied to his poetic trajectory, rather than his life.[241] David Gascoyne was born in Harrow, near London, on the 10th of October 1916. Like Barker, Gascoyne attended the Regent Street Polytechnic in London and did not go to university. His poetic vocation was confirmed when he published at the age of sixteen a collection of Symbolist poetry, *Roman Balcony and Other Poems* (1932). Gascoyne became involved in the bohemian intellectual life of Parton Street, where he would also meet Roger Roughton. David Archer's Parton Bookshop welcomed the subversive ideologies and poetic experimentation of the European Avant-Garde, including Surrealism. Gascoyne was soon drawn to the work of the Surrealists, to which he had access in the journals of the time, especially *transition* and back issues of *La révolution surréaliste* and *Le surréalisme au service de la révolution*, and in several visits to Paris, the first of which took place in 1933. In Paris he met British artists associated with the Surrealist movement, such as Stanley William Hayter and Julian Trevelyan, and other figures of the French Avant-Garde like Max Ernst. The October 1933 issue of Grigson's *New Verse* published Gascoyne's "And the Seventh Dream is the Dream of Isis", considered the first Surrealist poem to be published in English. This was followed by a series of prose pieces under the title "Surrealist Cameos" in *The New English Weekly* in November 1933.[242] Between 1933 and 1936 Gascoyne's Surrealist texts, both originals and translations, mainly poetic but also in prose, were published in several literary journals of the time: *This Quarter*, *New Verse*, *The Listener*, *The Bookman*, *New Republic*, *The European Quarterly*, *The Scottish Bookman*, *Janus* and *Contemporary Poetry and Prose*.[243] This established him as the most outstanding literary figure of British Surrealism, even before a Surrealist Group was instituted in Britain.

In 1935 Gascoyne persuaded Cobden-Sanderson, the publisher of his first novel, the semi-autobiographical *Opening Day* (1933), to commission him to write *A Short Survey of Surrealism* (1935). With a dust jacket designed by Max Ernst, Gascoyne's own translations of poems by the French Surrealists and his well-informed knowledge of the movement, *A Short Survey* was the first study of Surrealism which appeared in book form in English. The book is still appreciated for Gascoyne's visionary outlook on Surrealism one year before the sweeping outburst of the London Exhibition and for his acute and intuitive approach to the aesthetic and

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[241] Gascoyne's biography has been published recently by Robert Fraser, *Night Thoughts: the Surreal Life of the Poet David Gascoyne* (2012).
[242] The title was changed to "Automatic Album Leaves" in *Collected Poems 1988*.
[243] See bibliography for further details.

ethic complexities of the movement. In order to inform his research, he travelled again to Paris, where he finally met the central figures of the French Group (Éluard, Breton, Dalí, Domínguez, Ray, Hugnet) and attended some of their meetings at the Café de la Place Blanche. A visionary of the impact that Surrealism was to have in British intellectual circles, Gascoyne published independently the "Premier Manifeste Anglais du Surréalisme" (1935) in the French Avant-Garde periodical *Cahiers d'Art*. The "English Manifesto of Surrealism" was written in French at a time when there was not, properly speaking, an official Surrealism movement in Britain. It was also in Paris where he met Roland Penrose. They shared an enthusiasm for Surrealism as a permanent state of non-conformism and revolt, and decided to import these ideas to Britain, in whose literary tradition they already saw signs of the irrational at work. The "Manifesto", in which Gascoyne outlines the movement's literary and ideological position, is decidedly the product of a single person, even if Gascoyne was supported in this enterprise by Paris-based British artists like Trevelyan and Hayter. In fact, one of Hayter's engravings accompanies Gascoyne's text in *Cahiers d'Art*. The "Manifesto" is also a product of its time: a brief reference to possible attacks from the International Association of Writers for the Defence of Culture shows the impact that the recent confrontations between Communists and Surrealists at its First Congress, together with René Crevel's suicide, had in young Gascoyne.[244] Also, he repeatedly attacks both individualistic and propagandistic literature and defends Surrealism as the dialectical solution to the problem of reconciling poetic creation and the poet's relation to society: "La poésie n'a pas à se confondre avec la propagande. Elle est l'acte par lequel l'homme parvient à la plus complète connaissance de lui-même" (Gascoyne 1935j: 106).[245] For Gascoyne poetry is an activity of the mind whose images are forms of deeper revelation. Rather than a programmatic text establishing the principles of an emerging group, it is much more a product of its time, an attempt to consolidate an otherwise transient stage of the movement's development. At points it seems that the text has been dictated by Breton, and it would be difficult to justify its stubborn adherence to the historical materialism of Marx, Engels and Lenin, if it were not for Breton's own insistence on the matter at the time: the text thus becomes a personal revenge on the committee of the Congress for sabotaging his

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[244] The Surrealist poet and Communist René Crevel (1900-1935) committed suicide arguably due, among a series of personal issues, to the irreconcilable strains between Surrealism and Communism, which reached a climactic point at the time of the First International Congress of Writers for the Defence of Culture in Paris in 1935. Gascoyne was in Paris at the time of Crevel's death and he joined the Surrealists' meeting at the Café de la Place Blanche where the issue was discussed.

[245] "Poetry must not become confused with propaganda. It is the act through which man arrives at the most complete knowledge of himself" (my translation).

lecture.[246] The "Manifesto" does not respond to Gascoyne's own conceptualisation of Surrealism (as will be seen, he found it difficult to come to terms with the movement's excessive emphasis on materialism), but rather to Breton's desire to counteract the Communist attacks with a *more-Communist-than-the-Communists* attitude.[247] The "Manifesto" becomes obsolete almost as it is being written, for Breton's final move towards Trotskyism was already imminent.

Deeply immersed in the activities and meetings leading to the formal institution of Surrealism in Britain and gradually, albeit somehow reluctantly, involved in political action, Gascoyne saw the publication of his first and only collection of Surrealist verse, *Man's Life is this Meat* in 1936. This was a climactic year for him, but it also marked a decisive turning point in his attitude to poetry and politics. Gascoyne was a member of the organising committee of the International Surrealist Exhibition in London. To the Exhibition he contributed an object-poem, *Homage to André Breton*, and three collages: *Perseus and Andromeda*, *The Annunciation* and *A Critical Visit*.[248] He was also the ideologue of the Surrealist Phantom which Sheila Legge impersonated the opening day of the Exhibiton, taking the idea of a woman with a head of roses from Dalí's *Femme à tête de roses* (1935). His contribution to Surrealism as a translator of programmatic texts by Breton and poems by the French Surrealists is notable. All of these had a significant influence in his Surrealist poetics. Among other works, he translated Dalí's *The Conquest of the Irrational* (1935) and Breton's *What is Surrealism?* (1936). Together with Humphrey Jennings, he co-edited an anthology of Peret's poems in English translation, *Remove your Hat* (1936), and he also contributed with George Reavey, Ruthven Todd and Samuel Beckett, among others, to the translation of a collection of Éluard's poems under the title *Thorns of Thunder* (1936).[249]

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[246] Ideological concomitances are found in Gascoyne's "Manifesto" and in the tract issued by the Surrealist Group "On the Time when the Surrealists were Right" (1935): denunciation of the Communist manipulation of Crevel's suicide, repudiation of imperialism, nationalism and rearmament as a response to the 1935 Franco-Soviet Pact and an already outdated, in the context of 1935 Communism, recourse to Lenin to claim the freedom of speech that was denied in the Congress.

[247] The expression "more Communist than the Communists" was used by Roger Roughton in *Contemporary Poetry and Prose* to criticise Herbert Read's statements in the *International Surrealist Bulletin* no. 4 (Roughton 1936i: 74). It points to a transitory phase in the development of the Surrealist politics in which the Communist attacks were countered by a return to Marx's dialectical materialism, deliberately disregarding what the Communists had to say about it. This phase took place between the abandonment of Communism and the adoption of Trotskyism and Anarchism.

[248] Of the three, *Perseus and Andromeda* (1936) is the only one known to have survived and is kept now in the Tate. It provides a Surrealistic visual depiction of the Greek myth: on a ravaged shore, Andromeda (human head and body of a badminton racket) is exposed as pray to the sea monsters (three oversized seals), while a dysfunctional male figure with mobility difficulties does not seem to live up to the expectation to the title's myth.

[249] *Remove your Hat* was originally published as *A Bunch of Carrots* (1936), which was censored.

Of all the British Surrealists, Gascoyne was the one who felt closer to the French. His poetic heritage, as will be seen in his poems, is an eclectic European one. Of him Barker would assert: "I can never remember whether David Gascoyne really spoke only French at this time, or whether he merely happened to give this impression" (Barker 1971: 54). In her "Introduction" to Gascoyne's *Selected Prose 1934-1996*, Kathleen Raine, recalls Philippe Soupault telling her that "David is not an English poet, he is a French poet writing in English" (Gascoyne 1998: 15). Nevertheless, as Alan Young asserts in his review of Gascoyne's *Paris Journal 1937-1939* (1978), "despite his knowledge of the French language, of French life and letters, Gascoyne is essentially an *English* artist; his problem is the shaping vision of the English language within English culture" (Young 1980: 65). His poetry is as influenced by the French writers whom he translated, as it is by the poets of the dissident English tradition whom the Surrealists admired: Young, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Blake and Carroll. Particularly, Blake's visionary images and his dialectical synthesis of fundamental contradictions in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1790) find correspondences in Gascoyne's prophetic images and his ambivalent position towards spiritual or religious belief and material or sexual desire. In a way, as Gascoyne had anticipated in his "Manifesto", Surrealism was not an exotic import, but rather a system of thought concerned with the mechanisms of poetic inspiration already present in the English tradition, and yet his poetry differs greatly from that of other British Surrealists. His use of psychic automatism for the formation of unconscious images contrasts with Charles Madge's and Humphrey Jennings's collagistic technique and re-elaboration of found images. Unlike Sykes Davies and George Barker, he is not concerned with the poetic exploration of the abject and the sublime, but rather with the experience of the poetic marvellous. Moreover, Gascoyne's poetry, belonging to an intuitive line of Surrealist experimentation, disregards concerns which are central to the more materialist stance of Roland Penrose and Roger Roughton, who shared common views on industrialism and a distrust of official rhetoric. Nevertheless, they all shared an acute awareness of the "English Death" or "English Disease" to which Gascoyne alludes in his *Paris Journal* (Gascoyne 1978: 31, 54): this is the English lack of taste attacked by Read or the "contemporary inertia" denounced by Barker.[250] They all transformed French Surrealism in order to accommodate it to the new temporal and spatial coordinates specific to the British case, in order to reconcile their condition as both British and Surrealists. What makes Gascoyne's poetics peculiar is his spiritual quest for an absolute that transcends the materiality of Penrose's idea of poetic truth,

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[250] Herbert Read's "Why the English Have No Taste" (1935) and George Barker's "Poetry and Contemporary Inertia" (1932).

and which emerges from a deep-seated intuition that an ulterior reality, an unknown principle, exists beyond the excessively deterministic (materialistic, biological) Freudian conception of the psyche, which Jung would also challenge in studies such as *Psychology and Religion* (1938) and *Psychology and Alchemy* (1944).[251] Alan Young sees this within the context of the English literary tradition: "Gascoyne was seeking [. . .] an English spiritual vision, essentially a 'religious' quest, with the intense seriousness of D.H. Lawrence, or, as Gascoyne himself suggests, of his contemporaries, George Barker and the Eliot of the 'Ariel' poems and 'Burnt Norton'" (Young 1980: 65).

Gascoyne's denunciation of the English Death in British art had been made public as early as 1934 in a series of articles which appeared in the art section of *The New English Weekly* between April and July that year. Gascoyne's attacks are harsh; no doubt they are the product of a young published writer charmed by the luscious stirrings of the unconscious, which he found much more entrancing than the arid forms of Abstractionism. Whereas the arts were being gradually re-politicised in France, and Gascoyne became engaged in a transcendental search for an unknown poetic truth, he saw in British Abstractionism and the Unit One Group signs of the unimaginative and unmoved British society, neither concerned with materialism or idealism, but simply dull. It is not so much their lack of political commitment that he criticises, but rather the risk that abstractionism involves of losing touch with reality and therefore becoming sterile. He condemns Herbert Read's excessively aloof and theoretical approach and Paul Nash's uncreative appropriation of Ernst's pictorial techniques. On 26 April 1934, he said of Nash that "Only his colour is individual; that is, it has been watered down to just the correct English tone" (Gascoyne 1934b: 39). Of course, at the time Gascoyne could not know that both Read and Nash would become strong allies of Surrealism, and members of what would eventually become the British Surrealist Group in their own right. He considered their interest in abstraction rather obsolete. He had seen in France the development of abstraction into more concrete forms that gave expression to the convulsions of the unconscious and the suggestive world of dreams. These contrasted with British artists' arid representations, which he considered expressions of the death instinct, Freud's theoretical elaboration of the tendency towards the inorganic. His position, attempting to bring together artistic experimentation and a pseudo-Communist ideology, strikes as unbecoming in the context of his own poetic development. In a reversal of the typically

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[251] The idea of an "Unknown God", which one incessantly seeks and for which altars are erected in the debris of modern life, but whose existence is uncertain, would recur in later poems such as "Ex-Nihilo" and the unfinished "The Bomb-Site Anchorite".

Surrealist approach, his statements of 3 May suggest that social revolution must precede artistic revolution:

> Abstract painting [. . .] is simply another expression of the *will towards death* which Europe seems to be at present suffering from. Artists such as Mr. Nicholson, he suggests, are self-appointed scape-goats; they have taken it upon themselves to perform the death-rites of painting in order that a new era of art may begin. [. . .] The new era cannot begin until the social structure is changed, and it would be foolish to imagine that it can be changed by painting a couple of circles. (Gascoyne 1934c: 66)

In spite of this apparent flirtation with the Communist doctrine, Gascoyne's ideological advances are only tentative at the time. His criticism is addressed to what he saw as the ultimate representation of the spiritual sterility of Britain, unable as he was at the time to see the connections between Abstractionism and Surrealism, connections which would be soon introduced by Penrose in the abstract-oriented review *Axis*. In a 1936 review of Gascoyne's *A Short Survey of Surrealism* which appeared in *The Daily Worker*, Roger Roughton criticised Gascoyne's lack of commitment to the Communist Party: he deemed his attacks on Aragon's (also on Jacques Baron's and Pierre Naville's) Communist conversion as irresponsible towards the revolutionary cause, and condemned his attempts to organise intellectual political action outside the official party line:

> Mr. G[ascoyne], who can sometimes write quite charming little Surrealist poems himself, and once even finished an introspective piece with the daring though, in the context, meaningless phrase, 'If you are with us you are Red', is the aspiring organiser of a 'Left group of intellectuals refusing to accept the standard set by the existing organisations of the Left' and wishing to 'defend their particular standards of expression against the vulgar-marxismus and sectarianism which have up till now distinguished the Artists' and Writers' International (British section)' (incidentally no body of that name exists). (Roughton 1936b: 7)

And yet it is true that at some points Gascoyne seems to be verging towards the Communist stance, only to depart from it. The poem to which Roughton refers, "Baptism", ends in that defiant and strongly politicised statement: "If you are with us you are Red" (Gascoyne 1988: 28). Nevertheless, the poem, like the rest of Gascoyne's Surrealist compositions, can only with difficulty be considered a piece of political writing in the sense that Roughton understood it. Uttered by a Surrealist, Gascoyne's line involves a unidirectional movement: it suggests that being a Surrealist implies being a Communist. The opposite movement is nevertheless not guaranteed. Thus, it turns out that Gascoyne criticises the Abstract painters for their

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disconnection from reality, while he is simultaneously subjected by Roughton to the same criticism. Gascoyne stands in fact somewhere between the two poles, at all times struggling to reconcile his increasing social and political awareness with his belief in a transcendental reality and in the alchemical power of the poetic word. He found in the early configurations of Surrealism the means to bridge this abyss, which was not only central to the literary discussions of the time, but to Gascoyne's poetic development too. In his last review on modern art for *The New English Weekly*, he seemed to reconcile these conflicting worlds: "Faced with such a [capitalist] world, the Surrealists set out to create another and contradictory world, to batter down all idiotic bourgeois prejudices, to shock and startle the bourgeoisie by laying bare the corruption underlying its complacency" (Gascoyne 1934f: 282)

Although Surrealism was at the time becoming increasingly engaged in political action, Gascoyne remained faithful to its original emphasis on irrationality and automatism and its conception of poetry as an almost mystic form of intuition. This was for him a French as much as a British heritage. Surrealism had entered a new phase, announced by Breton as the "reasoning epoch" of the movement (Breton 1936: 50), an epoch of commitment to the principles of dialectical materialism. Whereas the imagery of most of the British Surrealists was influenced by this, it would be this turn in the Surrealist ideology that eventually drew Gascoyne away from Surrealism. Nevertheless, and although his poetry showed no signs of this new development, Gascoyne did reflect it in his *Manifesto* and his *Survey*, probably following Breton's dictates. The outbreak of the Spanish Civil War was the event that marked Gascoyne's development into a more materialistic stance, especially in his engagement in political action, which in turn also marked the end of his Surrealist production, as will be seen. He became a member of the Communist Party of Great Britain in September 1936. His journal records the taking of this decision: "There is no longer any honest alternative for me than direct action in the direction of Communism. [. . .] to understand Marxism means inevitably to work for the Party" (Gascoyne 1980: 24). Although he was irritated by the smug discourse of the likes of Roger Roughton, a fervent party member, and was resolved to be quite "casual" about the political issue, Gascoyne accompanied Penrose in his visit to Spain in the early months of the Civil War. He had previously taken part in an anti-Moseley and other anti-fascist demonstrations in London, which he tends to recount in his journals with astonishing impassivity: shouts of "They shall not pass!" and "Red United Fighting Front!" in the midst of a rather accommodated existence filled with tea parties and the petty urban affairs of a very young and promising writer. In a meeting at Penrose's house in Hampstead, Gascoyne was urged to go to Spain, as he records:

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> They are shortly going to Barcelona, armed with cameras and introductions from Fenner Brockway of the I.L.P., to work for the P.O.U.M., an apparently Trotskyite organization. Valentine has suggested that I should accompany them. 'You must come,' she said. 'You will feel that you are alive out there. Here, everything is so unreal.' (Gascoyne 1980: 36)

Valentine's words, although the seeming expression of a typically bourgeois attitude, could not have been any truer: in Spain, Gascoyne escaped the unreality and pettiness of London life, and encountered the harsh reality of a country at war. These were visions that decisively marked the development of Gascoyne's attitude to poetry and politics. Gascoyne received an advance by Cobden-Sanderson that allowed him to join Roland and Valentine in Paris. They visited Christian and Yvonne Zervos, who were also going to Spain, and Paul and Nusch Éluard. They obtained their visas from the Catalonian Government Propaganda Bureau. Once in Barcelona, they stayed in a guesthouse off the Ramblas. Gascoyne worked for the Propaganda Bureau translating news bulletins and broadcasting them to Europe from Radio Catalunya. During his stay, he showed admiration for the Catalonian Trotskyists of the P.O.U.M., who were being persecuted by Stalinist factions.[252] He was moved by a working-class audience attending a poetry reading by Rafael Alberti and disturbed by the godforsaken condition of the convent of Pedralbes.[253] The United Front, which was then formed as a union of left-wing factions against Franco, was proving disappointingly unsuccessful. This journey marked the beginning of his disillusionment with Communism, but also of a growing and genuine preoccupation with the international political situation. He left Spain carrying with him several war posters for a London exhibition in aid of the Republican cause, organised by Fenner Brockway and Emma Goldman. These newly-formed alliances with the Independent Labour Party and the Anarchist movement show the extent of the influence that the Spanish War had in Gascoyne. In June 1937 Gascoyne made his position regarding the Spanish Civil War explicit in *Authors Take Sides on the Spanish War*, and denounced the *gangsterism* of the Fascist forces in Spain. On the other hand, the more he became involved in political matters, the more his Surrealist sensitivity receded. This had been anticipated as early as October 1934, at a time

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[252] The P.O.U.M. or Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista (Workers' Party of Marxist Unification) was founded in Barcelona in September 1935 as a split faction of the Communist Party. Although Marxist in orientation, it was anti-Stalinist and heavily influenced by Trotsky's thought. The British I.L.P. was sympathetic to the P.O.U.M., which suffered strong repression by Soviet policy during the Civil War. David Gascoyne, Roland Penrose and George Orwell were among the British volunteers who joined the P.O.U.M. through the I.L.P. and bore witness to the Stalinist purges in Spain.

[253] Rafael Alberti (1902-1999) was the youngest poet in the Generation of 1927, of which Federico García Lorca was also a member.

when his political liaisons were not yet fully established. The editor of *New Verse*, Geoffrey Grigson, addressed a series of questions regarding the nature of poetic creation and inspiration to several writers. Gascoyne's answer to the question "Have you been influenced by Freud and how do you regard him?" (Grigson 1934: 2) shows an incipient dissociation between psychological Surrealist activity and political action:

> I have never been directly influenced by Freud in my poetry, but I have been indirectly influenced by him through the Surrealists. To give oneself up at any time to writing poems without the control of the reason, is I imagine, to have in a way come under the influence of Freud. I no longer find this navel-gazing activity at all satisfying. The Surrealists themselves have a definite justification for writing in this way, but for an English poet with continually growing political convictions it must soon become impossible. (Gascoyne 1934a: 12)

His last Surrealist poem, "The Light of the Lion's Mane", was published in December 1936 in *Contemporary Poetry and Prose*. At that time, he was attending a series of meetings with Charles Madge and Humphrey Jennings which led up to the foundation of the Mass-Observation movement, an instance of Surrealist anthropology which attempted to develop the collective poetics of the mass by unearthing class-based forms of unconscious repression. In a lecture that he delivered in Oxford around the time of these first meetings with Madge and Jennings, "The Future of the Lyrical Imagination" (December 1936), Gascoyne anticipated the concerns of Mass-Observation and prophesied the collective nature of the new post-revolutionary poetry: "just as the proletariat when no longer exploited loses the significance we now accord it, so perhaps one may predict that poetry, losing all but its name in following its historic necessity, will become part of a collective mental activity (such as the dream is now)" (Gascoyne 1998: 29).[254] This is Gascoyne's dialectical materialism applied to poetic creation at its climax. This lecture is also one of his crucial texts, written and delivered right before his transition from a materialist to a transcendental stance, which he at the time considered as antithetical:

> [. . .] two entirely different worlds are today engaged in the fiercest conflict: on the one hand, the world of metaphysics, idealism, religion, rationalization, the morality of castration and restraint, ego-inflation and mediocrity – on the other, the world of dialectical super-materialism, the liberation of man, new perspectives, physical delight, profound belief in the future, endless possibilities. (Gascoyne 1998: 25)

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[254] This lecture is a re-elaboration of a previous article, "Poetry and Reality", which had appeared in *The Literary Review* in May 1936. Both are included in Gascoyne's *Selected Prose 1934-1996* (1998).

The first one he associates with aggressive capitalism gradually turning into Fascism, and the second one he associates with Communism. How clear the two tendencies were defined in Gascoyne's own mind is difficult to tell, as his poetics represent a combination of the two: spirituality, idealism and mysticism on the one hand, and materialism, social liberation and the pleasure principle on the other represent essential elements of his poetry. December 1936 is a complex moment in the development of Gascoyne's poetic and ideological stance: just arrived from Spain, he feels deeply committed to the revolutionary cause, and yet is already disillusioned with the Soviet repression of the Spanish Anarchists. Also, his Surrealist poetics combine materialist Surrealism and transcendental irrationalism, although he is ready now to abandon the former in order to develop the latter in his next poetry collection *Hölderlin's Madness* (1938). By March 1937 Gascoyne, who had already entertained the idea of resigning from the Surrealist Group, had also dropped out of Mass-Observation, the last project with a materialist orientation in which he took part. The excessively scientific approach of Tom Harrisson, an anthropologist who joined the group early in 1937, countered Jennings's poetic aspirations for Mass-Observation, to which Gascoyne was more sympathetic: "a sounding of the English collective unconscious together with a particular attention to what was implied by Lautréamont's expression: 'Poetry ought to be made by all, not by one'" (Gascoyne 1980: 11). In the entry for 8 April 1937 of his *Journal 1936-1937* (1980), Gascoyne recounts that, on his way to one of the meetings of the Surrealist Group at Penrose's in Hampstead, he went to see Sykes Davies, who was in hospital. Sykes Davies, fearing that Gascoyne, like Roughton and Jennings, would soon drop out of the Group, confessed to him that he was a secret member of the Party and convinced him of the need to "put up with being in the group in order to subvert well-known artists and intellectuals, like Read and Nash and Moore, into signing political manifestos occasionally" (Gascoyne 1978: 74), an idea with which Gascoyne agreed, at least for a time.

Gascoyne's eventual abandonment of the materialist stance was followed by a return to irrationality, this time via Lautréamont, Rimbaud and Hölderlin.[255] Gascoyne lamented at the time that Surrealism, which advocated irrationality, had in fact become too *reasonable*: its resort to materialism as the only system of thought capable of explaining reality was excessively reductionist for Gascoyne, who was then trying to transcend rationalism. In 1938 he published *Hölderlin's Madness*, a collection of free adaptations of Hölderlin's poems and original compositions, influenced by Pierre Jean Jouve's *Poèmes de la folie de Hölderlin*

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[255] Other notable influences at the time are Friedrich Schelling, Novalis and Jean-Paul Sartre.

(1930).[256] In the entry for October 29th, 1938, of his *Paris Journal* he complains of the surrender of English poetry to rationalism and defends what he calls the "magic theory" of poetry:

> [. . .] the practice of magic (in poetry) involves 'damnation' (Hölderlin goes mad, Rimbaud abandons writing, Lautréamont dies abnormally young): [. . .] the poet's destiny is to risk madness, despair and death for the sake of a possibility of redeeming existence by means of the secret power of the Word. (Gascoyne 1978: 79)

These ideas are also central to his Surrealist poetry, in which a longing for spiritual redemption and wholeness is channelled through mystic fits of hysteria, apocalyptic images of a world in fragmentation and the yielding of the poetic voice to a sublimated death. In his "Introduction" to *Hölderlin*, Gascoyne points to Romanticism and Surrealism as periods in history in which there is "a sudden upsurge of lyricism and of man's unconscious thought (which are indivisible)" (Gascoyne 1938: 1). There is an organic development in Gascoyne from Surrealist intuition to Hölderlin's irrationality. This was not only a question of considering irrationality or mental conditions as visionary states in which the mind is dispossessed of repressive elements of a moral, intellectual or cultural order. Through Jouve, the development is even much more natural: Jouve understood the poetic process as an exercise in spontaneity which allowed the poet to connect with the unconscious. For Gascoyne, spontaneity was in fact crucial in Surrealist practice, and he often praised this quality in Éluard's poetry.[257] Jouve's poetry is also, in a way, automatic, but it was his openness to a spiritual dimension of the human soul that appealed to Gascoyne.

In "A Note on Myself", which was included in his *Journal 1936-37*, Gascoyne clarifies his position in relation to both Communism and Surrealism, two causes which, he felt, had failed in the midst of the international political crisis, and of his own personal and creative crisis. He also states his need to develop an individual poetics and a sense of individual consciousness:

> Now, at the age of twenty-one, having passed through surrealism, communism, mass-observation, etc., I no longer have any desire to be connected with any particular group, idealogy [sic.], or programme, but wish to be entirely free to develop my own individual preoccupations, which centre round the inner problem of modern man: the necessity for greater consciousness of himself: as a social being, as a psychological

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[256] Jouve (1887-1976) was a French poet with whom Gascoyne established contact and whose wife, Blanche Reverchon, became Gascoyne's psychoanalyst.
[257] His review of Sykes Davies's *Petron* (1935) and of Paul Éluard's *Facile* (1935) was based on this idea. See "On Spontaneity". *New Verse* 18 (December 1935): 19.

being and as a spiritual being – a problem too great to be perceived from a single, fixed

point of view. (Gascoyne 1980: 110)

Although no longer a Surrealist, Gascoyne contributed to the Surrealist Objects and Poems Exhibition, which took place late in 1937 at the London Gallery, with the prose piece entitled "Three Verbal Objects" and what was called an *interpreted object*, *The Halfback's Moon* (undated, but probably 1937).[258] In the 1940s he also created a series of Scrapbooks in a Surrealistic fashion. In them he compiled graphic material which he had gathered during his Surrealist period in France and in Britain, as a way to pay homage to the movement, and also as a way to pay Anthony Zwemmer, the London book dealer, for earlier purchases. One of these Scrapbooks is kept at the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art.[259]

Gascoyne gradually developed a metaphysical, quasi-mystic conception of the poetic act under the influence of Jouve's Christian reinterpretation of Freudian theories.[260] On account of this "conversion", Gascoyne was officially expelled from the Surrealist Group by Breton in a 1947 visit to Paris. This move was anticipated by an anecdote which took place in the early days of the Surrealist Exhibition, when Breton, on seeing Gascoyne with a copy of Benjamin Fondane's *Rimbaud le Voyou* (1933) exclaimed: "Ah! Ça c'est un livre dirigé tout à fait contre moi!" (Gooding 1991: 50).[261] Fondane's study reinstated the figure of Rimbaud after it had been instrumentalised by the Surrealists: he was praised in the first *Manifesto* and disgraced in the second one. Fondane also placed Rimbaud's incapacity to attain a sense of the unknown, which culminated in his conversion to Catholicism, at the root of his poetic *voyance*.[262] After reading Gascoyne's "Miserere", Breton accused him of being a Roman Catholic. The Surrealists loathed the institution of the Catholic Church, which they saw as a symbol of (im)moral oppression and of institutionalised cultural and intellectual reaction. A photograph of Benjamin Péret insulting a priest had become legendary since it was published in *La Révolution Surréaliste*. Péret's chivalric act acquired such mythical stature that even Gascoyne, in a 1992 interview with Lucien Jenkins, recalls that he had "seen Benjamin Péret

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[258] "Three Verbal Objects" was posthumously dedicated to Humphrey Jennings.

[259] Archive Reference GMA A42/2/GKL1014. The British Library, on the other hand, acquired three 1936 notebooks by David Gascoyne, in which he jotted down ideas for Surrealist objects and poems, and other notes on Surrealism.

[260] See Jouve's preface to *Sueur de Sang* (1933), "The Unconscious, Spirituality, Catastrophe", published in translation by David Gascoyne in 1941.

[261] "Ah! This is a book entirely directed against me!" (my translation).

[262] See John Kenneth Hyde's *Benjamin Fondane. A Presentation of his Life and Work* (1971): 25-32. Fondane's view on Rimbaud's religious *voyance* irritated the Surrealists. Gascoyne himself, in *A Short Survey of Surrealism* (1935), had criticised the "disgusting attempts to pervert everything that Rimbaud ever wrote, to make of him [. . .] a Catholic *manqué*" (Gascoyne 1935a: 30).

spitting at a *curé* on a bus because [Péret] thought it was his duty. He would have reproached himself if he had not done so" (Gascoyne 1998: 48). There is no reason to doubt Gascoyne's words, and yet they reveal, as much as his Surrealist poems do, the deep impact that Surrealism's sacrilegious acts had in him.[263] Gascoyne's lines in his "Ecce Homo" –"Christ of Revolution and of Poetry" (Gascoyne 1988: 94)- enraged Breton who consequently excommunicated him at a time when he had long stopped writing Surrealist poetry.

An apocalyptic and existentialist attitude, influenced by the religious existentialism of Kierkegaard and Chestov, permeates Gascoyne's later compositions, which include some of the finest examples of modern metaphysical poetry.[264] The publication of his *Poems 1937-42* (1943), reviewed in the press as the poetic event of the year, established his solid reputation as a mature poet. This seemed to stigmatise his Surrealist poems as the product of a transient stage of immaturity. The present study attempts to re-establish the value of Gascoyne's Surrealist production. After a prolonged depression which led him to several hospitalisations throughout his life, he published several translations and collections of his verse until his death in 2001. Of special interest are his journals, interesting accounts of the intellectual life of Paris and London in the late thirties, his *Selected Prose 1934-1996* (1998) and his translation of Breton and Soupault's *The Magnetic Fields* (1985). He remains the best translator of French Surrealism in English to date.

2.2. David Gascoyne from Intuition to Irrationality.

A relevant aspect about Gascoyne's poetic development is the apparent contradiction that implicitly pervades his evolution from Surrealism to metaphysical poetry. Nevertheless, an in-depth analysis of his Surrealist poetry shows that this contradiction is, in fact, only apparent. He was drawn to Surrealism at an early age, at a time when the movement was still in its "heroic" or "intuitive" phase, characterised by automatic experimentation and a magical, almost mystical, conception of poetry, something which is not so distant from Gascoyne's later

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[263] The incident was also recounted in Gascoyne's "Introduction" to Péret's *Remove Your Hat and Other Works* (1986). But this was not the only anti-religious Surrealist act. See, for instance, Antonin Artaud's "Address to the Pope" (which had appeared in *La révolution surréaliste* in 1925), in which the Pope is derided for his inability to mediate between man and the unknown: "We are not of the world, O Pope confined to the world, neither earth nor God speaks through you" (in Waldberg 1997: 58). Compare this to Artaud's "Address to the Dalai Lama" (also in *La révolution surréaliste* in 1925): "Teach us, Lama, material levitation of the body and how we can be held no longer by the earth. [. . .] It is inside that I resemble you, I, sprout, idea, lip levitation, dream, cry, renunciation of idea, suspended among all forms and hoping only for the wind" (in Waldberg 1997: 59). Thus the Surrealists renounced the materiality of existence and ideology in favour of spiritualism, an attitude which was shared in England only by Gascoyne.

[264] For an analysis of Gascoyne's postwar poetic reconfiguration of the destroyed cityscape in terms of a modern disbelieving religiosity, see Leo Mellor's "Words from the Bombsites: Debris, Modernism and Literary Salvage": 86-89.

understanding of the poetic act. This was certainly in accord with his own view of the poet as creator and seer who, in the absence of all control exercised by reason or any other external imposition (aesthetic, moral or social), creates a new world out of the fantastic images of his visionary mind. This seemed to be diametrically opposed to a materialist conception of the poetic act and therefore Breton's inauguration of Surrealism's "reasoning" phase implied, at least for Gascoyne, that Surrealism had become a mere mode of poetic expression, rather than a spiritual activity of the mind, an idea that discouraged him. The theory behind this new approach was recorded in his programmatic texts of the time, not so much in his poetry, which continued to adhere to the previous automatic line of creation, much more centred on the subject than the object.

Gascoyne's final move towards the object took place in 1936, and his essay "Poetry and Reality", published in *The Literary Review* in May 1936, was already an anticipation of his final adherence to the movement's materialist stance. "Poetry and Reality" is a response to the article "Sense and Abstraction", in which John Mair condemned Surrealism as the ultimate form of individualistic escapism. In his reply, Gascoyne makes use of Éluard's definition of poetry as "a perpetual struggle, life's very principle, the queen of unrest" (Gascoyne 1998: 75) and he defends the Surrealist position as an inevitably political one:

> Surrealist poetry constitutes not a *retreat* from, but an *assault* on the current conception of reality. The poet whose work is devoted to achieving a more complete freedom for the imagination, to discovering the complicated, startling and poetic relationships that exist between all *things* (images), cannot be indifferent to the social system in which he lives, a social system doing everything in its power to thwart him in his endeavour to create a richer and more lively universe –not for himself alone, but for everyone who has eyes to read and imagination to comprehend with. (Gascoyne 1998: 75)

Gascoyne's configuration of Surrealist activity is that of an image-making mechanism that, by bringing dissimilar realities into contact, contributes to the collapse of the prevailing moral and aesthetic order. Image and ideology become indissoluble: the liberation of imagination that he advocates necessarily calls for the destruction of an order that, through standardisation and commoditisation, attempts to stupefy the creative mind. A similar argument is used by Christian Zervos in his essay "Fait social et vision cosmique", published in *Cahiers d'Ar*t in 1935, where he defends the social dimension of Picasso's quest for the unconscious (Zervos 1935: 45). Zervos's argument is relevant in the context of Gascoyne's poetics: Gascoyne, like Picasso, in his ambition to conquer the unconscious, prepares the ground for a wider understanding of

the social realm, integrating in it the moral (understood in a non-institutionalised sense) and the spiritual. They both enter the night, not to find refuge in it, but rather to be able to understand the day better, and to know how it works and how it can be transformed.[265] In "Poetry and Reality", Gascoyne also states the need for the poet to get closer to the masses, in a way that anticipates his later interest in Mass-Observation:

> The position, as I see it, is this: the poet today is separated from the masses by a high, thick wall, made of prejudice, misapprehension and ignorance. The wall is deliberately constructed by the existing order. The part of the poet is *not* to climb over the wall to the other side, as certain poets seem to be trying to do at present, by 'writing down to the masses' (though this attempt can be of no avail, and is doomed to failure, since the number of readers for anything labelled 'poetry' at all is at present strictly limited), simplifying their work and thus eliminating from it all that is authentically poetic – curious, capricious, complex, for in doing so he must inevitably leave his treasure behind him. The part of the poet is to do everything in his power to bring about the collapse of the wall, and the wall's demolition can only be accomplished by proletarian revolution. (Gascoyne 1998: 76)

Gascoyne's Surrealist images (fragmented, prophetic, desecrating, mystic, esoteric, oneiric) did indeed contribute to the negation of bourgeois values and the collapse of the wall that separated poetry as a commoditised product from the reader as consumer. The following passage, taken from "Automatic Album Leaves" (1933), anticipates the kind of politicised imagery that is found in some of Gascoyne's texts:

> Priests pull pieces of string through holes bored in their jaws. Nursemaids paint their charges' behinds with glue. And at the supreme moment of universal anguish, when all the cathedrals are wrapped in blue cotton-wool, and all the underground railways are flooded and when trees with diseased branches have burst upwards through the pavements of the great cities, and choked every building with dense, verminous foliage, at the supreme moment Suffering passes right through the centre of the bunches of smoke, causing a revolting stench of burning rubber, and appears on the other side dressed in white, wearing a bishop's mitre stained with ink, wine, blood and sperm. (Gascoyne 1988: 33)

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[265] In "The Object as Revealed in Surrealist Experiment" (1932), Dalí described the first or intuitive stage of Surrealism as a "Revolution by Night", identifying it with the plunging of the imagination into the subterranean depths of the unconscious. On the other hand, the second or reasoning phase was described as a "Revolution by Day" (Dalí 1998: 238). Gascoyne's poems, which belong to the nightly stage, highlight the nocturnal occurrence of poetic revelation.

If anything, Gascoyne's Surrealist poetry is neither accommodative nor commercial. In his book *The Poetry of the Thirties* (1975), Trevor Tolley acknowledges in it "the equation between surrealist dislocation of images and the Communist image of a sick broken society" (Tolley 1975: 233). This is not so much a Communist vision as an intellectual vision of a culturally deadened society, since most of his Surrealist poems were written before Gascoyne's formal engagement with Marxist ideas. As Kathleen Raine notes in her essay "David Gascoyne and the Prophetic Role", when Gascoyne makes use of the term "bourgeois" in his programmatic writings (never in his poems), it "means not so much any class in particular but all that in society is contrary to the imagination" (Raine 1967: 41). This is supported by Gascoyne's statements in his Oxford lecture of December 1936:

> Everything under capitalism now is the most violent contradiction to poetry. It is not difficult to see how the status quo depends for its continuation on the production of a state of mind absolutely inimical to poetry. One might say that bourgeois education was a state machine for crushing and destroying the last ounce of the imagination that every child is born with. [. . .] The destruction of natural imagination is [. . .] a very important function of capitalist pedagogy. (Gascoyne 1998: 27)

The climax of Gascoyne's commitment to politics came, as was mentioned above, with the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War. His experience of the war in Catalonia and his engagement in political action brought him closer to the sort of Surrealist politics of the British Group and to the overall Marxist stance of continental Surrealism. In "The Future of the Lyrical Imagination" (1936), Gascoyne quotes Éluard to describe what he thinks the role of the poet in society is: "All poets worth of the name [. . .] are fighting the system of exploitation side by side with the workers. For true poetry is the camp of those who are fighting for the deliverance of Man" (Gascoyne 1998: 25). In this description, the combination of seemingly antithetical terms (the materialistic "workers" and the quasi-mystic "deliverance") is symptomatic of Gascoyne's own syncretism, as will be seen. Also, by siding with the Surrealists, he is also rejecting an alliance with the political poets of the time, eschewing Cecil Day Lewis's concept of poetry as propaganda, or Auden's view of poetry as a form of morality.

However, the closer Gascoyne followed the Surrealist movement's new directions, the further he got from the Surrealist idiom, as he would not write Surrealist poetry again. But this was the result of his own misunderstanding of the role that Surrealism was to play in the revolution: in his essay "Poetry and Reality" (1936), he had affirmed that "The revolution has no need of poetry, but poetry has great need of the revolution" (Gascoyne 1998: 76), a statement which indeed contradicted the movement's tenets, as well as the claims made by

other British Surrealists, and shows the extent to which Gascoyne found it difficult to come to terms with the movement's evolution towards Anarchist positions. For Gascoyne, what he considered to be the excessively materialist approach of Surrealism had overcome what he found most inspiring about it: its mystic spirituality, its belief in the Rimbaudian alchemy of the word, its idealism and its praise of the sacred power of the imagination. In its materialist approach to reality, Surrealism had become for Gascoyne too rational and too coherent. Gascoyne's evolution from Surrealist intuition to irrationality and, later, to metaphysical poetry, was already prefigured in his Surrealist compositions, and in Fondane's own poetic development, as Gascoyne himself explains:

> Fondane [. . .] was an intellectual in Romania, writing in Romanian about the French writers. And gradually getting more and more avant-garde and coming to Paris in the early Twenties and becoming a friend of Brancusi, his fellow Romanian, and following the Surrealist movement from its earliest days with great interest, and feeling great sympathy with it. But then, after his encounter with the great Russian philosopher [Chestov] he began to think seriously along the lines of a revolt against reason, which seems to be parallel with that of the surrealists. It's not just [. . .] to be irrational for the sake of irrationality, not at all; it was a realization that we are tyrannized by reason to the extent of sheer scientific materialism of dominating the whole of the world outlook that is commonly accepted by everybody everywhere now. And he felt that the surrealists' revolt against reason was too reasonable! Because really fundamentally the thing is that Fondane, although he was fundamentally a religious man I think - but he wouldn't have declared himself to be such, he would have preferred the word 'metaphysics' - but fundamentally he was not a reductionist materialist, and the surrealists went along with Marx and Freud, and rejected any kind of belief in the transcendent and the metaphysical or, you know, anything that couldn't be explained away by reason and materialist science. (Gooding 1991: 51)

One much-criticised aspect of British Surrealism was its strong reliance on an endemic Romantic heritage, an idea derived from Breton's definition of Surrealism as an "amazingly prehensile tail" of Romanticism (Breton 1972: 153).[266] The Surrealists drew on Blake's irrationality and on Coleridge's concept of imagination; nevertheless, these were re-elaborated and turned into historical categories by the Surrealists, becoming true signs of their times: irrationality was seen as the true symptom of modernity, whereas the unconscious became

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[266] Michel Remy states that Sykes Davies's and Read's reliance on British Romantic ancestors "amounts to a defusing of any revolutionary force in the movement" (Remy 1999: 97).

the major source of imaginative and creative power. In this regard, Kathleen Raine noted a crucial difference between Surrealism and Romanticism: "The crucial difference is the denial of the metaphysical. The psyche was, for the surrealists as for Freud, autonomous and its 'perpetual functioning' and 'irrational flow' envisaged in terms in no way incompatible with materialism" (Raine 1967: 42). Gascoyne eventually rejected this denial of the metaphysical, which was uppermost as Surrealism became increasingly politicised. It could be said that Gascoyne's abandonment of Surrealism was partly due to the fact that Surrealism was not Romantic enough. His turn to a sometimes overtly religious mysticism and to metaphysics is generally seen as a revolt against everything that Surrealism implied. Nevertheless, in a way it implied a return to Surrealism's pristine form or at least an attempt to continue the quest for the unknown and the inexplicable. With materialism, everything was already known, manifest. Madge advocated this move, which Gascoyne dreaded, when he anticipated that in the materialist era, poetry, like magic, would become unnecessary because they deal "not with the inexplicable, but with what has not yet been explained" (Madge 1937b: 32). In a review of Gascoyne's *A Short Survey* which appeared in the January 1936 issue of *Left Review*, the movement was described as "mystical", "idealistic" and "subjective", and criticised for the lack of material basis in Freud's theories of the unconscious: "The old religious concept of a soul and a world of the spirit, remain in surrealism, in the idea that the unconscious is either apart from, or in some unanalysable portion of the brain, and in their mystical concept of 'Poésie'" (Hastings 1936: 187). A little later, in May 1936, Louis Aragon revealed in an interview for *Left Review* the reasons that led him to abandon Surrealism. Aragon's theory of the trajectory of the movement, from a scientific study of the unconscious to an esoteric deification of the poetic imagination, contrasts with that of Fondane and Gascoyne. In this interview Aragon explained that

> The surrealists were originally a group of young men with a definite and a progressive purpose [. . .] *to analyse the mechanism of inspiration*. We were anti-mystical, scientific. We wanted to show that creative imagination was not supernatural, but worked according to laws that anybody could inspect. But gradually the school began to lose its impulse towards objectivity. Having taken the machine of the imagination to pieces, they started to put it together again so as to suit their own interests. Their theories had won them success, a snobbish following. They began to worship themselves. The poetic impulse was now no longer something to be analysed, it was something sacred, which could not be questioned. I, who had been a communist for four years before I left the group, said that it was necessary to discover the conditions

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under which the machine of the imagination worked –they wanted to worship it as an autonomous, holy power. (in Kahn 1936: 380)

Of course, both Hastings and Aragon only provide a partial and biased version of what Surrealism was at the time, but apparent contradictions exist between the development of Gascoyne's poetics (from intuition to irrationality) and that of Surrealism, as dictated by Breton (from intuition to reason) and as seen by his Communist antagonists (from science to magic). Gascoyne's development can be described in terms of a spiralling movement, for his advance towards a more spiritual and mystical conception of poetry simultaneously implies a return to Surrealism's original worship of the "autonomous, holy power" of the poetic word, as stated by Breton in the first *Manifesto*.

From a young age, Gascoyne considered the poet a specially gifted person with a distinct sensitivity, an idea which contrasts with Sykes Davies's and Barker's more biological approach to the nature of poetic creation. This is shown, for instance, in his reply to Grigson's question "As a poet, what distinguishes you, do you think, from an ordinary man?" (Grigson 1934: 2) in "An Enquiry". Although Gascoyne states that he doubts the existence of the ordinary man, he is quite conceited in his answer:

I believe that the poet is distinguished from the 'ordinary man' by his attitude towards experience. This attitude, as far as I am concerned, is one of continual expectancy, which may at times become a state of hyperaesthesia. [. . .] Everyone probably has some sort of attitude towards experience, though perhaps neither so constant nor so consciously developed as that of the poet. (Gascoyne 1934a: 12-13)

Also in 1934, in an article published in *Everyman*, "French Poetry of Today", Gascoyne already revealed his scepticism towards the collective nature of poetry that the Surrealists defended.[267] His definition of automatism as "uncontrolled thought" is conveniently attenuated, and the differentiated condition of the poet is emphasised: "Everything depends on the degree of the poet's sensibility; the uncontrolled thoughts of one not a poet set down on paper do not make a poem" (Gascoyne 1998: 72). Gascoyne's elitist ("snobbish" in Aragon's terms) view of the poet, and of himself as a poet, is also present in his journals, where he tends to overstate the special role of the poet, and to take pride in his own hypersensitivity. In *Journal 1936-37* (1980), Gascoyne finds problems when trying to reconcile his individualistic concept of the poet and a more collective configuration of the poetic act:

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[267] This article, published on 31st August 1934, is a literary contextualisation of the emergence of Surrealist poetry in France.

Perhaps it is idiotic to want to be great, and perhaps it is a mistake to imagine that one can become great by simple determination [. . .]. All this, of course, is quite contrary to the ideal of anonymity and community that I have learnt from Suarès, Caillois, Jennings. But I have now come to believe that for me, this ideal is a refuge, an excuse for weakness. No, I do not believe in self-renunciation, I have got to be selfish, in a particular way. The objection is that I am a 'pitiful' individualist.[268] (Gascoyne 1980: 54)

In an entry one month later he achieves such reconciliation by elevating the masses, instead of degrading the poet, in his particular perversion of Lautréamont's dictum: "everyone should be a poet in that everyone should have a (special) sense of existence" (Gascoyne 1980: 80).[269]

2.3. Irrationality, Mysticism and Desire in Gascoyne's Surrealist Poems.

Gascoyne's search for a transcendental truth and a sense of totality takes place in images that evince the convulsive nature of the moment of revelation.[270] In Gascoyne's poetics, revelation, like beauty for Breton, must be convulsive, and it is in this paroxysm of vision that a reconciliation between the material and the spiritual is achieved.[271] Image and ideology are brought together as the poet bridges the distance between conscious and unconscious states, putting the liberation of repressed desire at the service of a total revolution. Gascoyne's convulsive images take place in fits of irrationality, in moments of mystic union with the unknown and in erotic climaxes in which the physical and the spiritual merge. The influences on Gascoyne's poetics of irrationality are varied: Dalí's irrational epistemology; Breton's theory of the image as "the recourse to the irrational" (Breton 1972: 228) and of psychic automatism as the literary technique that makes manifest that which is latent; esotericism and alchemy *qua* reconciliation of opposites; the scientific advances on the psychoanalytical exploration of the unconscious; Freud's configuration of the Oedipus complex and his theory of the instincts; modern Christian mysticism; and Surrealism's erotic politics. Hal Foster has defined the marvellous in terms that are easily applied to Gascoyne's mystic search of the unknown:

As a medieval term the marvellous signalled a rupture in the natural order, one, unlike the miraculous, not necessarily divine in origin. This challenge to rational causality is essential to the medievalist aspect of surrealism, its fascination with magic and alchemy, with mad love and analogical thought. It is also fundamental to its spiritualist

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[268] Entry for 17 March 1937.

[269] Entry for 11 April 1937

[270] Hal Foster has studied the connections between the marvellous, the uncanny and traumatic convulsion in the chapter "Convulsive Identity" of his *Compulsive Beauty* (1993): 57-100.

[271] At the end of his novel *Nadja* (1928), Breton stated: "La beauté sera CONVULSIVE ou ne sera pas" (Breton 1964: 190), that is, "Beauty will be convulsive or will not be at all" (my translation).

aspect, its attraction to mediumistic practices [. . .] where the marvellous is again in play. These enthusiasms suggest the project to which the surrealist marvellous is implicitly pledged: the reenchantment of a disenchanted world, of a capitalist society made ruthlessly rational. (Foster 1993: 19)

The present study of Gascoyne's convulsive images traces a development in his poetics from epistemological irrationality and intuitive automatism to magic and alchemy and, eventually, mysticism, which anticipates the metaphysical content and religious imagery of his later poetry. This study mainly focuses on the poems in Gascoyne's Surrealist collection *Man's Life is this Meat* (1936), to which these elements (convulsive images, irrationality, mysticism and desire) are central. Nevertheless, it also includes references to other Surrealist texts (poems, prose poems and film scenarios) when appropriate, in order to underline the ways in which these elements are brought together in Gascoyne's poetics as a form of reconciliation of the material and the spiritual.

Gascoyne was aware that his special sensitivity as a poet was akin to the hyperaesthesia that he observed in some of the masters of the irrational. He saw that in the works of Van Gogh, Lautréamont and de Chirico the power of the unconscious verged on irrationality. These artists entered delirious states in which they perceived the marvellous coalescence of the real and the fantastic. Gascoyne reproduced a similar state in many of his Surrealist poems. In his last review on modern art for *The New English Weekly*, he stated:

The Comte de Lautréamont, locked in his room at midnight, was the spectator of delirious crises in the sub-conscious [. . .] The process by which the real becomes marvellous and that by which the marvellous becomes real are closely inter-related; there are certain moments of hyper-aesthesia in which such processes take place in nearly all great works of art. (Gascoyne 1934f: 281)

Gascoyne's interest in the workings of the unconscious and the unknown territories of the psyche was philosophical and artistic. This exploration was for him of a truly subjective nature: the images arrived at are the result, not of an external exploration of the object, but rather the result of an internal apprehension and subjective experience of reality.

Drawn to the deranged visions of the *poètes maudits*, Rimbaud, Mallarmé, Baudelaire, whom he read quite young while he was still at the Polytechnic, Gascoyne was finally instructed on Dalí's theories of the irrational during his translation of *The Conquest of the Irrational* (1935), in which Dalí states that his ambition is

to materialize the images of concrete irrationality with the most imperialistic furor of precision, so that the world of imagination and concrete irrationality may be of the

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same objective clearness, of the same consistency, of the same durability, of the same persuasive, cognoscitive and communicable thickness as that of the external world of phenomenal reality. (Dalí 1998: 265)

In this way, the images resulting from concrete irrationality "draw nearer to the phenomenally real" than realist techniques of representation. These images cannot be reduced to or deduced from logical intuition or any other mechanisms of reason: reality can only be grasped through the systematic application of irrationality to perception, something which Gascoyne does in many of his poems. The way in which Dalí accomplishes this is through his Paranoiac-Critical Activity:

Paranoia: delirium of interpretative association entailing a systematic structure – Paranoiac-Critical Activity: spontaneous method of irrational knowledge based on the interpretative-critical association of delirious phenomena. [. . .] The presence of active and systematic elements does not imply the notion of voluntarily directed thought [. . .] – any delirious phenomenon having a paranoiac character, even one that is instantaneous and sudden, already entails the systematic structure 'in its entirety' and only becomes objectified *a posteriori* by the critical intervention. The critical activity intervenes uniquely as a liquid developer of images, associations, coherences, and *finesses*, which are systematic, weighty and already in existence at the moment in which the delirious instantaneity occurs, and which for the time being at that degree of tangible reality, only Paranoiac-Critical Activity allows to return to objective light. Paranoiac-Critical Activity is an organizing and productive force of objective chance. (Dalí 1998: 267)

Dalí used to say that the only difference between him and a madman was that he was not mad (in Néret 2004: 7). Following Dalí's concept of the artist as a madman who is in fact not mad, as developed in his Paranoiac-Critical Activity, and Breton and Éluard's simulation of mental illnesses through automatic writing in *L'Immaculate Conception* (1930), Gascoyne himself experimented with poetic simulation of mental disorders, especially paranoia and hysteria, in some of his Surrealist texts,. The piece of poetic prose entitled "The Great Day" appeared in the short-lived review *Janus* in January 1936. It narrates in intensely poetic prose the nightly psychotic errands of a deluded speaker. Whether the narration is the result of a self-induced state of paranoiac vision or of the effects of drug use is difficult to attest, although the description of nightfall towards the end of the passage suggests that the speaker's visual distortions and accelerated heart rhythm are the result of having taken belladonna: "Night, yes indeed it was the night that fell, for I distinctly saw its columns dissolving one into the other

and its arches falling and its great aqueducts falling down like the very symptoms of a weak heart after taking belladonna" (Gascoyne 1988: 39). The speaker here is the nocturnal seer, endowed with the clairvoyant vision that his dilated pupils offer. He is as much a reflection of Gascoyne as of Lautréamont. In fact, in the "Introduction" to his translation of Breton and Soupault's *The Magnetic Fields* (1920), David Gascoyne comments on Lautréamont's resort to belladonna as a stimulant for writing *Les Chants de Maldoror* (In Breton and Soupault 1985: 11). Furthermore, Gascoyne himself took drugs to reach states of acute awareness which would aid the creative process but, as Julian Trevelyan suggests, these did Gascoyne more harm than good: "There were other members of our little Surrealist group who lent themselves to Mescalin; some had interesting hallucinations, but others who suffered from secret griefs were reduced to a state of acute hysteria; for Mescalin transports only those who are carefree travellers" (Trevelyan 1957: 76).[272]

In Gascoyne's poem the speaker stresses his clarity of vision, but the hallucinatory nature of the images that are described is manifest. He is in a state of hypersensitivity in which reality (its colour, form and state) is made so vividly sharp to the senses that mere perception is painful, and even dangerous:

> The banisters were shining intensely and the stairs were coming up towards me. I was well aware that my eyes were no longer clinkers. I sat on the edge of the bed with my feet in the sand and watched the ambulances going past the window. What carnage, what thunderbolts, and, indeed, what pascal lambs! (Gascoyne 1988: 36)

Vision is enhanced to an alarming extreme as he presents a reality on the brink of transformation in a way that recalls the ever-metamorphosing images in Sykes Davies's poems: "her mouth was like a beautiful garden full of flowers and full of bronze flowers and beautiful flowers like medals. [. . .] and the sound of my kisses on the air was like the flapping of sheets, [. . .] like the bottling of new wine" (Gascoyne 1988: 36). Language is equally affected, and the speaker engages in long and complexes sentences to describe simple facts. His logorrheic style reveals language's incapacity to transfer the images of a deranged mind, and the speaker's paranoid belief that he will not be understood. Thus, he persists in his linguistic neurosis and compulsively repeats linguistic equivalents to make sure that his ideas get through to the addressee:

> But I'm afraid you will hardly believe me when I tell you that at the hour when the night-bird should have flown, at the hour when all the matrons no longer able to have

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[272] For an account of Gascoyne's addiction to amphetamines see Robert Fraser's *Night Thoughts: the Surreal Life of the Poet David Gascoyne* (2012): 192-204.

children should have entered the room, precisely at the hour of the one-o'clock séances and balloon-course meetings, it was one o'clock. (Gascoyne 1988: 36)

His obsession with time, temporal progression and measure are also signs of a compulsive behaviour. He confesses to his predilection for mechanisms which "repeat themselves" (Gascoyne 1998: 37) and provides an excruciating description of his watch. He is betrayed by language, as he incessantly insists on the veracity of his account. Although phrases like "I tell you" and "I know what I am saying" abound in the text, language fails him when he attempts to describe the mysterious, almost macabre, surgery that is performed on him:

> Were I to describe to you all the details of what took place on that memorable occasion it would take me ten times as many books as there are stars in the universe and in any case my pen would have turned to dust long before I got to the last astonishing page where I should sign my name in letters of flame and of gold and in letters of flaming gold. (Gascoyne 1988: 37)

He suffers persecutory delusions and, under the effects of the anaesthesia, the hallucinatory visions increase. The bed on which he lies becomes an automatic pianola which carries him away into the forest where he successfully fights the red Indians who have tried to scratch his eyes out. His triumph is followed by fits of grandiose delusion. Nevertheless, on his return to the daylight, nobody is aware of his achievements or of the divine signs made manifest on his face: white footprints on his eyelids and black stars on his lips. Thus, he needs to tell his mother of his exploits with the Indians, which ended up in him being awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. As the night falls, further revelations and "beautiful" visions await, which the reader will nevertheless not see, for these are the products of the speaker's frenzied mind. The speaker knows that he will see beautiful visions again, visions that emerge from his head, "so full of gorgeous pictures of the wonderful palaces, castles, fortresses and great endless glittering palaces that are my inheritance and where I shall at last rest these weary bones of mine, far from the stupid creatures I despise" (Gascoyne 1988: 39).

Hysteria was praised by the Surrealists for its potential to liberate repressed psychic content. Surrealists saw in the female hysteric a representation of the modern mystic.[273] In 1928, Breton and Aragon published an article in *La Révolution Surréaliste* entitled "The Fiftieth

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[273] See David Lomas's "Seductions of Hysteria" in his *The Haunted Self: Surrealism, Psychoanalysis, Subjectivity* (2000): 53-94. In this chapter, Lomas distinguishes between the cases of simulated male insanity in Breton and Éluard's *L'immaculate conception* (1930), and the image of the female hysteric as mystic in Ernst's *The Dream of the Girl Who Wished to Enter the Carmelite Order* (1930). On the theatricality of the female hysterical fit in relation to Charcot's development of an iconography of the hysteric at Salpêtrière, see Georges Didi-Huberman's *Invention of Hysteria* (2003). Charcot's work on hypnosis in the treatment of hysteria was central to Freud's later psychoanalytical research.

Anniversary of Hysteria" which, accompanied by photographs of Charcot's patient Augustine at Salpêtrière, celebrated "the greatest poetic discovery of the latter nineteenth century" and established hysteria, not as a pathological phenomenon but as "a supreme means of expression" (Rosemont 1978: 424). Gascoyne resorts to the figure of the female hysteric in his poem "Lozanne" (Gascoyne 1936d: 39). The title of this poem refers to the pseudonym used by Alma Victoria Rattenbury, a popular musician who became involved in a case which shocked the English public in the summer of 1935, when her husband was murdered. Rattenbury and her young lover (the family's chauffeur, George Percy Stoner) confessed, but she then retracted. Upon trial she was acquitted of murder, whereas her lover was sentenced to death. The public opinion was set against Rattenbury who, being older, was thought to have manipulated Stoner into murdering her husband. Rattenbury then committed suicide. The developing events brought to Gascoyne remembrances of similar cases of murder which had taken place in France in 1933, and which had caught the attention of the Surrealists. The Papin sisters were tried and convicted for murdering their employer's wife and daughter. The sadistic and psychopathic execution of the murder, which combined a morally repressive environment, paranoia and eccentric behaviour, appealed to the Surrealists and had a notable influence on Lacan's psychoanalytical theory. Lacan's essay "Motifs du crime paranoïaque: le crime des sœurs Papin" was published in *Minotaure* in December 1933. Around the same time, the Surrealists sympathised with the case of Violette Nozière, who had robbed and poisoned her father, purportedly so she could ease her lover's financial problems. The Surrealists considered Nozière's crime a veritable act of *amour fou*, and collaborated in the collection of a series of poems and drawings inspired by it. The Surrealists saw in these murders examples of rebellion against the established authority and against patriarchal oppression. They praised the figure of the female hysteric for her connection with the most primitive instincts. The ritualistic character of the crimes (a whole lot of gory details were made public in relation to the Papin sisters crime) also led the Surrealists to establish parallelisms between these and rituals of black magic. Gascoyne's "Lozanne" emerges as a reaction to the Rattenbury-Stoner case, but is fermented in the psychological turmoil of the French crimes. In his poem, Gascoyne presents the hysterical woman at the scene of the crime through metonymic references and personifications, and it is interesting to see how the poetic discourse is affected by the psychological state of the woman, as if there was a kind of psychological transference of the perturbed mental condition of the woman to the speaker: "It was seven, it was nine o'clock, the doors were closing, the windows were screaming. You bent over the shadow that lay on the floor and saw its eyes dissolving. The band about your forehead began to turn. The band of

fever" (Gascoyne 1936d: 35). The hysterical woman is also affected by paranoia: first, she is haunted by the voice of her lover into killing her husband, and then she is haunted by the mallet, the phallic weapon with which the murder was committed. The hysterical fit of the woman, having culminated in the murder of the husband, is presented as a mystic revelation. The woman is transfigured into a celestial figure in a sacrilegious perversion of the virgin's assumption into heaven: "The armchair turned into a palace, the carpet became a bank of withered flowers [. . .] you ascended the great staircase. And took your place among the stars" (35). The text comes to an end with a sententia that seems a demonic reversal of one of the beatitudes: "Those who damned shall be damned". By sanctifying the figure of the female murderer, Gascoyne's text defies the established bourgeois ideology and its conventional impositions on female behaviour: Lozanne becomes a symbol of unrepressed desire and of true love, uncorrupted by the civilised pretence of sentimentality. Surrealism's concept of love as an irrational and violent impulse thus subverts the rationalised bourgeois ideal of love as sentimental philanthropy and female servitude.

"Direct Response" (Gascoyne 1936d: 14) is concerned with irrationality and mystic trance as forms of lucid apprehension of objective reality. In this poem sensory perception is undermined and irrationality and automatism are praised as forms of intimate contact with the unknown. The speaker becomes the observer of an extraordinary deserted landscape and is the medium that invokes the four elements to take part in a séance in which the connection with another reality takes place: "The elements are sitting at the table / There is a shipwreck on the sands" (14). It is significant that the speaker in "Direct Response" is one of Gascoyne's very few female personae, a fact which is only attested to by the reference to her "breasts" towards the end of the poem. Here, the female speaker connects with a transcendental reality in fits of mystic revelation, either through spiritist possession or hysterical catalepsis. Vision is impaired. A presence is detected, but not quite delineated: only a warm hand is felt. The three kingdoms of biological taxonomy (animal, botanic and mineral) are represented by a series of entities performing acts which subvert their very nature: the four elements join in a ceremonial banquet; flowers, unable to turn towards the sun, change their colour; a bird becomes a mere shadow; and the speaker's head turns to stone. Visual perception becomes deceptive in front of the unearthly spectacle: "What can you etch upon the eyes' quick web? / . . . / Whose profile can you sketch upon their filmy screen?" (14). In this state of blurred perceptions, the world is completely transfigured: the inanimate becomes alive and the animate is inert. The speaker, whose neck bends back at the weight of her stony head, enters a

state of trance in which sense perception is obliterated.[274] This is reminiscent of Freud's use of hypnosis in his study of the aetiology of hysteria. Through hypnotic suggestion, Freud achieved something that became central to Surrealist aesthetics: the production of cataleptic rigidity in the patient, a stage in which the individual adopts strained positions, exhibits abnormal contractures and does not respond to sensorial stimuli. A similar state is reached in the poem. The anaesthesia of the senses ("I am neither white nor warm nor cold") favours synesthetic automatism: "A bird's blue shadow trembles on my breasts / A bird's song blossoms from the water" (14). Irrationality and trance-like states are called for as pathways to a deeper apprehension of reality. The poem is not only an apology for hysteria and irrational perception, but also a critique of positivism and other systems of thought based on excessively rational and empiricist epistemologies, which are unable to provide a "Direct Response" to the spiritual longing for the unknown.

In Surrealism, woman is associated with the irrational, primitive and unconscious part of the human psyche, and, as a muse, she becomes an intermediary between the male artist and surreality.[275] The association of the womb and hysterical processes was commonplace in late nineteenth-century medical circles. First Jean-Martin Charcot and later Sigmund Freud contributed to the demystification of hysteria as an exclusively female ailment, in spite of the image of the mad woman that was to be perpetuated in Surrealist art.[276] With the collaboration of Joseph Breuer, Freud produced a series of essays centred on the psychological phenomenon of hysteria, *Selected Papers on Hysteria and Other Psychoneuroses* (1912). The repression of a traumatic memory is considered by Freud and Breuer as the main cause of hysteria. This memory is related to an experience which has been traumatic in varying degrees and which is, generally, of a sexual nature. The repression of the memory creates an excess of energy which cannot be released through *normal* reactions, such as weeping or confession. The excess energy is thus somatised, that is, it is abnormally released and made available through its conversion into the physical (visible), manifestations of hysteria.

Charcot included hallucination (*attitudes passionnelles*) and delirium among the forms of the hysterical attack (Freud 1994: 29), and it was this interest in these *attitudes passionnelles* that led the Surrealists to experiment with self-induced attacks during which they created hallucinatory reproductions of memories or dreams. There is an underlying

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[274] Not surprisingly, Gascoyne had described the real world of sensations as a prison and defended the need to go beyond the sensorial (Gascoyne 1935a: 23).

[275] See Briony Fer's "The Role of Psychic Disorder in Surrealist Aesthetic" in *Realism, Rationalism, Surrealism. Art Between the Wars* (1993): 209-220.

[276] For an in-depth analysis of male hysteria in the work of Charcot and Freud, see Mark S. Micale's *Hysterical Men: the Hidden History of Male Nervous Illness* (2008):117-161, 228-275.

eroticism in Charcot's and Freud's analyses of hysteria, and a similar idea is present in Western mysticism. Finally, hysteria may also be related to the imagination and artistic or poetic creation, since the hysteric suffers from imaginary ailments in which the real and the imagined converge. The Surrealists saw in the hysteric mind a not insignificant potential for artistic and poetic creativity: the hysteric disregards the moral and social impositions that the Surrealists intended to banish through the use of automatism. Mental asylums, on the other hand, were seen as repressive forces that blocked the freedom of the hysteric mind. As David Lomas states, "The surrealists were the anty-psychiatry movement of their day. In an open letter to directors of insane asylums published in *La Révolution surréaliste*, they are scornful of psychiatry and its institutions which they saw as the apparatus of a repressive social order" (Lomas 2000: 60). When Breton circulated copies of his novel *Nadja* (1928) among the inmates of a mental institution, the doctors were outraged to find out that one passage, underlined by a patient, was in fact an incitation to murder: "if I were mad and confined for several days, I would take advantage of any momentary period of lucidity to murder in cold blood one of those, preferably the doctor, who happened to come my way" (Breton 1972: 120). All these ideas merge in the genesis of Gascoyne's poem "The Rites of Hysteria" (Gascoyne 1936d: 39-40), in which mental conditions are praised as the psychological path to a new form of perception, and of expression. The poem presents a series of disconnected juxtaposed images as the result of the technique that Gascoyne termed "uncontrolled thought" (i.e. Bretonian psychic automatism). These are the visions of a deranged mind, and the poem resembles the prose piece "The Great Day" in its simulation of madness and the recreation of the fictitious images formed in the hysteric mind. The creative potential of hysteria is exploited in this poem, and thus logical or rational meaning is constantly hindered. The realities to which individual words refer are easy to grasp. Recognisably relevant terms which trigger instant visual and literary associations in the context of 1930s Surrealism are, for instance, "hysteria", "truths", "psychologies", "lips", "tongues", "monsters", "eye", "mucus", "sweat", "dream", "pamphlets", "asylum", "limbs", "sewing-machine", "nightmare", "nipple", "eyelids" and "mouth". A veritable Surrealist mythology is collected in the poem, with references to artists, poets and thinkers associated, willingly or unknowingly, with Surrealism. The mere occurrence of these terms evokes in the reader the presence of Breton, Bataille, Freud, Ernst, Domínguez, Lautréamont, Dalí and Buñuel, just to name a few. Although the awkward positions and striking juxtapositions into which the terms are forced elude univocal interpretation, the images connote suppressed fears and desires pushing through the barrier of consciousness. The poem is in fact a collection of surrealist objects, a gallery of horrors in which the fantastic

creations of a frenzied mind are encountered: an arrow with lips of cheese caught by a floating hair; perfumed lenses with tongues tied up with wire; boxes of tears; bicycles coated with stains swimming out of false-bottomed nests; a freak in a showcase smothered in mucus and sweat; lascivious pamphlets that form a beehive; rubber pitchforks; wriggling severed limbs; a sewing-machine condensing a windmill's halo; a tooth in an infanta's ear; a chain-armour of handcuffs; an ashtray balancing a ribbon upon a syringe; a breast stabbed by an icicle and a bleeding nipple. The final image sums up the frenzied nature of these visions: "A screen of hysteria blots out the folded hemlocks / And feathery eyelids conceal the volcano's mouth" (Gascoyne 1936d: 40). The convulsion of the hysterical fit obliterates sensorial perception and allows the connection with another reality.

In his poems, Gascoyne establishes a relation between magic and art. This does not only respond to Breton's defence of the magic of the poetic word, but is also the result of an animistic concept of reality, an idea that Freud explored in *Totem and Taboo* (1913), and on which Gascoyne drew. The reconciliation of image and ideology that takes place in Gascoyne's texts is also intimately connected with this animistic conception, as this reconciliation derives from the supremacy that Gascoyne bestows on poetic imagination as a productive and organising principle: in the same way that dreams arrange the latent images that remain as residues of waking life in the manifest dream, the poetic-magic act re-organises the disconnected images of subjective experience into a coherent whole of objective significance. In *Totem and Taboo*, Freud explains magic in primitive peoples as a cultural expression of the animistic system of thought. Animism is a belief in the immaterial, that is, in spiritual existence as complementary to physical reality, an idea which pervades Gascoyne's poems. Processes of animation are at the core of the animistic system of thought: the human consciousness is a myth-forming consciousness which, through analogy with its dualistic concept of the human being as body and spirit, endows the inanimate with a soul. For Freud, animistic mythology opposes religious and scientific discourses and is more exhaustive than these, as it attempts to explain totality in terms of a continuity between the material and the immaterial, the real and the ideal (Freud 2009: 101). E.B. Tylor defined magic as "mistaking an ideal connection for a real one" (in Freud 2009: 108), and therefore all forms of magic emerged from an animistic concept of reality, according to which the immaterial influences the material. For Freud, who draws on Frazer, this *mistake* may be based on two kinds of relationship established between the real and the ideal. Imitative magic is based on similarity between the magic act and its end product. Over time, some of our rituals have lost that iconic, imitative power, the signifier and the signified having become so separated through technical development that we can no

longer recognise the initial motivation of the magic act. On the other hand, contagious magic is based on the idea of contiguity between two realities, on the idea that contact is not a transient, material stage, but a permanent condition, very similar to the Surrealist concept of objective chance as the result of an unconscious desire. All forms of magic are thus based either on similarity or contiguity between the real and the ideal. In this, magic resembles the mechanisms of condensation and displacement in the dream-work as exposed by Freud. In his essay "The Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious" (1957) Lacan reinterprets Freud's theory of the dream-work in terms of Roman Jakobson's binary rhetorical model, identifying condensation with metaphor and displacement with metonymy (Lacan 1998: 1055).[277] Expanding on Lacan's idea, Surrealist poetry (certainly in the case of Gascoyne) may be said to be a form of magic, as it is an attempt to reconcile the real and the ideal through relationships of identification and of juxtaposition, resulting in the Surrealist image. The Surrealist image is, as Breton explains in the first *Manifesto of Surrealism*, not a comparison, but the juxtaposition of two distant realities (Breton 1972: 20). This juxtaposition responds to an unconscious desire, and the distant realities that are brought together remain forever so once the poetic word has united them through this form of contagious magic. On the other hand, the Surrealist image is also a form of imitative magic, for a relationship of identification is established between the poetic-magic act and that which it attempts to achieve: the destruction of the prevailing moral, political and ideological order that Surrealism attempts is *imitated* by its disruptive, disconnected and unsettling poetics. Freud asserts that only in magic and in art is the subject capable of retaining omnipotence of thought over the object. Religion and science represent different degrees in which the individual grants omnipotence to an object of desire other than himself. On the other hand, in magic and art, as narcissistic activities, the individual retains omnipotence over external reality:

> Only in one field has the omnipotence of thought been retained in our own civilization, namely in art. In art alone it still happens that man, consumed by his wishes, produces something similar to the gratification of these wishes, and this playing, thanks to

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[277] Jakobson first formulated his theory of the opposition of metaphor and metonymy in an essay entitled "Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Aphasic Disturbances" (1956). In it, Jakobson establishes the two basic modes of thought and expression as being either metaphoric or metonymic in nature: whereas metaphoric relations are based on similarity and substitution, metonymic ones are based on contiguity and context. In further essays on the matter, Jakobson assimilated the metaphoric mode with linguistic paradigm, and the metonymic mode with the linguistic syntagmatic axis. See Jakobson's *Selected Writings Vol. II: Word and Language* (1971). From Jakobson's thesis it is also derived that metaphoric thought and expression work on relations of absence, whereas the metonymic function relies on relations of presence.

artistic illusion, calls forth effects as if it were something real. We rightly speak of the magic of art and compare the artist with a magician. (Freud 2009: 117-118)

Gascoyne drew on Freud's ideas, probably through Breton, who described the automatic ritual of the Surrealist magical art as that of "first and last draft" (Breton 1972: 29). Gascoyne religiously followed Breton's dictates in his Surrealist compositions, and attacked those who did not: in his review of Sykes Davies's *Petron* for *New Verse*, "On Spontaneity", he harshly criticised Sykes Davies for his "premeditated" style and imagery (Gascoyne 1935h: 19). Automatism was for Gascoyne not only a literary experimental technique, but also a way to reconcile the real and the ideal into a totalising whole.

Links between spirituality and magic are found in some of Gascoyne's poems. To look for magic in poetry is to seek the influence of the immaterial on the material. Alyce Mahon defines magic as "a way of thinking that looks to invisible forces to influence event, effect change in material conditions, or present the illusion of change. Magic involves secret knowledge and revelation, and, on a more banal level, may be based on a trick of the eye and/or sleight of hand" (Mahon 2006: 221). Both types of magic are present in Gascoyne's poems, and it must be conceded that in them the more banal representation is always an aesthetic or ritualistic operation that leads to a secret revelation. Gascoyne resorts to magic and occultism as ways to engage with truth and reality: he finds in poetry the alchemical revelation that allows him to reconcile consciousness and spirituality by transcending both the objective (material) approach of Freudian psychoanalysis and the zealous representations of organised religion. In "Three Verbal Objects" (Gascoyne 1988: 63-66), first published in the catalogue of the Surrealist Objects and Poems Exhibition (1937), the speaker performs a ritual of mesmerism in order to connect with the masses: "In the centre of the arc is fixed a hunter's bow and arrow, festooned with deadly flowers. This is the node of animal magnetism and of all dreams of hate and fear. The people have secretly proclaimed their love for those who haunt them" (Gascoyne 1988: 63).[278] A key element of his poetics is subjectivity: Gascoyne's poems reveal a profoundly subjective aesthetic and ethic experience. It is this subjective approach that enabled him to connect with the irrational side of the human psyche and reach the

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[278] Mesmerism, or animal magnetism, is a healing practice based on the idea that all animals are subject to a certain magnetic energy, contained in their bodies, that connects them with the universe. Its name is derived from the German physician Friedrich Anton Mesmer (1784-1815), its main theoretician and practitioner. Mesmer's practice became very popular in Britain in the 19th century. For an analysis of the influence of Mesmerism in Victorian literature, see Martin Willis and Catherine Wynne's *Victorian Literary Mesmerism* (2006). One of its offshoots in modern science is Freudian hipnosis, and modern spiritualism is also partly derived from it. For a study of the development from Mesmerism to spiritualism in England, see "Mesmerism in England" in Frank Podmore's *Mesmerism and Christian Science* (2011): 122-150.

collective unconscious. Gascoyne's indulgence in states of unconscious trance, automatism, delusion and hysteria shows his determination to reach such connections.

Magic and alchemy became central to Surrealist practice.[279] The idea of the "alchemy of the word" was initially borrowed from Rimbaud, whom Gascoyne admired, first through the Surrealists, and later on through Fondane. His *A Season in Hell* (1873) is a significant influence in Gascoyne's Surrealist poetics. The figure of the speaker-madman-magician that appears in his poems is a Rimbaudian creation. In "Alchimie du Verbe", a section of *A Season in Hell*, the speaker's visions are not very different from those of Gascoyne's speakers:

> I got used to elementary hallucination: I could very precisely see a mosque instead of a factory, a school of drummers composed of angels, open carriages on the roads to heaven, a drawing room at the bottom of a lake; monsters and mysteries. [. . .] And so I explained my magical sophistries by turning words into visions! At last I began to consider the disorder of my own mind as sacred. (Rimbaud 2004: 55)

Rimbaud's conception of the poetic act is very similar to Gascoyne's in their use of hallucination as the source material of their poetic images, and the magic of the poetic word as the organising mechanism. The ecstasy of creation is a moment of mystic reunion with the unknown.

In Gascoyne's poem "The End is Near the Beginning" (Gascoyne 1936d: 20) the alchemy of the poetic word functions as a restorative power that grants immortality. Time becomes mythical through references to reincarnation and rebirth which undermine the natural laws of causality and the cultural concept of temporal linearity. A tension between memory and forgetfulness is only resolved in a projection (or a promise) of eternal rejuvenation: "There will be plenty of lace later on / Plenty of electric wool / And you will forget the eglantine / [. . .] / And if you forget the colour of my hands / You will remember the wheels of the chair / In which the wax figure resembling you sat" (20). As the title suggests, origin and end reunite, and the image of several men "standing on the pier / Unloading the sea" points to an endless activity that is cyclically repeated *in aeternum*. The sea bears the element which makes life possible (maybe even immortal), and a mysterious mechanism is necessary to extract it: "The device on the trolley says MOTHER'S MEAT / Which means *Until the end*" (20). This "mother's meat" is thus the alchemical element, the elixir of eternal youth

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[279] For an analysis of the influence of magic and the occult in continental Surrealism, see Nadia Choucha's *Surrealism and the Occult* (1991), Celia Rabinovitch's *Surrealism and the Sacred* (2002) and Alyce Mahon's "The Search for a New Dimension: Surrealism and Magic" in *The Meanings of Magic. From the Bible to Buffalo Bill* (2006): 221-234. Studies of Breton's alchemical interests are found in Clifford Browder's *André Breton: Arbiter of Surrealism* (1967) and Michel Carrouges's *André Breton and the Basic Concepts of Surrealism* (1974).

or the philosopher's stone. Like the Biblical manna, it is a miraculous food, provided by the eternal mother, nature, which acquires mysterious restorative powers. As opposed to the concept of material and perishable nourishment offered to the mortal man in the title of Gascoyne's collection of Surrealist poems, *Man's Life is this Meat* (1936), the *meat* offered by the eternal mother is the spiritual nourishment of the searching soul. Gascoyne's belief in a reality that transcends the material underlies this search for the alchemical element to counter the corruption of the body. As the magical enters the realm of the real, Gascoyne bridges the abyss between the spiritual and the material.

"Reflected Vehemence" (Gascoyne 1936d: 19) is a piece of poetic prose which makes use of unexpected juxtaposition and visually striking imagery to emphasise the outlandishness of the scenario that is presented. It is one of Gascoyne's most accomplished examples of uncontrolled thought. The familiar is defamiliarised and, as in the child's fantasy, this happens through processes of animation. For Freud, the act of bringing to life inanimate matter, or of applying human attributes to non-human beings, is a form of regression (Freud 1955: 233-236). The resulting image is one in which the familiar becomes alienated from itself through a process of repression: the laws of reason prevent such psychic formations from taking place again, they are repressed and only find expression in dreams and other unconscious states. Gascoyne's text is a poetic reflection on natural events, prompted by the presence of a fly on the speaker's hand. The capture of insects in a spider's cobweb and the formation of clouds are the two natural events for which an almost alchemical interpretation is provided in the text. The speaker presents the magic workings of a supernatural mechanism, unknown to the uninitiated, behind the common minutiae of nature. The natural and the ordinary acquire supernatural and extraordinary proportions. The cobweb becomes the dress of the trapped insects, whose final exhalations are said to "propagate violence and fear". The vehemence referred to in the title is reflected in the convulsions of these insects whose connection with superior astral entities cannot deliver them from their fatal end. They have been abandoned by their pagan gods; they are the "vanquished ones". The speaker provides metaphysical explanations for biological facts: the insects' fate is described as the breaking of a secret pact between them and Saint Valentine. Nature and nurture are combined and the biological is explained in terms of a cultural (Christian) belief that death is not the result of Darwinian (material) power structures, but rather of divine condemnation, and that there is no escape to it: "As though flying itself were only circular" (Gascoyne 1936d: 19).

Similarly, the formation of clouds is described as a ritualistic act. The inanimate is animated and nature, like the cobwebbed flies, acquires intellectual autonomy: "See how the

ruched waterfalls reply with shaking heads to the invitations of the warrior-like foliage" (19). Urban elements enter the natural realm and take part in this alchemical process. This anticipates Julian Trevelyan's creation of a *Machine for Making Clouds* (1937), which he contributed to the Surrealist Objects and Poems Exhibition. By making cotton-wool clouds come out of the mechanistic body of a Victorian female head, Trevelyan's object mixes the natural and the supernatural, the domestic and the mysterious. In Gascoyne's poem, the bells chime without the intervention of human hands, and eggs break during a fencing lesson. The Bataillean association of the egg with the ocular globe is an unambiguous reference to the accident in which George Barker blinded his brother during a mock-fencing game in April 1935. For the Surrealists, this accident was the crystallisation of mysterious rules which reconciled an unconscious desire to kill and die (Freud's death instinct) with the ultimate poetic act.[280] Finally clouds are born out of "an indulgently frothing explosion of the head", an image with manifest sexual connotations. Stylistically, the text is peculiar in its recurrent use of the definite article in noun phrases whose nuclear element is always preceded by a modifier: "the graphite byways", "the ruched waterfalls", "the warrior-like foliage", "the tinkling belfries" and "the closed gates" (19). This type of structure achieves two apparently contradictory goals. On the one hand, it points to a referent which is (ought to be) known by both the speaker and the reader: it is a familiar reality, something with which the reader is, at least at an unconscious level, acquainted. On the other hand, through the use of the modifying adjective, the speaker manages to defamiliarise such familiar sights. It is an unknown, strange world whose elements need to be constantly identified and defined, and whose boundaries require demarcation: these are not just any kind of byways or waterfalls, foliage, belfries or gates, but rather those precisely that insistently recur in the poet's magic visions of another world.

"Lost Wisdom" (Gascoyne 1936d: 21) takes the reader back to the mythical dawn of time, to "the first morning" in which humankind, avid for knowledge, lost all wisdom and was damned to live in "solitude and pain" (21). The loss of wisdom thus implies as well the loss of paradise. Biblical echoes in the poem serve Gascoyne to establish a secular Surrealist genealogy for humankind and re-write this chapter of Genesis in his own apocryphal terms. The Tree of Knowledge brings damnation upon humankind: "A faint odour of vegetable matter / Fringing the violet lids of night / And hanging from the water's eyes / The simulacrum of the damned" (21). In the poem, the visions of the poet-seer are perceived in the misty atmosphere of disturbed weather, and there are temporal lapses as the speaker's perspective shifts from

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[280] When Charles Madge learned of Barker's accident, he exclaimed: "For God's sakes, now I know you are a poet" (in Pondrom 1971: 389).

the remote mythological time of humanity's dawn to an unspecified present. When sight is disturbed, the seer's oneiric visions become clear: he sees the fallen angels, and the fall of man. He can also see the impossible: needles in the sand, the veins of polypi and seamless seams. Time is circular as past and present become united. There is no progression but repetition: "And now and then / [. . .]/ And then as now" (21). The final profanation of the tombs, which is also the unearthing of unconscious desires, discloses the alchemical nature of the truth revealed: in a reversal of the philosopher's stone, an element is found (snow) which is capable of melting gold, and flowers grow in barren soil. The impossible, the magical and the supernatural are regained in this second night of humanity, which is that of dreams. Dreams reveal the truth and recover the wisdom once lost to a cruel god, the only absence in the poem. Thus, paradise is regained in a world in which there is no paradise, but only the incessant rumours of the unconscious ("an unstanched stream") and the alchemical power of unrepressed desire. Again, the political element worms through Gascoyne's images, as it is from "every abandoned mouth" that the unconscious stream must flow: by providing the hungry mouth with the word, he is bestowing on the proletarian masses and the poor the power of poetic expression, which they have been so far denied. It is a worldly paradise that is regained in the text, but also a paradise in which material possession is deprecated (gold is melted) and it is an apparently insubstantial action (the gathering of flowers) that brings a sense of comfort. The original damnation of the Biblical account was, in fact, only a simulacrum and the paradise that is regained is thus, in a Marxist sense, of this world. "Lost Wisdom" is a ceremonial poem, with cadences that confer it a liturgical rhythm as the origins of humankind are recounted. Its lines tend to be shorter than the long Gascoynean Surrealist line. The iambic tetrameters are reminiscent of the enchanting rhythms of many of the *Lyrical Ballads* (1798). The combination of these with shorter lines, especially dimeters, evokes the interrupted rhythms of liturgical formulae. Also, the use of assonance and imperfect rhyme confers the poem with echoes of unknown truths which are revealed in perceptual processes that go from the purely sensorial to the spiritual: "pain-night-eyes-damned" (the vowel sound develops from /eɪ/ to /aɪ/ and eventually /æ/; the nasal sound /n/ is repeated and partially recovered in /m/; the nasal is not present in "eyes" but it recovers the diphthong /aɪ/); "see-wings-sand-seams" (the sibilants /s/ and /z/ recur in initial and/or final position, whereas the vowel sound /iː/ alternates with /ɪ/ and /æ/ and is eventually recovered in the last line); "mouth-flow-now-snow-stone-all" (the last stanza is more elaborate: the vowel sound develops from /aʊ/ to /əʊ/ and eventually /ɔː/, whereas there is an intricate play of consonantal echoes of nasal and lateral sounds).

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"The Truth is Blind" (Gascoyne 1936d: 26-27) integrates a series of motifs that appear in several of Gascoyne's poems. The revelation of the truth occurs in the dark hours of the night, as in "The Cage" (Gascoyne 1936d: 28), for instance, where the dream-like encounter takes place at night, the magic hour at which time comes to a halt and a revelation ensues: "In the waking night / The forests have stopped growing / The shells are listening / The shadows in the pools turn grey / The pearls dissolve in the shadow" (28). In "The Truth is Blind" the darkness of the night hinders human vision, but the poetic word is illuminating. Sensory perception is hampered, but this allows for a deeper and truer form of perception: that of unconscious imagination. The revelation of truth through blindness is a motif that recurs in Surrealism from Buñuel and Dalí to Bataille. As Linda Williams states, "blindness, as every poet knows, can also be a *figure* for a different kind of sight" (Williams 1992: 73). Written towards the end of 1935, Gascoyne's poem combines brief poetic pieces with instances of poetic prose. Three sections in the poem are press cuttings which Gascoyne selected randomly from three periodicals of the time: *Argosy Magazine*, *The Listener* and an unidentified evening paper. In the "Introduction" to his *Collected Poems 1988*, Gascoyne explains the composition method that he used for this poem:

> three cuttings were selected [. . .] and then stuck on two sheets of paper with spaces left between them to be filled in such a way as to link them into a more or less coherent whole, while avoiding stopping to consider anything like a normally logical connection between the three disparate component elements. (Gascoyne 1988: xv)

The projected aim behind this exercise of textual collage was that the resulting text, in all its fragmented juxtaposition of discordant elements, would create the effect of a dream narrative. Gascoyne's creative method would be later taken up by Humphrey Jennings and Charles Madge. Nevertheless, the way in which Gascoyne displaces and re-elaborates his source texts, which become untraceable, differs greatly from Jennings's editing labour and Madge's cut-and-paste technique. Gascoyne's process of creation is organic, and the source material is used to trigger unconscious associations in the poet's mind: this is the poetic application of Freud's psychoanalytical method. Gascoyne's method, very much like that of Sykes Davies, as will be seen, responds to Breton's original definition of automatism as intuition: it is the passive state in which the poet perceives unconscious connections of which he is only the intermediary. Jennings and Madge, on the other hand, use textual collage in such a way that the associations they consciously establish prompt unconscious connections in the reader. Jennings's and Madge's method responds more clearly to Breton's definition of

"reasoning" or engaged Surrealist practice, and is therefore closer to the forms of active engagement with the reality of the texts.

"The Truth is Blind" presents a Surrealist sunset, born out of the actions of two contradictory emotions. Love recedes like the day, leaving hate to spread the darkness of the night. The image is visually powerful: "Love wrapped in its wings passed by and coal black Hate / Paused on the edge of the cliff and dropped a stone / From which the night grew like a savage plant". Crime and passion accompany the darkness, and the creeping night becomes a savage plant whose leaves are daggers and whose flowers are red hearts. The Gothic atmosphere that is recreated in the poem is further reinforced by the emergence of the supernatural as the inanimate becomes alive: "the bed / Rose clocklike from the ground and spread its sheets / Across the shifting sands". Suddenly, as in a dream, the scene is interrupted and perspective shifts. The speaker describes an expedition through an unknown river. The precarious boat acquires magical features: water and fire gush out of holes on the prow, through which the passengers discover the fantastic vision of a prestidigitator performing a magic trick. The speaker attempts to dissociate himself from the images that follow by creating a frame through the use of the expression "we are told". Nevertheless, the fact that the speaker quotes the whole passage in which the vision is recounted does not only suggest that he is a witness to the magical events, but also that he is the prestidigitator himself:

> The conjuror, we are told, 'took out of his bag a silken thread, and so projected it upwards that it stuck fast in a certain cloud of air. Out of the same receptacle he pulled a hare, that ran away up along the thread; a little beagle, which when it was slipped at the hare pursued it in full cry; last of all a small dogboy, whom he commanded to follow both hare and hound up the thread. From another bag that he had he extracted a winsome young woman, at all points well adorned, and instructed her to follow after hound and dogboy'. (Gascoyne 1936d: 27)

The conjuror, like the Surrealist poet, creates an impossible world of magic, which he draws out of a bag as if it were one of Dada's automatic poems.[281] The poet becomes again the poet-creator and the poet-magician: these visions are the magic creations of the poetic word. The young woman who had been instructed to go after the hare, the beagle and the dogboy, as if in a crazy chase devised by Lewis Carroll, defies and rebels against her creator: she laughs at the spectator's expectancy, claps her hands and vanishes, reappears on the other bank of the river, takes flight again towards the sky and finally falls beside a ragged pilot. The creator,

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[281] The instructions on how to make a Dadaist poem appeared in the 1918 *Dada Manifesto*. See *Seven Dada Manifestos and Lampisteries* (2011): 3-14.

nevertheless, overpowers her and she is turned into a sugar statue whose head is consumed by the pilot. The river, the fantastic place in which the supernatural occurs, turns out to be just another urban setting. The street, an abyss that separates the real from the unreal and the fantastic is full of traffic smoke that leaves "A sharp taste in the mouth".

Either through irrationality or magic, the idea of the poet as prophet-seer is central to Gascoyne's Surrealist poetics. The poet is a visionary capable of attaining degrees of consciousness so far unknown, or unavailable to the common man. In his "Introduction" to *Hölderlin's Madness*, Gascoyne wonders about the nature of the world that is discovered by the poet-seer, and uses André Gide's quote to defend the poetic imagination as an irrational creative force against rational and material necessity:

> "What is it then, the secret world to which the poet penetrates, the world discovered by the poet-seer? 'The poet is he who sees,' wrote André Gide. 'And what does he see? –Paradise!' And in fact, this is so, if by Paradise we mean a state of autonomous existence unsubjected to necessity, a state of perfect freedom, without tie or age, and if the non-rational imagination of the poet is distinguished precisely by its ignorance of Necessity's irrevocable laws and its defiance of the Aristotelian *ananke*. (Gascoyne 1938: 11)

It is poetic autonomy that makes possible the visionary images of the poet, immune as he is to the rational laws of causality and necessity. In Gascoyne's poem "Germinal", the poet-prophet becomes the announcer of a marvellous reality. The revelatory power of the poetic word is finally made manifest on the fertile ground of unsubjected poetic freedom: "The marvellous is yet unborn / In the Manor of the Tongue / Seed fallen until now on stony ground / Spoken then / An announcement of future marvels" (Gascoyne 1988: 27).

Prophetic and apocalyptic images recur again and again in Gascoyne's poems. "No Solution" (Gascoyne 1936d: 13), a poem first published in 1934, presents a circular concept of time as the incessant and purposeless succession of days ("The roll of days spread out like a cloth" and "Yesterday folding Tomorrow opening"). This is reinforced throughout the poem in which time does not seem to advance, as the first stanza becomes lost in the description of a today which is forever repeated: every development into the future is a constant repetition of the past, and the present only exists as the materialisation of other temporal references. The second stanza evokes formally what the first one achieves in content, since the use of assonance and internal rhyme hinders progression: "A burning taper burning paper / And you can turn back no longer". Words refer to each other in a circular manner: "turn" takes the reader back to "burning", and "paper" summons up "taper". The repetition of "burning" both

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as an adjective and as a verb highlights this sense of circularity, and the action of burning almost becomes reciprocal. The beauty of the images, which insist both on the domestic ("The roll of days spread out like a cloth" with resonances of Eliot and Reverdy) and the exotic ("A fan of days held in a virgin hand"), does not palliate the apocalyptic brutality of the message: there is "No Solution".[282] The burning of the paper refers both to medieval forms of censorship and to the undecipherable hieroglyphics of Egyptian papyri. The implications are that the errors of the past will be repeated. The poem, concise and direct, stresses the despair and chaos of existence ("Today like a horse without a rider") and the impossibility of escape.

Although apocalyptic in nature, "The Last Head" (Gascoyne 1936d: 15) also prophesies salvation, brought by the Surrealist poet, whose fantastic head will be the "Last Head" standing when the world is doomed. This poem presents a highly visual, almost pictorial, description of the last remaining head. Its organic associations with water, the sea and other marine elements anticipates the work of Eileen Agar, whose 1930s collages show cephalic profiles in which shells, weeds and sea species find their natural habitat. Also, Agar made several sculptures of plaster cast anthropomorphic heads, such as *Angel of Mercy* (1934) and *Angel of Anarchy* (1936-1940, currently held at the Tate). *Angel of Mercy* is an ancient god in astrological communication: the dice on the nose, the diamond on the forehead and the stars above and below the mouth point to the merciful fortune that this magical figure evokes. *Angel of Anarchy*, on the other hand, elaborately blindfolded with Chinese silk and decorated with feathers, beads and shells, is a tribal goddess of fertility which stands beautiful and provocative against the aesthetic and moral codes of bourgeois civilised society. All these themes, present in Agar's Surrealist heads, appear already in Gascoyne's poem. The inner landscape of the mind is presented as a warm and light room in which the head, protective and ritualistic, is found by the poet-seer: "I saw the last head with its fingers plaited in curls / And its sides ridged and smooth, worn by runnels of light" (15). Perspective shifts and the outside is described as a dark site of doom as the world comes to a halt: "The canals are all stopped with a white-flowering weed / The beetle conspires to bring doom to the bridge / The night air is salt on the tongue" (15). In spite of the apocalyptic and menacing atmosphere that reigns outside, the inside is comfortable and secure, a "vegetable dome" which contrasts with the paralysis of the world outside. Gascoyne's last head is, like Agar's *Angel of Anarchy*, a primitive god "wrapped in it oiled silk sheath". And, like Agar's *Angel of Mercy*, it is also an ancient immortal god which has ichor for blood. It is this ichorous liquid that makes it

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[282] In his *Manifesto of Surrealism*, Breton used Reverdy's image "Day unfolded like a white tablecloth" to defend the unpremeditated nature of the Surrealist image (Breton 1972: 36).

immortal, by burning the dry and dead shells of its mask and allowing thus eternal regeneration.[283] The poet is thus conceived of as an immortal god. His "ichorous brain" is the source of his poetic imagination, primitive, visionary and eternal. His is the power to preserve the autonomy of the poetic word in the midst of intellectual paralysis.

Prophetic images of cosmic chaos appear in "Yves Tanguy" (Gascoyne 1936d: 25), a poem inspired by Tanguy's 1932 painting *The Ribbon of Excess* (1932). This painting marks Tanguy's transition from the watery landscapes of oceanic depth of his earlier work to this extraterrestrial and lunar landscapes in which complex visual relationships are established among "soft" forms and constructions of Dalinian influence: elongated members, bean-like figures, biomorphic elements and anthropomorphic beings, halfway between the organic and the inert, crowd Tanguy's deserted, sterile landscape of unearthly geological and atmospheric features. This extraterrestrial landscape is described by Gascoyne as a vast world confined by darkness. The claustrophobic and dark atmosphere of the poem equals that of Tanguy's painting: "The fading cries of the light / Awaken the endless desert / Engrossed in its tropical slumber / Enclosed by the dead grey oceans / Enclasped by the arms of the night" (25). Tanguy's paintings depict a world in fragmentation whose fluid fractions are on the brink of metamorphosis. Gascoyne verbalised the violence and convulsion of these visions by insisting on repetition as a form of incantation: the line "The worlds are breaking in my head" is repeated throughout the poem to foreground the destruction which is taking place. This geological destruction is accompanied by spiritual damnation and despair, on which the hungry and the abandoned feed. This emphasises the parasitic relations that are established between those amorphous beings that await the final blast: "Their fragments are crumbs of despair / The food of the solitary damned / Who await the gross tumult of turbulent / Days bringing change without end" (25). These references do not only encode a psychological commotion, but they are also a presage of war: the "gross tumult of turbulent days" may be seen as a reference to Hitler's marching troops, whereas the "change without end" is seems to be an allusion to war itself. These readings further stress the apocalyptic nature of the visions. This is an outer space as much as an inner landscape, which Gascoyne transferred to poetry through the incessant re-enactment of the explosion that brings about this planetary (and psychical) commotion: "The worlds are breaking in my head / Blown by the brainless wind /

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[283] The idea that ichor is the substance that the gods have for blood, as a result of eating and drinking ambrosia and nectar, making them immortal, appears in Homer's *Iliad*. When Aphrodite is wounded by Diomedes, ichor oozes from her wound: "ichor pure, / Such as the blest inhabitant of heav'n / May bleed, nectareous; for the Gods eat not / Man's food, nor slake as he with fable wine / Their thirst, thence bloodless and from death exempt" (Homer 1802: 153).

That comes from afar / Swollen with dusk and dust / And hysterical rain" (25). In his essay "What Tanguy Veils and Reveals" (1942) André Breton described Tanguy's paintings in a way which can also be applied to Gascoyne's poem:

> Here the elixir of life is decanted, leaving behind all the cloudy sediment of our ephemeral individual existences. The tide ebbs, revealing an endless shore where hitherto unknown composite shapes creep, rear up, straddle the sand, sometimes sinking below the surface or soaring into the sky. (Breton 2002: 178-179)

Indeed, and in spite the devastated landscape that is presented, the *elixir* of a new and revolutionary life is also *decanted* in the poem through partial echoes, alliterations and imperfect rhymes: "The fuming future sleeps no more / For their seeds are beginning to grow / To creep and to cry midst the / Rocks of the deserts to come" (Gascoyne 1936d: 25). The seeds of this new life begin to grow as the angry revolt awakens. These are images of a bourgeoning revolution, and even if the landscape of the future is barren as a desert, it is countered by the emerging life that creeps through it. This is the idealised promise of an angry tomorrow. Nevertheless, Gascoyne's cosmic visions come to an end with disturbing, and not unambiguous, images of birth and growth. The seeds scattered by the planetary explosion are also the remnants of a decaying world creeping through the sterile desert: are these then the sign of a coming revolution or of eternal damnation? New life emerges, in the poem as in the painting, as the result of the alchemical combination of "hysterical rain" and "brainless" and "grotesque" wind. The cosmic and the material are brought together again in the final image, which proleptically anticipates scenes of nuclear devastation, or is simply a poetic vindication for the exploited proletariat. In this image, the ugliness of the visions combines with the sublime rhythms and echoes of the lines: "Whose head is so swollen with rumours / Whose hands are so urgent with tumours / Whose feet are so deep in the sand" (25).

"The Diabolical Principle" (Gascoyne 1936d: 37-38) presents an eschatological scenario in which two symbols of the Biblical apocalypse (the white horse and the living dead) intervene and a series of omens, incantations and rituals are used to conjure up the diabolical forces that govern the universe. As the curtain rises, a landscape is revealed which is as cryptic as one of de Chirico's metaphysical paintings: "And when the curtain rises the landscape is as empty as a board / Empty except for a broken bottle and a torso broken like a bottle / And when the curtain falls the palace of cards will fall / The card-castle on the table will topple without a sound" (37). The alliteration of plosive sounds contributes to the fragmented character of the visions and the staccato rhythm of the lines: "broken"-"bottle"-"broken"-"bottle", "card"-"castle" and "table"-"topple". A series of juxtaposed images, which include an

eye winking from the gallows and a bed sliding upwards, follow each other vertiginously suggesting seduction and temptation, but also presaging punishment and death in a way which is reminiscent of the enticing tree stump in one of Sykes Davies's poems. Gascoyne's visions may be seen as taking place in a theatre performance as if in one of Aleister Crowley's Golden Dawn rites (as indicated by the rising and falling of the curtain), or simply as part of a natural landscape observed by the poetic eye (the reference to the "winter's curtains" and "the clouds' draperies").[284] In any case, the visual must not supersede the verbal, as the poem is also an automatic message that comes from the afterlife: "A suicide with mittened hands stumbles out of the lake / And writes a poem on the tablets of a dead man's heart" (37). Appropriately, it is a poem and not any other literary form that connects the world of material and mortal existence with the afterlife; and the creator of the poem is a suicide, the only person who derides material existence and decidedly embraces the unknown. Also, the fact that the poem is written on "tablets" is significant in the context of Gascoyne's religious imagery: the poetic word thus substitutes for god's commandments as poetry and magic supersede religion in the new society that is envisaged in the poem.

The theme of seduction and erotic union is taken up again in a series of images in which echoes of Crowley's sex magic rituals can be traced: "The marine sceptre is splintered like an anvil / Its spine crackles with electric nerves / While eagle pinions thunder through the darkness / While swords and breastplates clatter in the darkness" (37).[285] The image of the bed sliding upwards in the previous stanza recalls unorthodox rites of Catholic exorcism; finally, damnation (or is it orgasmic redemption?) is brought upon it as "the storm falls across the bed like a thrice-doomed tree". The poem creates an effect of *mise en abîme* which is marked typographically. This is not so much the result of a conscious elaboration of André Gide's play-within-a-play structure, but rather it seems to respond to the kind of unconscious association and displacement that occurs in dreams, prompted by the image of the convulsive bed. Thus, a new text is embedded within the main frame: the lines become shorter but the landscape widens. It is now an open landscape, a beach on which the daybreak (a sign of regeneration) is

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[284] Although Paul C. Ray sees these two readings as contradictory in his critique of Rob Jackaman's analysis of the poem, I see no reason why they should not be complementary, especially if the images are considered, as they are in this study, in the broader context of Aleister Crowley's Golden Dawn magic, certainly an influence in Gascoyne's early poetics. See Rob Jackaman's "View from the White Cliffs: a Close Look at One Manifestation of English Surrealism" (1975) and Paul C. Ray's "Meaning and Textuality: a Surrealist Example" (1980). For a study of the influence of Golden Dawn magic on British Surrealism see Yiyi López Gándara's "Myth, Dream and Poetry. The Occult in 1930s British Surrealism" (2011).
[285] An analysis of Crowley's magic and sexual excesses in the cultural context of Modernism in Britain is offered by Hugh B. Urban in "Aleister Crowley, Sex Magic and the Exhaustion of Modernity" (2004).

countered by equally ominous signs: "poisoned arrows", "darts of disaster", "the cry of a foal", a white horse stamping on "disastrous waves". Several images point to the sexual violence of the ritual which has taken place during the night, the consequences of which are encountered by the light of day: through the use of hypallage, the sun is described as both "a broken mouth" and "a broken lamp", images which show the extent of the violent act, both in figurative and in literal terms. Also, bloody traces are left as the "careful signatures" of those involved in the ritual. A mythological deluge announces the convulsive nature of the post-coital apocalypse: "A sound drops into the water and the water boils / The sound of disastrous waves / Waves flood the room when the door opens / A white horse stamps upon the liquid floor" (38). Nevertheless, the moment is anticlimactic as there is a progressive return to normality: the mind (also the body?) is left empty and exhausted, the magicians-lovers abandon the place leaving their footprints on the sand and railways continue their advance towards the hills. An apparent normality is restored: the ceremonial rite has been interrupted by the morning light which, deriding the lovers, "laughs like an unposted letter", an image that underscores this idea of incompletion and *coitus interruptus.*

Finally, the main frame of the poem is reinstated and a demonic entity, the diabolical principle, is conjured up in order to stop planetary mayhem: "Stop it tormentor stop the angry planet before it breaks the sky" (38). The "Diabolical Principle" that is invoked in the ritual and in the poem may be seen as Gascoyne's poetic configuration of the Christian god-tormentor, responsible for these apocalyptic visions of doom. Thus, the poem combines a mixture of sexual exaltation and spiritual damnation, of convulsive apocalypticism and anticlimactic inertia, showing Gascoyne's own ambivalent attitude to physical gratification and religious belief and his struggle to come to terms with a sense of the spiritual within the material. The poem comes to an ambiguous end with a final ritual in which satisfaction of material, bodily needs eventually supersedes spiritual gratification ("Having given up hope for water") and historiographic discourse is criticised as a form of arbitrary revelation: "Having shaken the chosen words in a hat / History opened its head like a wallet / And folded itself inside" (Gascoyne 1936: 38). Instead of being the expression of the dialectical forces at work in the material development of humankind, history becomes the narration of the progress of the dominant classes. The ideological implication of this is that the world indefectibly advances to its own destruction, as it is envisioned by the apocalyptic images and the figure of the tormenting god. The ideological element thus penetrates the imagery of this poem in which

magic, religion, poetry and desire are used as means to reconcile the spiritual and the material.[286]

As we have seen, in his Surrealist poetry, Gascoyne combines religious and erotic imagery so that the revelation of a transcendental truth acquires an almost mystic quality. In "The Future of the Lyrical Imagination" (1936) Gascoyne describes modern religion as an institutional manipulation of the individual's concept of material and spiritual existence. Whereas religion is seen as a form of distorting reality, poetry, on the other hand, is "a reflection of the real, a transformation of it" (Gascoyne 1998: 29). Thus, Gascoyne establishes a radical distinction between institutionalised religion as a rational activity and poetry as a subjective experience of the spiritual phenomenon, albeit with a social dimension. Even so, Gascoyne acknowledges the role that religion plays in pre-capitalist societies: "The positive function that religion once performed was the exercise and training of man's spirit: it provided a balance and complement to the rationalizing and logical functions of the mind" (Gascoyne 1998: 30). Following on from I.A. Richard's statement in *Science and Poetry* (1926) that poetry should replace religion, Gascoyne defends poetry as the new religion of modern times. Science and poetry (the reasoning and the spiritual or irrational faculties of the mind) may now work together and complement each other. For Gascoyne, poetry is essentially an activity of the mind, rather than a means of expression, and he suggests that the role of this poetry-activity-of-the-mind in a new post-revolutionary society will be related to the sublimation of anti-social impulses, impulses which are now repressed by the moral codes of behaviour (Gascoyne 1998: 33). That is how poetry would achieve the complete liberation of the human spirit in a post-revolutionary world. The role of future poetry is "that of completely humanizing and liberating the spirit of mankind, and giving significant meaning to universal leisure" (33). In saying this, Gascoyne became the first British Surrealist to theorise on the role of the poet and of poetry as substitutes for religion in the post-revolutionary world. His is a "revolutionary theory of poetry" rather than a "theory of revolutionary poetry" (34).

The influence of an anticlerical Christianity is widely acknowledged in Gascoyne's post-Surrealist production. Nevertheless, the criticism says very little about it in his Surrealist

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[286] Finally, the poem can also be seen as a revaluation of the Romantic element in Surrealist poetry, and a response to Wyndham Lewis's article "The Diabolical Principle" (1929), in which Lewis attacked Surrealism as a form of "new romanticism": "a return to the feverish 'diabolism' that flourished in the middle of the last century in France, and which reached England in the 'nineties,' with Oscar Wilde and Beardsley as its principal exponents. Huysmans' exploitation of the mediaeval nightmare and his *Messe Noire* interests; Nietzsche's turgid Satanism and the diabolism of Baudelaire and Byron: the 'Drunken Boat' of Rimbaud, and the rhetoric of Lautréamont, are its basis" (Lewis 1931: 42). In the light of these attacks, Gascoyne's invocation of the "Diabolical Principle" in the poem is as much a reappraisal of Romantic *diabolism* as a vilification of Lewis's position.

poetry, and the very little that actually gets said still fails (or refuses) to acknowledge its insistence on religious imagery. Gascoyne's poetic concern with religion pervades his poetry as a recurrent theme, from *Roman Balcony* (1932) to his later poems. Much of the religious imagery that appears in later poems brews during his Surrealist period: religious iconography, Biblical echoes and characters, references to Christian mythology and a mystic conception of the poetic act (as both sexual and spiritual climax) are already present in his collection of Surrealist poetry *Man's Life is this Meat* (1936). It is not merely an execrating attitude that he exhibits: a sort of religious mysticism, described by Gascoyne as "a quest for an absent god" (Gooding 1991: 59), is at the core of his poetic creation. Gascoyne's *fits* of mysticism are related to genesis and revelation: a poetic world is created by the poet-magician, and a new reality is prophesied by the poet-seer. The poet is in communion with the historical conditions that surround him; he becomes a speaker for humanity, and also the symbol of the mystic reunion of contraries: the real and the unreal, the material and the spiritual. This union is enacted in Gascoyne's poems through erotically charged encounters described in terms typically associated with mystic poetry: synaesthesia, contrast, antithesis, paradox, spiritual elevation, carnal mortification, orgasmic climax, delusion and hallucination. Faith and sex become connected as both lead to a revelatory climax, an idea which is also central to mystic poetry: through irrational acts of faith and sex, the poet abandons himself to a revelation beyond the merely sensorial.

In his interview with Lucien Jenkins, Gascoyne offers the interpretive key that opens up his poetry to the reader: when asked about the theme that is present in all of his poetry, he answers that it is "The hollowness of the world without a spiritual dimension" (Gascoyne 1998: 47). In his Surrealist poetry, images of fragmentation and void are combined with the longing for wholeness of Gascoyne's speakers: these are madmen, mediums, seers, prophets and priests yearning for the spiritual dimension that the decaying material world refuses to yield. Gascoyne's poems are quests for totality: quests for a deeper apprehension of reality, for wider material consciousness, for spiritual revelation, for physical pleasure and for psychic liberation. Although Gascoyne considered himself an atheist at the time, influenced as he was by his early reading of Marx and Freud, there persisted in him a sense that life could not simply be explained in material terms, that an inborn need to believe is inherent in the human condition: "I believe that man has a soul" (Gascoyne 1998: 47).

Published at the height of his Surrealist period, *Man's Life is this Meat* (1936) is Gascoyne's most significant achievement as a Surrealist poet.[287] The collection gathers a series of Surrealist poems which Gascoyne had published in several journals, and some other unpublished poems. The cryptic title of the collection is said to have been taken randomly from phrases found in one of Geoffrey Grigson's books of printers' types. In the "Introduction" to his *Collected Poems 1988*, Gascoyne goes to great lengths to describe in detail the arbitrary process that led to the naming of the book:

> The title [. . .] was the result of a meeting with Geoffrey Grigson during which he produced a sample-book of printers' type-faces, which when opened at random showed the words 'man's life is' in one sort of type at the end of the bottom line of the left-hand page, and 'this meat' in a different type of lettering at the beginning of the top line of the page opposite: as an example of what the surrealists described as 'objective hazard', this seemed at the time an ideal title. (Gascoyne 1988: xv)

The excruciatingly detailed account is not devoid of a certain mysticism associated with the Christian idea that to name is to create. The incoherent and apparently nonsensical title was meant to acquire significance through displacement, its fragmented nature being countered by the totalising experience of the book as a whole. Nevertheless, and this has never been acknowledged, the title also bears echoes of one of Christ's lessons to his disciples, according to which "life is more than meat, and the body is more than raiment".[288] Whether the echoes of these words in Gascoyne's title are deliberate or not is not as important as the fact that those echoes do exist. The title might be seen as the result of a deliberate act, of objective chance or simply unconscious association. In any case, it is significant in the context of this analysis, for it reconciles Gascoyne's spiritual longings for totality with his visions of a fragmented reality through a disjointed aesthetics. In the 1992 interview with Lucien Jenkins, Gascoyne, reflecting on his poetic evolution from Surrealism and his political development out of Communism, says:

> I realized pretty early that man cannot live by bread alone and when the masses go home from their demonstrations and find themselves alone in the dark, all they have to fall back on is what was scornfully described by the party line philosophy as 'mere subjectivity'. I could never accept that subjectivity was 'mere.' (Gascoyne 1998: 47)

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[287] An editorial note warns the reader that the first six poems of this collection are in fact not Surrealist poems.

[288] Luke 12:23.

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In the light of these words, Gascoyne's title is deceitful: by asserting that life is nothing more than "this meat", it seems to defy the Christian teaching that there is more to life beyond the material. Nevertheless, if the collection is seen as a spiritual quest to fill the voids of material existence, that is, if the title is seen as a meta-literary reflection on the very nature of the work, with the deictic pronoun "this" having precisely this quest as its referent, then Gascoyne's title supports, rather than challenges, this view. On the other hand, a Marxist reading of the title, as that which J. Brian Harvey offered in *Left Review*, understands that "mans' life" is the "basic realism" which Gascoyne's work lacks (Harvey 1936: 531). Nevertheless, the critique of bourgeois accommodated values is made manifest from the initial translation of Éluard's didactic poem "Critique of Poetry" which opens the collection: "Of course I hate the reign of the bourgeois / The reign of cops and priests / But I hate still more the man who does not hate it / As I do / With all his might" (Gascoyne 1936d: 5).

Gascoyne's title anticipates that what follows is not easy to digest: the meat that he offers as the textual and psychological content of the book is as rotten and corrupt as life itself. Imagery of food and nourishment, especially associated with the celebration of ritualistic banquets, is present in several of Gascoyne's poems. Although echoes of Gascoyne's celebratory repasts are found in Barker's use of gastric iconography, Gascoyne does not wallow in the abject. In Barker's revolting images, as in Freud's own theory of the impulses and Dalí's envisaging of the rise of Nazism, food and eating are constantly associated with desire, life and death from a biological, and therefore material, perspective. Gascoyne, on the other hand, less concerned with the materiality of things, tends to associate the process of eating with ceremonial rites of passage leading to a transcendental revelation. It is this sort of psychological inner reality that is encountered in *Man's Life is this Meat* (1936) and other Surrealist poems. Nevertheless, it may not be argued that it is only Gascoyne's own subjectivity that finds expression here. Many of the poems present visions or are concerned with the observation of external reality (regardless of how twisted a representation this is). Such is the case, for instance, of "The Last Head" or "Reflected Vehemence". It is in this process of observation that a connection is established between the objective world and the subjective state of the poet-seer. The distortion that takes place as the visions are verbally transferred acquires universal validity. Gascoyne's automatic images utter collective dreams, desires, phobias and fears which had so far remained unspoken. In "Marrow" (Gascoyne 1988: 28), for instance, desire is a phantasmal appearance: "Women are often spectral / They often walk down the street like banjos / Their eyes are often no more than mere scraps of paper" (Gascoyne 1988: 28). "Educative Process" (Gascoyne 1936d: 29-31), on the other hand,

transfers unconscious fears onto the landscape: "The flowers' voice is evil, the caves / Are asleep. In the grass / Children playing take fear at the clouds carved like skulls" (30).

In his poems, Gascoyne's use of religious, esoteric and erotic imagery creates an intriguing paradox. On the one hand, Gascoyne's Surrealist poetics is inscribed in the general desecrating aesthetic of the Surrealist movement, full of profane and sacrilegious images; on the other hand, and this is peculiar to Gascoyne, the recurrence of the spiritual element reveals his opposition to an excessively materialist construction of reality. Materialism implies for Gascoyne, to a certain degree, material determinism, and, unlike other Surrealists such as Sykes Davies or Barker, he refuses to accept the idea that poetry is a biologically determined act. Poetry, as an activity of the mind, entails liberation from material constraints: it is a form of spiritual flight. Gascoyne conceived of poetry as a form of religion, an idea inherited from Rimbaud and Baudelaire, and the poetic act as a ritualistic act of faith.

Gascoyne's search for totality is shown in the joining of spirituality and eroticism which, following (but also subverting) the tradition of literary mysticism, takes place in his poems. Among the works that influenced the Surrealists' connection of the supernatural and the erotic was Herbert Silberer's *Problems of Mysticism and Its Symbolism* (1914), in which he established the relationship between psychoanalysis and alchemy and defended spirituality and mysticism as forms of approaching the study of the human psyche.[289] Silberer's stress on alchemy as the union and integration of liquid bodies or essential elements acquired an overtly explicit sexual nature in Surrealism. The link between alchemy and eroticism was soon established as a cosmic sexual union which eventually leads to the formation of the primordial hermaphrodite, the primeval human state before the sexes were separated. This sexual union is therefore also a return to the womb, or a Narcissistic fusion with the father seen as an extension of the self. Both ideas are present in Gascoyne's poems. Furthermore, for the Surrealists, the energy or driving force behind automatism is the libido. Poetic activity is thus seen as cathexis, as an investment of sexual energy. In order to create, the Surrealist poet reaches a state of automatic trance in which the libido is released and a revelation ensues, and hence the connection between the spiritual and the erotic.

It was in the writings of Pierre Jean Jouve that Gascoyne gained an awareness of the interconnection between spiritual mysticism and sexuality. Three of Jouve's poems, in which he explored unconscious material of a sexual nature, were published in *Minotaure* in 1935. In

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[289] Silberer's position was later continued by Jung who later published *Psychology and Alchemy* (1944), placing great emphasis on the role of alchemy and occultist symbolism towards the interpretation of dreams. Jung's new directions implied, as in the case of Gascoyne, a negation of Freud's excessively materialistic view of the mind.

spite of this brief convergence with Surrealism, Jouve differed from the Surrealists in his transcendental understanding of the human soul as a reconciliation of the physical and the spiritual, rather than the more biological Surrealist dialectics of body and psyche. In his interview with Lucien Jenkins, Gascoyne asserts that

> It was only Jouve who had the idea of spirituality and the erotic force being interconnected: the esoteric idea, the Smaragdine Tablet of Hermes Tristmegisthus, the saying that that which is above is as that which is below for the creation of the One Thing. That is to say, the finally unified world in which spirit and matter are no longer seen as in contradiction, and reason and imagination are no longer opposites, nor subjectivity and objectivity. (Gascoyne 1998: 49)

Gascoyne's poetic exploration of desire and sexuality responds to this reconciliation of opposites. On the one hand, it implies a reconciliation between the physical (sexual) and the spiritual: a physical union with the object of sexual desire and a spiritual union with the unknown. On the other hand, it is also totalising in its union of masculine and feminine traits in an attempt to achieve the primordial unity of the sexes, as stated in Freudian theory (Freud 1991: 52-60). Curiously, Gascoyne, as he acknowledged, always thought of himself "as essentially bisexual" (Gooding 1991: 90). As we mentioned before, Charcot and Freud contributed to demystify the traditional associations of hysterical symptoms with the female sex. In fact, Freud established a direct relationship between hysteria and bisexuality. In "Hysterical Fancies and Their Relations to Bisexuality" (1908) he stressed the sexual nature of the hysterical symptom, which is considered as the realisation of two unconscious fantasies: one is masculine whereas the other one is feminine, and thus one of these fantasies responds to an unconscious homosexual impulse (Freud 1994: 117). It is in this way that Freud manages to link the hysterical symptom with a latent unconscious homosexuality. This he observed in examples of ambivalent simultaneity in his own patients, who adopted both masculine and feminine roles in their hysterical attacks.

Some of these ideas seem to inform Gascoyne's poem "Purified Disgust" (Gascoyne 1936d: 16-17). The poem explores the theme of homoerotic desire in order to expiate feelings of guilt and shame while simultaneously it advocates the cathartic and purifying effect of the homosexual experience. It describes a rite of initiation in which the speaker is assailed by moral doubts and religious prejudices surrounding male homosexuality. The use of religious terminology throughout the poem serves to establish the state of moral confusion of the speaker: "An impure sky / A heartless and impure breathing" and "Heavy flesh invokes the voice of penitence / Seated at the stone tables / Seated at a banquet of the carnal lusts" (16).

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Thus, terms like "impure", "penitence", "carnal lusts" and phrases with Biblical resonances like "the herds come home" contribute to recreate the scenario of a religious struggle within which the speaker places this impious ceremony. This is further accentuated by the co-occurrence of terms that point to the noxious, destructive or simply sick nature of everything that surrounds the act: "The fevered breath of logic / And a great bird broke loose / Flapping into the silence with strident cries /A great bird with cruel claws" and "Behind our putrid masks we snicker / Our men's heads behind our masks / Twisted from innocence to insolence" (16). Adjectives like "heartless", "fevered", "cruel", "putrid" and "twisted" establish unambiguous associations in the speaker's psyche. The connection between homoerotic desire and spiritual elevation occurs as the speaker undergoes a gradual transfiguration into Saint Sebastian: "Where one walks with bound hands / Where one walks with knotted hair / With eyes searching the zenith / Where one walks like Sebastian" (16). Along these lines, but in a different context, the poem "Baptism" (Gascoyne 1988: 28) presents a similar transfiguration. In it, a political reflection on the social order is expressed through Christian imagery as a subjective experience of reality. The speaker presents his political conversion (from inaction to activity, from expectancy to readiness) in terms that resemble those used in "Purified Disgust". In "Baptism" the speaker is identified with Christ "Walking in the water / Or upon it". Through the baptismal rite, he becomes the redemptive figure that brings the good word of Surrealism to those ready to convert to the Surrealist creed, just like Sebastian attempted to convert Roman soldiers to Christianity.

In "Purified Disgust" (Gascoyne 1936d: 16-17), sexual and religious themes are blended in the figure of the martyr and this can be seen as the continuation of a long artistic tradition in which the eroticisation of Sebastian dates as far back as the Renaissance. Painters such as Guido Reni, Perugino or Carlo Saraceni depict the saint as a highly eroticised young man who is unequivocally endowed with a certain masochistic mysticism: he is pierced by arrows and yet neither his body nor his face show signs of pain or distress.[290] Rather, he is rapturously contemplative and, above all, passive, almost relishing it as the arrows penetrate his body. The *fin-de-siècle* aesthetes, such as Oscar Wilde, Walter Pater and Aubrey Beardsley, whom Gascoyne admired, secularised the image of the saint, turning him into a homosexual cult figure, associating Sebastian's passive countenance with what they saw as a decadent

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[290] In fact, Sebastian miraculously survived the execution, which was ordered by the Roman emperor Diocletian. Sebastian was rescued and nursed by a woman, Irene, and Diocletian ordered a second and more effective attack: Sebastian was then beaten to death (Butler 1995: 42). The iconic image of Sebastian that persisted in the collective memory responds to a desire to publicise his miraculous survival, which gained him the condition of saint. An institutional justification on the part of the church might be behind the early complacent depictions of the martyr.

inclination towards pain and penetration.[291] This idea was exploited by many Modernist writers. Rainer Maria Rilke's poem "Saint Sebastian" was published in *New Poems* (1907-1908). Gascoyne started reading Rilke while still at the Polytechnic, and it is likely that he was acquainted with the poem, which recovers previous imagery associated with the saint: Sebastian's rapturous pose, his dark smile as he remains unhurt and the already ambiguous and too corporeal epithet "lovely thing" (Rilke 1990: 103). The war poets, Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon among others, reconfigured Sebastian's masochistic traits into a willingness to die in the battlefield. T. S. Eliot also devoted one of his poems to the martyr, suggestively entitling it "The Love Song of Saint Sebastian" (1914). Nevertheless, as Richard Kaye argues in his study of his homoerotic poetics, Eliot

> sought to erase St. Sebastian's implications as a feminized male. Eliot's attitude toward a homosexually inflected decadent movement was one of a self-conscious disengagement, in which the poet, fascinated by the tropes of fin de siècle decay, refashioned those tropes for non-homosexual ends. (Kaye 1999: 109)

The Avant-Garde desacrilised further the figure of the saint by turning decadent erotic insinuations into explicit sexual statements. In the late 1920s Saint Sebastian became one of Dalí's fetish figures. Imagery related to the saint, charged with homoerotic content, is recurrent in Dalí's and Lorca's coded correspondence and drawings of the time. Also, Dalí based his aesthetic concept of "Saintly Objectivity" on the iconography of the saint.[292] Alfred Courmes' painting *Saint Sebastian* (1934) was exhibited at the Salon des Indépendants in Paris from January to March 1935. Although it is not known whether Gascoyne actually attended the exhibition or saw the paintings, part of his stay in Paris coincided with the show. Courmes's painting presents a figure halfway between queer sailor (striped shirt, sailor cap) and salesman (brown shoes, sock suspenders). The inferior part of his body is naked, exposing a series of arrows strategically stuck into his legs and a sizeable sexual organ. The body is presented facing forward, which neutralises the passivity traditionally attributed to the martyr and counters the abandonment and idleness of his head, looking sideways and surrounded by a moon-halo.

By the time Gascoye set himself to write "Purified Disgust" Saint Sebastian was already a figure traditionally associated with homosexual desire, used and abused by poets and artists

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[291] Beardsley appears as one of Leon Brinson's fetish artists in Gascoyne's semi-autobiographical novel *Opening Day* (1933).

[292] In his essay "Saint Sebastian" (1927), which was dedicated to Lorca, Dalí sees the image of the saint as the exact representation of detachment and unsentimental objectivity (Dalí 1998: 19-23). See "El amor de Salvador y Federico" in Javier Pérez Andújar's *Salvador Dalí. A la conquista de lo irracional* (2003): 110-113.

known to Gascoyne. His choice of imagery is therefore not coincidental, or innocent. The speaker describes a sexual encounter into which he ventures. It is a ritualistic encounter which, as it happens in Gascoyne's poems, takes the form of a banquet full of fetishistic elements which bring together Freudian associations of physical hunger and sexual appetite. In spite of the speaker's readiness, which is also that of the modern Saint Sebastian, he is assailed by the moral imperatives of his repressive conscience: he is a penitent for a sin not yet committed. The rite of initiation begins as innocence is lost: "Seated at a banquet of the carnal lusts / Behind our putrid masks we snicker / Our men's heads behind our masks / Twisted from innocence to insolence" (Gascoyne 1936d: 16).

The theme of persecution and accusation allows Gascoyne to further exploit the associations that, through the figure of Saint Sebastian, are established between homosexuals and Christians. The pointing, accusatory finger in the poem chooses both the culprit and the victim. In this paradoxical movement, the finger becomes a symbol of moral rectitude, but also a phallic symbol of perversion, like the arrows. In a similar process of identification, the speaker-victim, by embracing his victimisation, is also accused. His passivity, like that of Sebastian, is to blame for the sinful act. The double image that brings together a self-satisfied victim and a defiant accused seems to respond to Courmes's ambivalent depiction of the saint: "The victim embraces his victimization / The accused belches defiance". The speaker-saint is both corrupted (penetrated, sodomised by the accusing finger) and corruptor (his eagerness to be penetrated lies at the root of the corrupting act). Thus, the sin and the punishment are also identified. Physical and psychological (but gratifying) torture brings about purification and cathartic realisation in a state of semi-unconscious mystic trance. The illumination that is brought about by the consummation of the act is intellectual and spiritual: "A sudden spasm saves us / A pure disgust illumines us" (17). Whereas imagination is praised as a new form of consciousness, logic and rational knowledge are deprecated as forms of "savage pretence", and the orgasmic climax achieves intellectual enlightenment. Echoes of Breton's statement in his *Manifesto of Surrealism* (1924), where he defends imagination over civilisation, are apparent: "Under the pretence of civilization and progress, we have managed to banish from the mind everything that may rightly or wrongly be termed superstition, or fancy" (Breton 1972: 10). Paradoxically, spiritual purification is achieved in the sacrilegious glorification of the sexual act. Gascoyne's indulgence in the figure of the sodomised saint as victim-culprit and the very juxtaposition of secular and religious terms in the poem's title shows this process of execration of Christian iconography and, by extension, of bourgeois morality. The disgust initially inspired by the ideological representation of the act is redeemed and purified by the

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consummation of the act itself. In this way, Gascoyne's images reconcile the traditional paradox established by Western morality between religion and desire. Similarly, in "Educative Process" (Gascoyne 1936: 29-31) an ambiguous encounter, not devoid of homoerotic nuances and religious imagery, takes place. A description of the mystic paroxysms of love is reminiscent of "Purified Disgust": "The feathers fledged from your flesh meet mine / And ardent haloes meet like plates above our heads / You are not gentle" (Gascoyne 1936: 29). Neurotic attacks result in further violence and indulgence in sado-masochistic acts: "Wire twisted back bites into the cheek / The gardens of neurosis" (Gascoyne 1936: 30). And religious references appear constantly in erotically charged passages, contributing to the recreation of sex as a mystic experience of "clutching hands and agonized eyes": "A drop of dew sings psalms upon the hill / Anatomies of wonder opened at the first page / [. . .] / Rockets open the sky like keys / And your breath is warning" (Gascoyne 1936: 30). In another poem, "Antennae" (Gascoyne 1936: 32-34), the profanation of the Tree of Knowledge is presented as a ritualistic banquet that culminates in a sexual union of cosmic proportions: "Longing to eat of the fruit of the poisoned tree / Longing to eat from the plates on our lozenge-shaped table / [. . .] / And the peaceful star of the vigil fell from the sky / And spilt its amazing fluids across the mosaic floor". The long-sought-for reunion of the lovers ("The full breasts of eternity awaiting tender hands") is described in terms that echo the synesthetic reunions of mystics with their gods: "Our burning possession of each other / Held in both hands because it is all we have". As we can see, it is through highly ambivalent Surrealist imagery that Gascoyne reconciles religion, mysticism and desire in his poems.

"Salvador Dalí" (Gascoyne 1936d: 36), originally entitled "In Defence of Humanism", makes use of typically Dalinian themes and images in order to recreate the painter's mythologies of the unconscious. The poem explores the Oedipus theme through the Biblical myth of David and Goliath. It draws on several images disseminated through Dalí's works, combined with Biblical references and autobiographical elements of Freudian import. Among the works which are unconsciously evoked in the poem are *Apparatus and Hand* (1927), the drawing *The Butterfly Chase* (1929), *The First Days of Spring* (1929), *The Invisible Man* (1929-1933) and, especially, *The Spectre of Sex-Appeal* (1934).[293] In *Apparatus and Hand*, two

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[293] In the "Introduction" to his *Collected Poems* (1988), Gascoyne states that the poem "does not attempt to present in verbal terms the imagery to be found in Dalí's best-known works, but to provide some sort of parallel equivalent of the personal 'mythology' his paintings embody" (Gascoyne 1988: xvi). It is in this sense that the evocation of Dalí's paintings, which does exist in the poem, can only accurately be described as *unconscious*. Similarly, his poem "The Very Image" (1936), dedicated to René Magritte, also recreates the striking effects of Magritte's visual images without actually being a description of these. See page 61 of the present study.

geometrical figures engage in a dynamics of balance which risks penetration. On top of the figures, a dominating hand, a symbol of power, castration anxiety and masturbation, resembles the "bag of nails" which is the sun above the lovers in Gascoyne's poem. In *The Spectre of Sex-Appeal*, on the other hand, a gigantic mutilated woman supports herself on crutches against a landscape of beach cliffs. A little boy (Dalí himself) looks at her overwhelmed. Through the use of double image and the presence of several phallic elements (the crutches, a bone stuck in her thigh and her distorted body resembling a wrapped up phallus), the scene contemplated by the child is also the "primal scene" described by Freud.[294] In Gascoyne's poem a similar image provides a reinterpretation of Freud's (and Dalí's) primal scene: "Goliath plunges his hand into the poisoned well / And bows his head and feels my feet walk through his brain. / The children chasing butterflies turn round and see him there / With his hand in the well and my body growing from his head, / And are afraid". *The Butterfly Chase The First Days of Spring* and *The Spectre of Sex-Appeal* are also invoked in these lines. These references allow a psychoanalytic interpretation of the poem, not devoid of homoerotic elements and religious imagery.

The poem can be seen as a poetic re-elaboration of a number of themes which appear in Dalí's paintings. They are often heavy with Oedipal references. Paintings such as *Lugubrious Game* (1929) or *The Enigma of William Tell* (1933) explore the theme of castration, homosexual desire and a troubled relationship with the father figure. The poems can also be considered as a self-transposition fantasy in which Dalí becomes the figure of authority, the mentor or father, whereas Gascoyne becomes the pupil, the child overwhelmed by the presence of the big parent (the big Other in Lacanian terminology associated with the mirror stage). Dalí is then Goliath in the poem and his greatness, comparable to the giant's size, threatens Gascoyne, who is David in this profane perversion of the Biblical passage. In fact, a similar master-disciple situation occurred between Dalí and Gascoyne when the latter was only nineteen. In the summer of 1935, Gascoyne was researching Surrealism for his *Survey* when Dalí employed him as translator of *The Conquest of the Irrational*. For a week Gascoyne went to Dalí's and sat at his desk to work on his translation. There is something invasive and voyeuristic about entering the privacy of an already reputed painter's house, looking at his work in progress, sitting at his desk and talking to his wife. Dalí was over ten years his senior and Gala, over twenty. In his interview with Mel Gooding, Gascoyne acknowledges that he felt

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[294] Freud dealt with the primal scene for the first time in relation to the Wolf Man case in 1914. See *The 'Wolfman': from the History of an Infantile Neurosis* (2010).

"slightly intimidated" at his presence and recalls with some mysticism the time he saw the master at work:

> I did on one or two occasions see him . . . actually saw him painting. Because, although I was sitting at my table, a long desk with my back to the studio apartment - it was quite a small studio apartment really with the dining room recessed well over the bedroom further on which I never saw, and this large room in which he painted, and which was full of paintings of his and objects, which are now famous. And there a long piece of mirror at my feet, so I could see what was going on in the back in the room, while I was writing. [295] (Gooding 1991: 32)

The unnecessary, and therefore telling, bedroom reference reveals Gascoyne's desire to *see*, to attend this primal scene which is only sublimated in a substitutive act: the reproductive, and therefore erotic, act of artistic creation. In fact, in Freudian theory, the primal scene is generally understood as a fantasy which is revisited in dreams, rather than as a real event actually witnessed.

The poem's imagery contributes to the perversion of the Biblical myth of David and Goliath. Goliath's hand being plunged into a "poisoned well" is suggestive of anal penetration, whereas graphic references to sexual positions suggest oral-genital intercourse: Goliath "bows his head" and keeps "his hand in the well". On the other hand, David's body grows from Goliath's head and his feet "walk through his brain", an image which also points to an intellectual connection between them. The disturbing nature of the scene makes the children retreat into the catacombs. The children may be understood as extensions of the speaker's (David's) consciousness. Their retreat is a return to the mother's womb, in which no sense of security is found. The castrating mother is turned into a flower-eating obelisk, Gascoyne's Surrealist reconfiguration of the man-eating sphinx in the Oedipus myth. The children's call for help becomes a ritualistic chant for universal knowledge: "Strong-bow of salt, cutlass of memory, / Write on my map the name of every river". The chant is nevertheless not heard, as they are finally asphyxiated in a vertiginous descent into the mother's womb, in which heraldic elements (symbols of fatherland) reinforce the idea of rape. Finally, a process of transfiguration takes place as David and Goliath become identified: "Mirrors write Goliath's name upon my forehead". The image bears implications of penetration, which contributes to the identification of father and son. The mirror, an essential element in Dalí's double images but also a central element in Gascoyne's relationship with Dalí, sustains this identification.

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[295] The anecdote was first recounted in Dalí's "Obituary" written by Gascoyne for *The Independent* (24 January 1989).

Dalinian mythologies replace Christian ones in Gascoyne's film scenario "History of the Womb or Nine Month's Horror" (Gascoyne 1998: 373-375), which explores Freudian themes through a series of Surrealist images related to creation, procreation, castration anxiety and death.[296] In a typically Dalinian deserted beach, which Gascoyne identifies with the English landscapes of Dungeness or Portland Bill, a naked woman dashes across the scene and is followed by a naked man. The image of the naked couple on the barren landscape is reminiscent of the first couple, Adam and Eve, having been expelled out of Eden, in shameful, but also enticing, nakedness. The next scene shows an old woman, reminiscent of the nursing figure in Dalí's painting *The Weaning of Furniture-Nutrition* (1934), followed by a little boy. They exchange no words, except for the woman's threatening directive: "Don't you dare to talk, or I'll beat you" (Gascoyne 1998: 373). The scene is full of references to acts which are substitutes for repressed sexual desire (the boy plays on his own with some stones, the woman is absorbed in her needlework) or frustrated attempts at realisation of such desire (the boy puts his leg on the woman's shoulder). The boy tries to possess the mother figure. By saying "I want to stand on your eye-lids!" (Gascoyne 1998: 373). A close-up of the woman's head follows: "Tangled in the hair on top there are a number of small objects: a model ship, a wheel form a toy train, a flat slip of wood on which a mouth has been drawn, a dry star-fish, and lastly, a large mint humbug, very sticky" (Gascoyne 1998: 374). The woman's hair is an extension of, or a substitute for, her sexual organ, as the mouth drawn on the wooden piece suggests. In this alluring cove the boy discovers a series of treasures with which he can play (a model ship, a toy train), and which he can, and wants to, eat (a humbug). The following fragment from Freud's "Symbolism in Dreams" (1916) should enlighten an interpretation of Gascoyne's images. The co-occurrence of symbols in Gascoyne's and Freud's texts is revealing, for it seems that Gascoyne's images are actually a poetic rendering of Freud's analysis of dream symbolism:

> Another symbol of the female genitals which deserves mention is a *jewel-case. Jewel* and *treasure* are used in dreams as well as in waking life to describe someone who is loved. *Sweets* frequently represent sexual enjoyment. Frequently represent sexual enjoyment. Satisfaction obtained from a person's own genitals is indicated by all kinds of *playing*, including *piano-playing*. Symbolic representations *par excellence* of

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[296] Film scenario written by Gascoyne circa 1936. Following the Surrealist fashion, it may be labelled as a "cine-poem", a term actually coined by Benjamin Fondane in 1928. It has never been produced, and was published for the first time in *Selected Prose 1934-1996* (1998). Roger Scott found the manuscript in one of Gascoyne's Notebooks in the British Library. When Scott asked Gascoyne about it, he said that it was inspired by Dalí's painting *The Weaning of Furniture-Nutrition* (1934).

masturbation are gliding or sliding and *pulling off a branch*. The *falling out of a tooth* or the *pulling out of a tooth* is a particularly notable dream-symbol. Its first meaning is undoubtedly castration as a punishment for masturbating. We come across special representations of sexual intercourse less often than might be expected from what has been said so far. Rhythmical activities such as *dancing*, *riding* and *climbing* must be mentioned here [. . .]. (Freud 1963: 156-157)

The starfish also has a long symbolic tradition in Surrealism and is central to Man Ray's film *L'étoile de mer* (1928). Alyce Mahon has provided an alchemical reading of this: in the starfish, the feminine (water) and the masculine (star) are united to create a primordial being, the hermaphrodite body (Mahon 2006: 227). In Gascoyne's scenario the starfish is nevertheless "dry". By depriving the starfish of its naturally aquatic nature, Gascoyne's nurse acquires typically masculine traits: she has appropriated the male phallus (an idea which is latent in the image of her abnormally long hair) and is therefore the source of Oedipal castration for the boy.

Nevertheless, the boy's insistence on the sticky humbug represents, like the mouth, a form of overvaluation and fetishisation of parts of the anatomy that do not lead to procreation and are therefore deviations of the normal sexual function (Freud 1991: 62-67). In Freud's theory of sexuality, clitoral excitation (suggested in Gascoyne's text by the humbug and the mouth) does not satisfy the sexual appetite whose source is the life instinct to procreate. Similarly, the humbug does not satisfy the physical appetite of hunger, but rather points to a form of fetishisation of food. In both cases, the boy is led by a pleasure principle which is thrown against itself, as it thwarts the life instincts that lead to the individual's perpetuation. The boy's frustrated attempts to disentangle the humbug from the woman's hair finally resolve themselves into a violent tug which transforms the woman into a wild devouring mother: "We see that her face is the face of a hyena, covered with bestial hair and with long slavering carious teeth, her eyes red coals. With one claw she clutches the child's arm, biting into its flesh, with the other she brutally beats him down upon his back" (Gascoyne 1998: 374). In the meantime a rowing-boat has been approaching the shore for some time. A young couple dressed in eighteenth-century clothes leave the boat and sit on the stones with their backs to the horrible scene, symbolising the indifference and blindness of an accommodated bourgeoisie, engaged in self-complacent petty activities. The cine-poem comes to an inconclusive and ambiguous end when the child approaches the couple, who take no notice of him. By gaining independence from the nurse, whom he previously considered an extension of his own body (he had the right to possess her, penetrate her, eat her, play with her: he was, as

the title indicates, inside her womb) the boy is now prepared to find a surrogate object of desire. The time he has spent with(in) the nurse-mother is a time of horror, and the moment of birth, the first and final separation from the mother, is, in Freudian terms, a rehearsal of death. Freud stated in his essay *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) that "*The goal of all life is death*" (Freud 1922: 47). According to him, the individual keeps rehearsing this moment throughout life. The mechanisms through which the pleasure principle and the death instinct are reconciled are complex: the sexual instincts act in accord with the pleasure principle as they seek, not only physical gratification but also opportunities for preservation, that is, for prolonging one's existence. On the other hand, the separation from the object of desire that necessarily follows the sexual act is an atavistic reminiscence of the moment of separation from the mother which takes place at the moment of birth (and which is incessantly repeated throughout life), and a proleptic rehearsal of the moment of death. The film's end then suggests mythical repetition: the spectator is unconsciously led to think that the scene will recur *in aeternum*. The couple's indifference to the boy mimics that of the nurse's and the act of the woman unpacking a picnic basket in preparation for lunch takes us back to the figure of the devouring nurse. These parallel associations suggest that new mother figures will keep arriving and new rehearsals of death will be perpetually enacted in this womb-beach. The film thus provides a new psychoanalytical mythological framework in which to interpret the genesis of humankind, an alternative to Christian representations of creation. The whole scenario is not only inspired in Dalinian imagery; its ideological background is set in Dalí's theorisation on his painting *The Weaning of Furniture-Nutrition* (1934) in *The Conquest of the Irrational* (1935):

> [. . .] our contemporaries, systematically cretinized by machinism and by an architecture of self-punishment, by bureaucratic psychological congratulations, by ideological disorder and by privation of the imagination, and by all kinds of paternal affective hungers, seek in vain to bite into the senile and triumphant softness of the plump, atavistic, tender, militaristic, and territorial back of any Hitlerian nursemaid, in order to be able at long last to commune, in some form or another, with the totemic consecrated host that has just been taken away from under their very noses, which, as is known and understood, was none other than the spiritual and symbolic nourishment that Catholicism had offered throughout the centuries for the appeasement of the cannibalistic frenzy of moral and irrational hungers. (Dalí 1998: 263)

Dalí thus condemns the imaginative and cultural starvation of contemporary society, and explains how Nazism has replaced Christianity as the new religion. A similar ideological reading can be extracted from Gascoyne's text, in which the moral and irrational hungers that afflict

the paternally neglected boy are palliated by the succulent promise of regaining a sense of spiritual wholeness that Fascism offers. Capitalism and positivism have eradicated theology and metaphysics. The hunger of the masses for believing in something other than, as Gascoyne puts it in his own collection of Surrealist poetry, "this meat" has allowed the new mythologies of Fascism to supersede the religious myths. Fascism, as a new religion, is the new opium of the people. If this is the case, as these examples suggest, then Surrealism attempts to conquer these irrational hungers in the current state of moral and ideological confusion: as opposed to the "supremely biological cutlet which is that of politics" Surrealism is the food of the spirit (Dalí 1998: 263). This idea, which is also central to George Barker's poetics, shows the extent of Dalí's influence in Gascoyne. Curiously enough, they both developed parallel artistic interests, and were increasingly concerned with religious imagery and a pseudo-Christian mysticism in their works.

Religious imagery is also present in "Charity Week" (Gascoyne 1936d: 18), a poem dedicated to Max Ernst. It is Gascoyne's poetic rendition of Ernst's graphic novel in collage, funded by Roland Penrose, *Une Semaine de Bonté* (1934). The poem, like the novel, makes use of Christian iconography in order to satirise and ridicule the bourgeois pretence of moral superiority. The fact that Gascoyne's own translation of Ernst's title contains a term with strong religious undertones ("charity") is relevant in the context of Gascoyne's poetics. A common English translation of "bonté" in Ernst's title is "kindness", a term devoid of religious connotations which is generally used in the criticism. Gascoyne's deliberate use of the term "charity" instantly places the poem in a religious context. Ernst's novel is divided into the seven days of the week, for which there are the seven deadly elements, his own secularised rendition of the seven deadly sins. Each element is represented by a beast of demonic proportions. Ernst makes use of illustrations taken from 19th-century pulp fiction and Gustave Doré's engravings, which he brings together forming extraordinary collages of a monstrous nature. These hellish visions denounce the depravity of capitalist society. Ernst presents a bourgeois world, sumptuous and luxurious, which nevertheless is house to the most horrible monsters. It places highly eroticised images of naked women and phantasmagoric hybrid creatures in oneiric scenes in order to provide a mixture of the abject and the beautiful, the comic and the sublime. The technical accomplishment and formal beauty of many of the illustrations and etchings that serve as a base for the different plates contrasts with the sordidness of the collages, the beastly nature of the characters and the baseness of their actions. Oneirism, irrationality and eroticism are central elements in Ernst's visual poetics, which Gascoyne re-uses in "Charity Week".

Gascoyne's poem begins with a presentation of the first character in *Une Semaine de Bonté*, the Lion of Belfort, whose element is mud. The Lion of Belfort is originally a 19th-century sculpture created by Frédéric-Auguste Bartholdi to celebrate the French resistance during the Franco-Prussian War. The lion is thus a symbol of patriotism and heroism, two concepts which Ernst and Gascoyne loathed. It is a figure of power (a soldier, a king, a nobleman, a priest), corrupted and sadistic, whose medals are not made of gold, but of mud. The lion becomes the highest figure in the bestial hierarchy and the utmost representative of abusive power in this debased society. The lion precedes "each beast in this sombre menagerie" and because its day is Sunday, further sacrilegious references are implied: the lion also becomes the representative of a corrupted church. Instead of presenting examples of charity, kindness and compassion (all of which are implied in Ernst's title), the novel exhibits moral counter-examples. The seven deadly elements are in fact the seven deadly sins, in which the lion indulges as he rapes and tortures women, flaunts his powerful position, gets inebriated on wine, becomes the seat on which lewd women rest and guillotines a man. Religion is thus satirised as the lion's desires are sublimated. The strong sacrilegious message in Ernst's work is stressed further by Gascoyne who presents the disturbing chimeras of the novel dressed in seminarists' garments, "With lice in their hair / Noughts in their crosses". The hybrid monsters of the imagination are also part of the reader's dreams and desires, which cannot be escaped. The epigraph to "Wednesday" in Ernst's novel is interesting in this respect. It is a fragment from the *Complainte de Peyrebeille*, a French popular ballad which recounts the horrible crimes that took place in this village. In spite of the final exhortation with which the lamentation comes to an end, both Ernst's novel and Gascoyne's poem show that little can be done to free the individual from the monsters of imagination: "Great God, save the earth from ever bearing such monsters. No history has proved that there ever were any such. Through the efforts of the authorities, no one will be exposed to them any longer" (Ernst 1976: 116). The exhortation is nevertheless ironic, for these are not only monsters of the imagination, but real monsters that inhabit each of us and that appear when the unconscious is not subject to repression, as Goya had described in the 1799 etching *The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters* from the series *Caprichos*, an influence in Enrst's novel. In Gascoyne's poem, the speaker acclaims the power of unconscious dream states, irrationality, sensorial obliteration and mental breakdown to produce these horrible inner visions. The psychological turmoil and mental convulsion, which characteristically occur in dreams and other states of trance, are not destructive states but creative ones: "Shipwrecked among the clouds / Shattered by the violently closed eyelids". Like the monsters of Ernst's novel, the speaker invokes hysteria and induces the reader to commit the crime of a

collective desire: "Hysteria upon the staircase / Hair torn out by the roots / Lace handkerchiefs torn to shreds / And stained by tears of blood / Their fragments strewn upon the waters" (Gascoyne 1936d: 18). In spite of the apocalypticism with which the poem comes to an end ("The distant roar of disaster"), which is also pervasive in Ernst's novel, the final line points to the sublimation of desire ("the great bursting womb of desire") as the only path towards liberation from the repressive morality of the society represented by the Lion of Belfort. Desire and religious imagery are thus brought together in this poem in which image and ideology, irrationality and reason, are reconciled.

There is a change in direction in "Unspoken" (Gascoyne 1936d: 22-23), a poem that has language as its central theme. Drawing on psychoanalysis and forms of atavistic regression (such as hypnosis), it delineates a pagan genealogy of humankind, working on a main paradox according to which language, being a cultural construct, functions as a repressive force; simultaneously, it is also the means through which the unconscious (i.e. that which remains unspoken or repressed) is liberated. In oneiric images of orgiastic paroxysm associated with pre-conscious states, these desires, which are of an ineludibly sexual order, are brought to the surface and the unspoken is finally uttered. The terms of the paradox are thus reconciled. For Freud, the emergence of the linguistic sign symbolises the fall of the individual into language. This, by implication, also marks the fall of the individual into the lie of civilisation and into repression through taboo. Language emerges just to be suppressed because, as soon as child language materialises, it is repressed: the child is told what must and must not be said. Before, the child is not told what must not be thought of. In Freudian theory, this fall represents the decadence of the narcissistic stage: the moment at which signifier and signified become independent from each other and the arbitrariness of their relation is made manifest. It is the moment at which the child as signifier becomes physically, but also psychologically, separated from the mother as signified. Jacques Lacan developed further the theory on the relationship between language and the unconscious in his essay "The Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious" (1957), which serves to enlighten Gascoyne's linguistic concern in this poem.[297] Jacques Lacan was in fact closely associated with the Surrealist movement in the 1930s, being a friend of Dalí, Breton, Bataille and Picasso. His Doctoral Thesis on *Paranoid Psychosis and Its Relations to the Personality* (1932) is largely influenced by Surrealism, and he contributed to

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[297] Lacan's essay was originally delivered as a lecture at the Sorbonne in 1957. Its title has also been translated as "The Insistence of the Letter in the Unconscious".

the Surrealist art journal *Minotaure* in 1933.[298] Lacan's emphasis on a less bodily (i.e. less materialist) version of psychoanalysis than that of his contemporaries, and his peculiar interest in the ideological structures underlying language in the poetic act was akin to Gascoyne's exploration of the unconscious through poetic expression.

The fall into language is for Lacan a rather tragic episode in life. Language opens up the gap between what the individual has and what the individual lacks and therefore desires. Language is for him the articulation of a lack. Since desire cannot be realised (for Lacan desire can never be realised), it is repressed. The beginning of the mirror stage (the stage in which the child sees itself and *the other* as different, as separate beings, the stage in which signifier and signified become forever divorced) coincides with the emergence of human language and, therefore, as I have stated, with the beginning of repression. Similarly, in Gascoyne's poem, language brings spiritual dearth and death on the individual. While it is an attempt to bring the object closer to the subject, language creates a divide between the individual and external reality which cannot be surmounted. Thus, pre-linguistic and pre-logical stages are praised in the poem as stages in human development in which, as in speechless infancy, a sense of satisfying wholeness and of indissoluble union with external reality (with the mother in the case of the child) is achieved. Although these ideas seem to contradict the Surrealist claim that language is prior to thought, we will see how both positions are reconciled in the poem through the disruption of that primeval state of wholeness, a state which was never reached because language was already there. Thus, the poem opens with a reference to the tragic moment described by Lacan ("Words spoken leave no time for regret / Yet regret / The unviolated silence and / White sanctuses of sleep") and then, as the poem progresses, it is the pure silence of the "unspoken continent" that buries the corrupted speech of civilised society: "Travelling though man's unspoken continent / Among the unspeaking mountains / The dumb lakes and the deafened valleys / [. . .] / Clear waves of soundless sight / [. . .] / Flowing endless over buried speech / Drowning the words and words" (Gascoyne 1936d: 23). The emphasis is, as we have seen, on silence and the lack of speech, with an insistence on adjectives that highlight this idea: "unspoken", "unspeaking", "dumb", "deafened", "soundless", "buried speech", and "drowning the words".

In Gascoyne's poem language is unreliable because it is ephemeral and meaningless, as it contributes to further separating subject and object. This idea might be related to Lacan's statement that the unconscious is structured semiotically like a language (Lacan 1998: 1046):

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[298] For an account on the influence of Surrealism in Lacan's theories, see David Macey's chapter "Baltimore in the Early Morning" in *Lacan in Contexts* (1988): 44-74.

both are metonymic in nature, which implies that meaning (i.e. the moment of attainment of the object of desire) is always deferred. The complete realisation of meaning (in language) and of desire (in the unconscious) cannot be achieved: they seem to approximate the individual to the object of signification (the referent), or the object of desire (the phallus), but their trajectory is exocentric, as they simultaneously procrastinate such an encounter. The signifier never reveals completely the signified, for language is not only arbitrary, but also confusing, ambiguous, it includes diversions and digressions, taboos, euphemisms, periphrastic structures, all of which delay and even hamper signification. The dream, as the manifest expression of the unconscious, is, like language, composed of a series of signs that require decoding. "The dream is a rebus" says Lacan (Lacan 1998: 1054). Furthermore, in order to avoid censorship, dreams are distorted, filled with motifs, elements, characters and verbal messages which are displaced ("In sleep there are places places / Places overlap" states the speaker in Gascoyne's poem) and therefore deviate (displace) the unconscious significance underneath: "Full-blossoming hysterias / Lavishly scattering their stained veined petals". Gascoyne's poem reveals the slippery and therefore unreliable nature of language, in spite of its apparently "intimate" character as a mode of personal expression:

> Recurrent words / Slipping between the cracks / With the face of memory and the sound of its voice / More intimate than sweat at the roots of the hair / Frozen stiff in a moment and then melted / Swifter than air between the lips / Swifter to vanish than enormous buildings / Seen for a moment from the corners of the eyes" (Gascoyne 1936d: 22).

Also, language is presented as an unreliable source of meaning: when speech flows, it bears an "undertow of violence and darkness / Carrying with it forever / All those formless vessels / Abandoned palaces / Tottering under the strain of being" (22).

The paradox persistent in the linguistic-poetic exploration of the unconscious is not only that it is structured like a language and is therefore metonymic, but also that, in fact, it can only be accessed through language: dreams need to be told, psychoanalysis being essentially a *talking cure*. In Gascoyne's poem, as in Lacan's theory, the letter (i.e. language) *insists*, exists, in the unconscious. In "Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming" (1907) Freud stated that creative writing is a surrogate for childplay, which is the fulfilment of an unconscious wish (Freud 1998: 484). For Lacan, language constitutes the unconscious. It is not that poetry is the signifier and the unconscious is the signified, but rather that poetry and the unconscious are one and the same, they are both the signifier, and hence the importance of automatism in the

discovery of repressed fears and desires. In this regard, Maurice Blanchot observes that automatic writing reproduces the unconscious:

> The effectiveness and importance of automatic writing is that it reveals the prodigious continuity between my suffering, my feeling of suffering, and the writing of the feeling of this suffering. With it the opaqueness of words is established, their presence as things is lessened. They are all that I am at this very instant. By raising the constraints of reflection, I allow my immediate consciousness to burst into language, I allow this emptiness to be filled and this silence to be expressed" (Blanchot 1995: 87).

Similarly, in Gascoyne's poem, it is the unconscious that utters that which has so far remained unspoken. This idea connects with the Surrealist concept of literalness, according to which the Surrealist image is not the signifier of a deferred unconscious signified. The image *is* the unconscious. In a review of Éluard's *La rose publique* (1934), Gascoyne said of his poetry that "it is so pure and so concentrated that it requires no idealogical [sic.] framework, no explanation. Every line means exactly what it says: thus imagery becomes completely free of symbolism and refers to nothing but itself" (Gascoyne 1935l: 18). Lacan developed a similar idea and for him language does not refer to something else but to itself, for it is not a product of the *ego* that points to the *id*, but rather the *id* itself. The idea that language precedes matter (i.e. that language creates that which it names), also a Biblical heritage, is present in Gascoyne's alchemical concept of poetry and of the poet as creator. In "Unspoken" there is no return when the word is uttered ("Words spoken leave no time for regret"), and yet it is known that the word is the origin. There is no silence before the word, no immaterial that precedes matter: the onset of sleep, which is also the onset of language, is marked by the profane hymns, the humdrum, of the unconscious. Language is, as was said above, the articulaton of a lack, and nevertheless there is a brief poetic moment at which the revelation takes place: consciousness is widened as the gap between signifier and signified is revealed, the gap between subject and object, between the unconscious and that which it desires, and which it cannot have, even if the individual, as it happens with Gascoyne's speakers-seers, sees it ("Seen for a moment from the corners of the eyes").

The emphasis previously placed on language shifts to sight and vision as the speaker begins a journey which echoes Joseph Conrad's profane pilgrimage to the Belgian Congo: "Illumined by paroxysms of vision / Clear waves of soundless sight / Lapping out of the heart of darkness" (Gascoyne 1936d: 23). The passage seems to point to a pre-linguistic, pre-logical state of human development in which the unconscious was unrepressed. This is part of the Surrealist fetishisation and sacralisation of the impious and the primitive, a return to a

primordial state in which the individual is in communion with nature. But it is also a spiritual revelation of the horror that lies at the heart of darkness. The unmediated nature of the revelation makes it all the more fundamental: since it is not a linguistic revelation (unlike those that Penrose and Madge denounced), it cannot be distorted. Gascoyne has replaced the culturally sophisticated concept of religious revelation with that of an iconoclastic spiritualism.

Later in the poem, the speaker-seer observes in rapturous contemplation an endless procession of voluptuous figures. This is the paroxysm of vision mentioned earlier:

> And here I am caught up among the glistening of / Bodies proud with the opulence of flesh / The silent limbs of beings lying across the light / Silken at the hips and pinched between two fingers / Their thirsty faces turned upwards towards breaking / Their long legs shifting slanting turning / In a parade of unknown virtues / Beginning again and beginning / Again. (23)

In spite of the clear echoes mentioned above, it would be difficult, if not impossible, to assert without reservation that this "unspoken continent" is Africa. The voluptuousness of the figures on display is counteracted by their mannequin-like posture, which is more suggestive of the urban figures one encounters in the busy high streets of large cities or in shop windows. On the other hand, terms like "proud", "opulence" and "silken" bear rather bourgeois connotations, pointing to material riches which contrast their spiritual dearth, their "thirsty faces" and the paroxysmal movements of their elongated legs. Is not their speech buried in the whitened sepulchre that is Europe? Are not their words drowned by the repressive forces of civilisation and its official discourse? Is not the heart of darkness lying at the very core of the so-called civilised world? Through this exploration of the complex relationship between language and the unconscious, Gascoyne's "Unspoken" resolves the paradox of the linguistic sign as both a repressive and a liberating force which works at the conscious and the unconscious level, bringing the individual closer to reality while simultaneously always deferring this encounter.

"And the Seventh Dream is the Dream of Isis" (Gascoyne 1936d: 41-43) was Gascoyne's first attempt to write poetry following the formula of pure psychic automatism as stated by Breton in his *Manifesto of Surrealism*, and the first English Surrealist poem ever published. The poem is devoted to Isis, the Egyptian goddess of magic and fertility. References to Egyptian mythology are already present in one of Gascoyne's "Ten Proses", which he published a month earlier, in September 1933, in *The New English Weekly*. Although the "Ten Proses" (Gascoyne 1933d: 515) are not Surrealist, number six is interesting in its presentation of the figure of the bird-poet, following Ernst's elaboration of the hybrid figure of the bird-

man, with alchemical resonances. The fusion of bird and human is recurrent in Ernstian imagery, which culminated in the creation of a mythical bird of the name Loplop, the painter's *alter ego*.[299] Also, birds and feathers are typically associated with the occult: from rituals of black magic to auguries of death. Gascoyne resorts to Egyptian and Classical Greek mythology as the two bird-men are described as "little Horuses with ornithological heads" who fight each other for the possession of the hamadryad in front of a party of chimeras. Pagan mythology, occultism and sexual rituals merge in this pseudo-Surrealistic piece which anticipates the erotic mysticism of Gascoyne's later work.

Gascoyne was from an early age connected with occultism and magic. Some of his poems, together with those of Ruthven Todd and Dylan Thomas, appeared in a weekly column of *The Sunday Referee* called "Poets' Corner", run from April 1933 by Victor Neuburg, a former lover and follower of the magician of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn Aleister Crowley. This link is relevant in Gascoyne's development of the Isis theme in "And the Seventh Dream is the Dream of Isis". Isis is a deity associated with motherhood in Golden Dawn magic. Several temples of the Hermertic Order of the Golden Dawn were established in Britain towards the end of the nineteenth century, all devoted to ancient Egyptian mythology: the Isis-Urania Temple in London, was followed by the Osiris Temple in Weston-super-Mare and the Horus Temple in Bradford, among others. Relevant poets came to be associated with occultist beliefs which drew on Egyptian esotericism: Yeats was a member of the Golden Dawn, whereas Pound joined the Theosophical Society.[300] Described by Aleister Crowley as "the eternal mother" in his seminal treatise *Magick* (1973: 343), Isis was a central deity invoked in occultist performances and rites. Crowley's *Rites of Eleusis*, for instance, were performed with Victor Neuburg at Caxton Hall in 1910. By the time Gascoyne wrote his "Seventh Dream", Isis already had strong associations with occultism in Britain and is use of Egyptian mythology must be considered in the context of the British esoteric tradition. In Gascoyne's poem, the goddess's seventh dream is a dream of resurrection which defies the laws of the natural world. Gascoyne presents a decaying capitalist society and its legacy of Biblical plagues, parricides, clerical corruption, selfishness and sterility. The new reality emerges from the remnants of this dying

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[299] The bird in Ernst's paintings and collages has multiple meanings and bears associations as varied as Christ and Freud. See Marjorie Warlick's *Max Ernst and Alchemy: a Magician in Search of Myth* (2001): 89.

[300] On the influence of Western occultism in modern literature see Leon Surette's *The Birth of Modernism: Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot, W.B. Yeats and the Occult* (1993) and Alex Owen's *The Place of Enchantment. British Occultism and the Culture of the Modern* (2004).

system in a way that is reminiscent of the mythological resurrection of Osiris.[301] As in Helena Blavatsky's *Isis Unveiled* (1877), the foundational book of the Theosophical Society, spiritualism and magic are defended against religious zeal and scientific dogmatism. The poem begins with references to heathen colonies to which the religious word is introduced. Gascoyne's critique of imperialism is centred on evangelism as a form of corruption. The transference of a moral system (i.e. of a religious mythology) which is seen as superior to that of the colonised people is in fact one of the pillars of the imperialist enterprise. In the poem, the evangelisation of primitive peoples destroys their inborn connection with nature (their "starborn heritage"), imposing on them a world of moral depravity and human degradation which is created and recreated in the teachings of the missionaries and is presented thus in the poem:

> White curtains of tortured destinies / inheriting the calamities of the plagues of the desert / encourage the waistlines of women to expand / and the eyes of men to enlarge like pocket-cameras / teach children to sin at the age of five / to cut out the eyes of their sisters with nail-scissors / to run into the streets and offer themselves to unfrocked priests. (Gascoyne 1936d: 41)

Sin and doom are presented as artificial creations, civilising myths of a civilised society, used to dominate and subdue the so-called savage and substitute his ancient magical beliefs for a Christian mythology based, not on connection, but on fear of an unknown god.

Nevertheless, a new world is announced. The revelation is, like beauty for Breton, convulsive. In a shift of perspective, the reader is taken back to the metropolis, where the apocalyptic message of a world gradually approaching its end is expressed in images of violent convulsion ("the time of earthquakes is at hand" and "there is an explosion of geraniums in the ballroom of the hotel"), of uncertainty and menace ("the streets are full of hearses" and "the pavements of cities are covered with needles"), and of decay and death ("the doors fall off their hinges in ruined cathedrals" and "bloodred lilies appear"). All of these are combined in an image which summarises the state of despair and precariousness of the individual, surrounded as he is by death: "across the square where crowds are dying in thousands / a man is walking a tightrope covered with moths". Finally, Isis appears. Her description is Surrealistically unreal, a prelude to Sheila Legge's impersonation of the Surrealist phantom at the 1936 London Surrealist Exhibition, and to Dalí's *Rainy Taxi* in the 1938 Paris Exhibition:

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[301] In *The Golden Bough* (1890), James George Frazer offers an account of the myth of Osiris (Frazer 2009: 362-367).

> there is an extremely unpleasant odour of decaying meat / arising from the depetalled
> flower growing out of her ear / her arms are like pieces of sandpaper / or wings of
> leprous birds in taxis / and when she sings her hair stands on end / and lights itself
> with a million little lamps like glow-worms. (Gascoyne 1936d: 42)

She is the Surrealist woman archetype, associated with ritualistic magic and superstition ("you must always write the last two letters of her christian name / upside down with a blue pencil"; "she was burning the eyes of snails in a candle"), eroticism ("she was standing at the window clothed only in a ribbon"), subversion of conventional codes of behaviour ("she was eating the excrement of dogs and horses") and political action ("she was writing a letter to the president of france").

Finally, the new world emerges in images that suggest life and fertility ("the trunks of trees bust open to release streams of milk") and Gascoyne's lines become longer and more rhythmical, in accord with his typically Surrealist idiom. The liturgical character of the passage is reinforced by the use of ternary anapestic rhythm, syntactic parallelism and anaphora, reaching a final climax towards the end of the poem, to signal the end of the world of false shadows and deceptive reflections that is the bourgeois world: "and with theatres and eggshells and droppings of eagles / and the drums of the hospitals were broken like glass / and glass were the faces in the last looking-glass". The repetitive use of the first-person plural pronoun ("we") stresses the collective character of the images that are presented: this is a new reality which we all share. We all join in a ritualistic chant to celebrate our liberation from a repressive morality, embrace crime as the ultimate redemptive act, and worship the pagan deities that have replaced the Christian idea of god. We are all poet-seers:

> we rejoice to receive the blessing of criminals / and we illuminate the roofs of
> convents when they are hung / we look through a telescope on which the lord's prayer
> has been written / and we see an old woman making a scarecrow / on a mountain near
> a village in the middle of spain / we see an elephant killing a stag-beetle / by letting hot
> tears fall onto the small of its back / we see a large cocoa-tin full of shapeless lumps of
> wax. (Gascoyne 1936d: 42)

The new world that is announced anticipates that which is bombastically broadcast in Roger Roughton's poem "Animal Crackers in your Croup" (1936). In Gascoyne's poem, this is a world in which religion is deprecated ("when an angel writes the word TOBACCO across the sky / the sea becomes covered with patches of dandruff"), desire is liberated ("little girls stick photographs of genitals to the windows of their homes / [. . .] / and virgins cover their parents' beds with tealeaves"), private capital is depreciated ("and the wings of private

airplanes look like shoeleather / shoeleather on which pentagrams have been drawn / shoeleather covered with vomiting of hedgehogs / shoeleather used for decorating wedding-cakes") and institutions are condemned ("there is an extraordinary epidemic of tuberculosis in yorkshire / where medical dictionaries are banned from the public libraries", "and the gums of queens like glass marbles / queens whose wrists are chained to the walls of houses"). Furthermore, in Roughton's poem, the highly visual image of a 'palmist' lunching on his crystal ball reinforces the idea of the poet-prophet. On the other hand, in Gascoyne's poem, images of eternal damnation show the black-magic powers of the poet-priest: prayer books open themselves during death services; a horrible dentist is sent to examine the methods of cannibals; terrible illnesses are wreaked upon the possessors of pistols.

Moral repression and intellectual and cultural complacency were for Gascoyne the signs of a corrupted and deadened society. For him, contemporary Britain was the epitome of such a condition, with its excessive rationalism, political inaction and starving imagination. Surrealism provided him with the appropriate tools to fight the three causes of this spiritual corruption. In his Surrealist poems, the excessive rationalism of the positivistic sciences is countered by the use of irrationalism and mental derangement as forms of poetic liberation: the poet as madman. Political inaction is fought with images of the destruction of a decaying social order and the creation of a world which subverts its moral basis: the poet as magician-creator. Finally, imagination is restored by means of the obliteration of sensual perception and the defence of more intuitive forms of perception: the poet as prophet-seer. The old order is destroyed by means of convulsive images of chaos and devastation. Image and ideology are finally reconciled as the new world is announced in paroxysmic visions of revelation: these are the visions of a deranged mind in hysterical fits, of the magician in connection with a transcendental reality, of the poet in mystic union with an unknown god, which is no other than the imagination. Gascoyne's Surrealist poetry is, in all its obscurity, a clear night.

3. The Excremental Image: George Barker.

> Nor can we tell if the three great images
> –excrement, blood and putrefaction- are not precisely
> concealing the *wished-for* 'treasure islands.'
> Being connoisseurs of images, we have long since learned
> to recognise the image of desire in images of terror,
> and even the reawakening of 'golden ages'
> in the shameful scatological images.
> Salvador Dalí, "The Stinking Ass" (1932): 52-53.

> Sometimes writing poems is like the act of defecation.
> George Barker, "An Interview with George Barker" (1971): 394.

The inclusion of George Barker in a study of Surrealist writing might be considered surprising as he is hardly considered a Surrealist poet nowadays, and there are several factors that account for this: his alliance with the British Surrealists had come about through personal friendship rather than him becoming a member of a pre-established group; furthermore, after this short association with Surrealism between 1936 and 1937, he deliberately distanced himself from the activities of the British Surrealist Group as he strove not to be associated with this or any other literary group, school of thought or political creed; also, his only Surrealist composition, *Calamiterror* (1937), in spite of an initial timid reception as a Surrealist text, has been since placed on a par with the more politically engaged poetry of the thirties (W.H. Auden, Stephen Spender and Cecil Day-Lewis), especially due to its explicit references to the Spanish Civil War, or with the *surrealising* imagery of Dylan Thomas; and finally, although the criticism has acknowledged some Surrealist influence on *Calamiterror*, it has failed to see the Surrealist genesis of its imagery, its connection with the works of other British and continental Surrealists, and therefore to consider it as a psychoanalytical exploration of unconscious and irrational images which eventually develop ideological significance.[302] Hence, it is by drawing attention to all these neglected aspects of *Calamiterror*, and to the correspondences between

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[302] See, for example, Peter Nicholls's "Surrealism in England", in *The Cambridge History of Twentieth-Century English Literature* (2004), where he argues that "like Thomas, Barker was more influenced by the English Romantics than by Breton" (Nicholls 2004: 413). An insightful analysis of Barker's poetry is Leo Mellor's unpublished doctoral thesis *Calamiterrors: the Works of George Barker, 1933-1944* (2007), where (unorthodox) Surrealist influences in *Calamiterror* are studied.

Barker's poetic theory and the Surrealist theories on poetic creation, that the analysis presented here reinstates George Barker's *Calamiterror*, not only as a Surrealist poem, but also as one of the most valuable contributions to the reconciliation of image and ideology that the British Surrealists unrelentingly sought in their writings. This becomes clear by studying the chronology of the text's composition in relation to the chronological development of historical events, a relation disregarded in the criticism so far. Also, we will consider the parallels that are established between Barker's *unorthodox* Surrealism and the dissident tendencies initiated by Salvador Dalí and Georges Bataille on the continent, and which are clear influences on Barker's conception of the Surrealist image in his work. Indeed, *Calamiterror* distances itself significantly from orthodox Bretonian Surrealism and, I sustain, its Surrealist aesthetics may in no way be considered instrumental, or merely formal: certainly, the poem is not the result of borrowing imagery, or of simply emulating a style. Rather, the Surrealism of *Calamiterror* is organic and radical, for it arises from the image-making mechanisms that are at work in the process of composition. In this process, highly subjective and abject images emerge and become intertwined, creating a complex web in which the dynamics of sight and blindness, birth and death, food and hunger, ingestion and evacuation, destruction and creation are explored in relation to the poem's main themes: sexuality, religion, poetry, kinship and war. In the poem, which is a psychological journey, a delving into a deeply troubled unconscious in order to reach a certain sense of the collective, these become central. The analysis that follows shows the ways in which image and ideology, poetry and politics, are reconciled in one of the richest poems produced in Britain in the 1930s.

3.1. Barker, Surrealism and Politics.

Catholicism was a major influence on Barker's life and work from childhood. Born in Essex in 1913 to an English father and an Irish Catholic mother, he soon became tormented by a sense of Catholic endurance, sufferance and guilt that never abandoned him.[303] In 1926, he began a course on theology and established contact with two priests, who "combined to produce what became his own complicated view of the Church, which would remain constant to the end of his life" (Fraser 2001: 16). The Catholic doctrine with which he was imbued is largely responsible for his pessimism, his sense of unredeemable sin (derived from the Catholic concept of the original sin) and his constant struggle with moral guilt. In "An Interview with George Barker", he explained the roots of his obsession with guilt:

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[303] Biographical information taken from Robert Fraser's *The Chameleon Poet* (2001) and Cyrena Pondrom's "An Interview with George Barker" (1971). For a biographical account of his relationship with the Canadian poet Elizabeth Smart, see Christopher Barker's *The Arms of the Infinite: Elizabeth Smart and George Barker* (2010).

> I think that obsession –and it is an obsession, not just an interest– with guilt, I mean with the conscious knowledge that what one had done could be seen as both evil and wrong, is something that has been with me since the age of seven –since the advent of one's faculty for reasoning. It's easy to argue that though I most desperately loathe the Roman Catholic Church, I'm indeed deeply grateful to it, because it imposed upon me a sense of guilt that I wouldn't be without. (in Pondrom 1971: 387)

This moral duplicity and religious ambiguity permeates his Surrealist *magnum opus Calamiterror* (1937), in which a similar attitude towards politics is manifest. Indeed, he considered himself to be a "renegade Catholic" (399), and *Calamiterror* reveals him as a political renegade too. Even so, this permanent state of partial belief (religious as well as political) contrasts with the perseverance of his faith (moral and ideological) throughout *Calamiterror*: regarding this, in "An Interview with George Barker", he describes the poem as "an act of faith" in which contraries are reconciled (376-377).

Barker left school at fifteen to never return, something that distinguishes him greatly from the core group of thirties' poets, most of whom were educated in public schools and attended universities such as Cambridge or Oxford. He was employed by the Janus Press, established by Desmond Harmsworth, where he became familiar with the works of Wyndham Lewis, whose political ideas, especially those expressed in his apologia of German National Socialism, *Hitler* (1931), confused a still young and impressionable Barker. In his years as a newly-married young poet, he led a sort of double life: married life in the countryside during weekdays, city bohemian wildlife at weekends as in 1932 he became involved in the bohemian and subversive cultural life of Parton Street. It was there, through David Archer's Parton Bookshop, where Surrealist works such as Gascoyne's *Man's Life is this Meat* (1936) would be published, that Barker entered the London Avant-Garde literary scene and the Marxist political circles of the time. It was in this context and at this time also that Barker and David Gascoyne became acquainted, a friendship that would last a lifetime. Then, Barker was nineteen, whereas Gascoyne was only sixteen but already deeply immersed already in his research on Surrealism, which would crystallise in his 1935 *Short Survey of Surrealism*. Barker also became acquainted with Charles Madge, a supporter of Surrealism and one of the founders of the Mass-Observation movement.

One of Barker's first appearances in print was his poem "Daedalus" which was accepted for publication in T.S. Eliot's *The Criterion*, where it appeared in the April 1934 issue. From this moment on, he became one of Eliot's very few protégés. However, in spite of these several literary and cultural kinships, Barker always deliberately stayed on a different if parallel

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line from the established literary creeds of the time, and his poetics and politics never belonged to any marked trend. Not in vain, as Robert Fraser confirms, very early in his life he had already decided he would never belong to a particular literary group or school (Fraser 2001: 28). But regardless of this distance which he felt between himself and these poets because of their different background, his friendship with David Gascoyne and the natural curiosity that a movement like Surrealism was arousing in Britain at the time account for his enthusiasm towards the Surrealist movement, which would have a deep effect on the composition of *Calamiterror*. Regarding this, when asked about the influence of Surrealism on his poetry, he explained it in the following terms:

> Because the best friend I had at that time, or one of the best friends, was David Gascoyne. And so we would kick this idea around –and anyhow, for any chap of my time, the surrealist idea was certainly the most exciting idea around then. For me it was infinitely more exciting than Marxism. Because politics has always rather bored me. I mean bored me in the sense that one is cynical, and has always been cynical, about it. All politicians are skullduggers and that's that. But the poems written by Breton and Eluard [sic.]: there was a lovely series of poems called *Simulations of Paralysis*. These are terribly beautiful. You know they used language and ideas with an irresponsibility which was so heavenly to one at that time when one was overcome with a sense of responsibility, because one was new to the game. Oh God! one took oneself very seriously. It was lovely to see men playing around with ideas in apparently the service of a very beautiful idea: i.e., these poems were called, what were they? *Some Surrealist Poems in the Service of the Revolution*. So, what one was happy to believe in was that one was not only obsessed with aesthetics, but one was also doing a little political thinking at the same time. But even apart from that, the absolute destruction of all categories was an idea which of course excited us at that time. (in Pondrom 1971: 381)

As well as discovering the link between art and politics through Surrealism, Barker's poetry was also influenced by another obsession rooted in his own sexual experiences, as he became concerned with male-female sexuality and homosexual desire. These concerns appear at several points in *Calamiterror* and other works such as "The Bacchant" and "The Documents of a Death", published in the volume *Janus* (1935). Fraser recounts that "[Barker's] journal in 1931 had recorded a moment of disturbance in which 'a terrifying visitation of effeminacy slit open the brain and swerved in suddenly, as I lay upon the bed thinking about the future'" (Fraser 2001: 61). At the beginning of 1935, the prospect of a sexual affair with another man

took Barker on a trip to Capri, which Fraser recounts thus: "The ostensible purpose of the visit was to flesh out the geographical detail of the Capri sequence in the story ["The Documents of a Death"]. However, as his correspondence with Eliot makes clear, the final draft had already been submitted. [. . .] It was the first time that Barker had been outside England and his real motive for leaving was, as his notebook confirms, the possibility of sexual adventure" (75). The theme of homosexual desire is revisited at several points in *Calamiterror*, where it is associated, in a typically Dalinian manner, with excretion. Also, he expands on the idea of sexual ambiguity or ambivalent sexuality (androgyny, hybridism and even hermaphroditism) in relation to reproduction, birth and death. As will be seen, his attitude to sexuality in the poem is as ambivalent as his attitude to religion and politics.

However, it was personal experiences that marked the genesis of Calamiterror: in April 1935, in a mock-fencing game with his brother Kit, Barker poked his brother's eye out with a stick, an accident that has constant poetic resonances in *Calamiterror*. Actually, and in spite of two other factual occurrences that are generally associated with the inception of *Calamiterror* (i.e. Barker's wife's miscarriage of their second child and the Spanish Civil War), Barker himself recalled the terrible accident as the main catalyst for writing the poem:

> this long poem [*Calamiterror*] was occasioned when a sporting accident happened and I blinded my brother in one of his eyes. The whole thing, then, blew up on me, and I don't think it was entirely by accident. I don't think the thing itself was an accident; it was one of those ghastly things . . . –a very close friend of mine, a poet by the name of Charles Madge, came up to me when he learned what had happened and said, 'For God's sakes, now I know you are a poet.' I could have hit him, but I knew the truth of what he was saying. My brother then became a very good painter. And I think the shift in these years was to do with that. (in Pondrom 1971: 389)

As will be corroborated in the analysis of *Calamiterror*, the accident acquires in Barker's imagination and memory a poetic, almost mythical, significance. It marks the beginning of his incursions into Surrealism, as well as his brother's, whose painting was also largely influenced by the movement in the late 1930s. Barker's recollection (and Madge's interpretation) of the incident, not as an accident, but rather as a poetic act of destruction merges with his own sense of guilt and his obsession with sight and impaired vision in the poem. The unconscious deliberateness of this act of destruction is expiated in the acts of creation that it led to, which Barker understood as the crystallisation of the unknown mechanisms of desire.

In the spring of 1936, Barker's wife suffered the miscarriage of their second child (they had given their first one in adoption), an event which also influenced the composition of

Calamiterror. In the meantime, Surrealism was burgeoning in Britain, with David Gascoyne and Roger Roughton (Gascoyne already a close friend of Barker and Roughton, a Parton colleague) immersed in the preparations for the London International Surrealist Exhibition. Fraser's description of the influences that converged in the early stages of *Calamiterror* seems accurate enough:

> The [Surrealist] craze was proving contagious. Kit Barker, for one, was finding in surrealism something that gave shape to his aspirations as a painter. For a while it also rubbed off on George, who was looking for a way to organise his long and, currently, disconnected poem, envisaged as the first of a series of 'Cantos.' Suddenly disconnection was a virtue. George was grappling with images of childbirth and of blinding, while endeavouring to articulate his growing political unease. (Fraser 2001: 90)

Fraser is right in pointing to the association, in Barker's imagination, of the incident of Kit's blinding and the eye-slitting scene in Buñuel's film, although he mistakes *L'Age d'Or* (1930) for *Un Chien Andalou* (1929). However, when he asserts that Surrealism was for Barker a mere *technique* which helped him transform his disconnected and inconsistent poetics into a *virtue*, he is mistaken: *Calamiterror*, in spite of the ambivalence of its images, can hardly be described as disconnected and was certainly not considered *virtuous* at the time, not even in Surrealist circles, as Barker's Surrealism stepped well outside the orthodox Bretonian creed, as will be seen. A few stanzas from *Calamiterror* were published under the title "X Stanzas" in the August-September 1936 issue of Roger Roughton's *Contemporary Poetry and Prose* (1936-1937), and the book was favourably reviewed by Stephen Spender in *Left Review* (1934-1938).[304] Seemingly, Barker had achieved what no other poet had at the time: to be praised by two conflicting factions (i.e. the Surrealists and the Communists). However, this is a rather superficial reading of the reception of his work which could dangerously lead to a confirmation of Barker's *virtuosity* in using Surrealism as a means to an end, for the question is not as clear-cut as it may seem at first.

"X Stanzas" makes up the first Book of *Calamiterror*, a section of the poem in which there are no political references and in which highly effective Surrealist images pile up in the creation of a distorted universe where the dead child and the struck eyeball float in Barker's

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[304] The stanzas published in *Contemporary Poetry and Prose* were sacrilegiously dedicated to Reverend Vincent McCarthy, something which might have likely pleased the Surrealists. Although these stanzas make up *Calamiterror*'s first part, they present a few significant variations from the final published text, as will be seen. The fact that Barker's stanzas were published in a Surrealist issue of a Surrealist-oriented journal shows the extent to which Barker was considered a member of the movement.

poetics of desecration, blood and excrement. When Roughton included Barker's "X Stanzas" in the Picasso's poems number of *Contemporary Poetry and Prose*, the poem was still work in progress: as Fraser suggests, Barker started writing the poem soon after his wife's miscarriage (spring 1936), but did not finish it until the end of 1936, and it would not be published until April 1937, which means that Barker had plenty of time to revise the text. Also, in these stanzas there are echoes of Sykes Davies's algolagnic sensibility, some of his motifs are evoked (the bloodred baby, the tree, the leaf), and even his own lines resonate with echoes of "In the Stump of the Old Tree": "It is here the hooded vulture and the walking skeleton / Converse in fatal language, rend each other, blend together" (Barker 1937b: 92) or "His eyes are the leaf of the tree and also space. / The waterspout is his umbilical" (93). On top of that, it must be remembered that Barker was a close friend of Gascoyne, a champion of Surrealism in Britain and the one responsible for the publication of the "Premier Manifeste Anglais du Surréalisme" (1935), and that Barker had been partially involved in the recent Surrealist Exhibition in London. All this, together with his fantastically Surrealist "X Stanzas", was to assure Barker a place among the Surrealists, a place which he nevertheless rejected, just as he rejected the attempts to associate him with the British "left-wing intelligentsia" (Fraser 2001: 110), from which he constantly tried to distance himself. Then, once *Calamiterror* was completed and published, the political element in it (especially the specific references to the Spanish Civil War) became conspicuously apparent to the eyes of the leftist reviewers.

Prior to Spender's review, Barker had been published in *Left Review* (three political poems: "I am not wronged" in March 1935, "Poem on People" in Januray 1937 and "5 Stanzas on the 5 Pointed Star" in May 1937); condemned for the solipsism of *Poems* (Cecil 1935: 383); mentioned a couple of times as the author of *Calamiterror* (in May 1937, with a couple of biographical inaccuracies, and in June 1937); and had also been one of the authors to *take sides* in the journal's survey *Authors Take Sides on the Spanish War* (signed in June 1937, published in November 1937). However, Spender's favourable review of *Calamiterror* in *Left Review* does not provide conclusive arguments regarding the poem as a political text, but quite the contrary. When compared to the other authors that Spender reviews (Charles Madge, Rex Warner, Ezra Pound), Barker turns out to be the

> least politically conscious [. . .], he has by now been told by most of the critics that he
> is too absorbed in the private crisis of his own personality, yet I find that his poems
> give me a far deeper sense of the confusion and frustration of European civilisation
> than do Charles Madge's quick-change muse, Rex Warner's severely willed political

Puritanism, or Ezra Pound's vast cocktail of old-world beauty and Douglas economics. (Spender 1937: 358)

Spender's understanding of Barker's Surrealist poetics is exquisite, and his arguments actually contribute to restoring *Calamiterror* as a truly Surrealist work, and not as a formal instrumentalisation of Surrealism to express a biographical content:

> If I read in the newspapers about an air raid in Valencia, I am oppressed by the weight of the actual and menacing which may seem to obtrude for a moment on my own environment: if I dream about an air raid in Valencia, I realise that this part of contemporary reality has become, as a symbol, part of my own mental environment, with a special significance which I cannot elude. [. . .] the air raid [. . .] has broken right into the centre of my dream and become one of the symbols of my mental life –in fact, the air raid which I have poetically 'experienced.' George Barker's world is obsessed, over-sensitive, hysterical, and perhaps, in the last resource, too passive towards experience. [. . .] Barker [. . .] is capable of imaginative experience to the degree to which it is only possible to the true poet, the degree by which an imagined experience modifies the poet's whole being. (360)

This appreciation of the poem is indicative of Spender's views, which are worth considering as they bring together both the Surrealist and political elements in the poem. Spender's conception of poetry and the role of the poet certainly differed from orthodox Communist precepts and the *literature of the proletariat* defended throughout the pages of *Left Review*. As well as contributing extensively to the journal, he was one of the signatories of *Authors Take Sides* and one of the English writers to deliver a speech at the Second Congress of Writers for the Defence of Culture (Madrid July 1937); however, he tended to detach himself from its Realist literary dogma in his defence of the writer's freedom and his criticism of literature as propaganda, which came closer to the ideas on art and the artist advocated by the Surrealists. In "Writers and Manifestoes" (1935) he had emphasised that

> if one is on the side of the greatest possible degree of freedom, if one insists that one should write as one chooses and about what one wishes, one is not a traitor to the cause of world socialism. No system is in itself a complete solution of world problems. If there is to be any sort of freedom and improvement, one has go [sic.] to push and even sometimes fight the systems of one's own choice. Unless artists insist on their right to criticize [. . .] communism will become a frozen epoch, another ice age. (Spender 1935b: 150)

As we saw in the chapter devoted to Surrealist ideology in Britain, in spite of his collaborations with Communist organs, Spender, whose position was closer to that of the Surrealists, was harshly criticised by the British Communists and his commitment to the Communist literary programme in his works was constantly questioned in *Left Review*, with the hope that he would eventually take the final step towards Socialist Realism. Montagu Slater's review of Spender's *Vienna* (1934), although sympathetic towards Spender, also pointed out the need to solve his theoretical problems concerning poetic creation through communal action, which implied that Spender tended towards individualism. Edgell Rickword was harsher in his review of Spender's *The Destructive Element* (1935), where he criticised "Spender's antipathy to Communism" (Rickword 1935: 479). Considering all this we may conclude that, whereas Barker's *Calamiterror* was welcomed by the British Surrealists as a genuine piece of Surrealist writing, in Communist circles its political element was praised only by Spender, who was no orthodox Communist himself.

As opposed to what is suggested in the criticism, the Surrealism of *Calamiterror* is not instrumental, but rather the very creative motor of the poem.[305] As Fraser has noted, *Calamiterror* brings together three biographical elements, the miscarriage of his child, Kit's accident and Barker's growing political concerns. The association of these, which were crucial in his life both at a conscious and unconscious level, could only be achieved through the immersion into a truly Surrealist poetics. Nevertheless, Barker's Surrealism is not only a formal structure to express a series of otherwise straightforward biographical events. The very conception of these events in Barker's imagination is of a Surrealist nature, and the poem becomes a sincere exploration of unconscious fears and desires which transcends a merely aesthetic exercise. Kit's incident is conceived in the light of the secret workings of unconscious desire, and revisited in a variety of images of blindness, impaired vision and rape, whereas the pierced eye is per se a Surrealist element with strong unconscious evocations, and legitimised by Dalí, Buñuel, Bataille, Emmy Bridgwater and Conroy Maddox, just to name a few. Barker's distinct understanding and poetic treatment of his recent political concerns and the Spanish Civil War (whose outset Fraser sets wrongly in May 1936, and therefore could not be present in the inception of the text) differs greatly from the kind of poems that the conflict inspired in

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[305] See, for example, Barbara Josephine Guenther's *The Emergence of George Barker* (1974) and Michael Schmidt's *An Introduction to 50 Modern British Poets* (1979). More recently, Peter Nicholls has downplayed the Surrealist influence in the poem in favour of a Romantic one (Nicholls 2004: 413), whereas Leo Mellor has referred to Barker's use of "Surrealist methods" (Mellor 2011: 91).

Britain, and from Barker's own political poems.[306] Emily Coleman, one of Barker's fairly close American acquaintances, wrote to him on 5 July 1937, and established what would later become the public's generalised and simplistic reading of *Calamiterror*: "As I see it now it is a sort of recording of your breaking out from the skin of your self-love, emerging from the subjective chrysalis" (in Fraser 2001: 99). Barker abhorred politics and, above all, he abhorred the imposition of politics on the work of art. This was reflected in *The True Confession of George Barker* (1950), where the poet satirises his own political concerns in a movement (from eating to masturbating) which finds, as will be seen, correspondences in *Calamiterror*:

> I entertained the Marxian whore-
>
> I am concerned with economics,
>
> And naturally felt that more
>
> Thought should be given to our stomachs.
>
> But when I let my fancy dwell
>
> On anything below the heart,
>
> I found my thoughts, and hands as well,
>
> Resting upon some private part. (Barker 1965: 31)

Also, in "An Interview with George Barker" (1971), he talked about Dylan Thomas's and his own unconcern for politics in the 1930s: "the atmosphere in London at that time was so full of political ideas and political passions, and one was aware –you were aware, you weren't alive, you were just politically self-conscious. But neither Dylan Thomas nor I had any care about such matters" (in Pondrom 1971: 383). His answers to Geoffrey Grigson's questionnaire in the October 1934 issue of *New Verse* show that he was not willing to commit his poetics to either Freud or Marx, and this was a declared rejection of aligning with a political creed or party. Nevertheless, the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War proved crucial in his adoption of a more urgent attitude towards the international political situation. His brief answer in *Authors Take Sides on the Spanish War* (1937) is commented on by Fraser, who focuses on Barker's religious references:

> Though unimpeachably pro-Loyalist, his answer slipped nimbly between the unequivocal commitment to Spanish democracy enunciated by Spender and Gascoyne, and the measured neutrality of Eliot. [. . .] By cheekily placing the Anglican Primate

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[306] See, for example, *Poems for Spain* (1939), co-edited by Stephen Spender and John Lehmann. Among Barker's political poems are "Poem on People" (1937), "5 Stanzas on the 5 Pointed Star" (1937), "Poem on Geography" (1938), "Elegy on Spain" (1939) and "O Hero Akimbo on the Mountains of Tomorrow" (1939).

among the fascists, Barker's remark implicitly aligned all English Catholics [like himself] with the Republic. (Fraser 2001: 91)

Certainly, his awareness of the official support that Franco was obtaining from the Spanish Catholic Church and his unquestionable loathing of Fascism ("I am for the people of Republican Spain [. . .]. I am against Fascism, Franco") must have placed him in a difficult position. This was his unequivocal but somehow half-hearted answer to *Left Review*'s questionnaire: "I am for the people of Republican Spain, for the people of China, for the people of England, for the people of Germany, etc. I am against Fascism, Franco, Mussolini, Japanese Generals, Hitler, Walter Chrysler, the Archbishop of Canterbury, etc." (in Left Review 1937a: 4).

The effect that the Spanish Civil War had on Barker's poetics crystallised further in three political poems which differ significantly from *Calamiterror* in their treatment of the political theme. In "Elegy on Spain" (1939) and "O Hero Akimbo on the Mountains of Tomorrow" (1939) the political element is uppermost, which brings them closer to the sort of political poetry that was written in the final years of the thirties' decade.[307] Nevertheless, some elements which become recurrent in *Calamiterror* are also present in these poems. "O Hero Akimbo on the Mountains of To-Morrow", which appeared in Stephen Spender and John Lehmann's *Poems for Spain* (1939), revisits the theme of hunger and eating through the anthropomorphic representation of Spain's geography. In his description of the map of Spain, a "starved shape", the reference to "the Gibraltar jaw" implies that Spain is being eaten by Britain, probably through its non-intervention policy. The photograph which inspired "Elegy on Spain", generally understood to be the photograph of a child killed in a Barcelona air-raid in 1939, has been rightly traced by Leo Mellor in his unpublished Doctoral Thesis on Barker, where he acknowledges that

> this is not a picture, as Barker and his biographer and critics title it, of a child killed in the Barcelona air-raids of 1939 – or even 1938. It was rather taken at some point during the initial bombing raids on Madrid late in 1936, as soon as the Nationalist forces realised they would not take the city before winter arrived and the defence lines hardened. As an image it had a complex history, re-used as an archetypal vision of civilian casualties by the press in Europe – but also incorporated into one of the most famous posters of the war.[308] (Mellor 2007: 144)

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[307] Both poems, were, together with fragments from *Calamiterror* (1937), included in Valentine Cunningham's *The Penguin Book of Spanish Civil War Verse* (1980).
[308] The poem was published anonymously by David Archer in 1939, it remained so until the publication of Barker's *Lament and Triumph* in 1940.

Indeed, it is actually the photograph of a child victim in Madrid that appeared, together with seven more pictures of dead children, in a U.G.T.-C.N.T. poster by the Ministerio de Propaganda in Valencia. The image of this child, with an added background of military planes, would later be used in two other posters, also by the Ministerio de Propaganda and addressed to an English-speaking public: "Madrid. The 'military' practice of the rebels. What Europe tolerates or protects. What your children can expect" and "Madrid. The 'military' practice of the rebels. If you tolerate this your children will be next" (Miratvilles 1978: 132, 147).[309] The poem continues to explore themes that had already appeared in *Calamiterror*, such as the pierced eye ("Madrid, like a live eye in the Iberian mask, / Asks help from heaven and receives a bomb"), food imagery ("O now, my nimor moon, dead as meat / Slapped on a negative plate, I hold / The crime of the bloody time in my hand") or the Spanish conflict itself; but it does not yield to the Surrealist convulsion of *Calamiterror* or attempt in any way an internal exploration of dream imagery or of unconscious associations. The political element remains explicit at all times, dominating the composition, while Barker's use of the bland metaphor remains aesthetically inferior to the powerful visual quality of his Surrealist images in *Calamiterror*. As a political poem, it has been considered one of the most accomplished instances of poetry of the Spanish Civil War and, in 1990, David Gascoyne was invited to read fragments of Barker's "Elegy on Spain" during an act of commemoration of the death of British writers during the Civil War in which a plaque was placed at the Residencia de Estudiantes where the Surrealists Lorca, Dalí and Buñuel studied.

If we bear in mind the clear differences between these political poems and *Calamiterror*, it must be emphasised that, even if the political element cannot be obviated, the latter is not a political poem, in the terms that "political" is understood in the context of thirties' British literature. Furthermore, because the political element was not present at the inception of the poem, but was rather later incorporated into its composition through unconscious associations, *Calamiterror* is a case of politicised poetry similar to that of Hugh Sykes Davies's and David Gascoyne's works. Also, like Sykes Davies's *Petron*, *Calamiterror* is a constant re-enactment of a nightmarish experience, or a series of them, linked through associations which work at the unconscious level. Thus, the Spanish element becomes mythically associated with issues of ancestry and origin, while birth is simultaneously connected with blindness, desire and death. Barker's poetics continually re-enacts this circular

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[309] The photographs of the eight children were reused in a leaflet issued by the Communist Party of Great Britain: "This is what fascism means! Swift Death out of the Sky. 71 Children Killed with One Bomb, blotting out the school-house of Getafe October 30th, 1936. This was Franco's first air-raid on Madrid. This is How Fascism Fights!" (The Communist Party of Great Britain 1936: n.p.).

motion in a way that connects all these elements to the excremental motif that dominates the poem, creating a self-contained web of intratextual references which forces the reader's, but also the speaker's, violent confrontation with the poet's obsessions.

3.2. Barker's Poetic Theory.

Barker wrote extensively on the nature of poetic creation and several aspects of his poetic theory crystallised in *Calamiterror*: these are his poetic Anarchism, according to which the poem is an autonomous entity independent from aesthetic, moral or rational concerns; his Freudian concept of poetry as the constant re-enactment of painful experiences through which mastery over reality is achieved; and the idea that poetry's ultimate aim is the attainment of a superior reality which transcends the material, or the merely political. Although he never acknowledged as much, several parallels can be drawn between these ideas and the poetics of Surrealism as it was theoretically developed in Britain by its foremost theoreticians, Herbert Read and Hugh Sykes Davies. For example, Barker's concept of poetic Anarchism was close to Read's theories of the anarchist nature of the work of art. For Barker, poetic anarchism implied that poetic creation is autonomous, because it is independent from external conditions and influences, and unpredictable, because the coordinates (when, what, who, how) in which inspiration takes place remain unknown and beyond man's rational grasp. Also, Barker saw poetry as an inherently *perverse* human activity, an idea which found clear correspondences in Sykes Davies's Gothic genealogy of British Surrealism and his Freudian conception of poetry as the gratifying re-enactment of painful experiences. In the "Introduction" to his *Essays* (1970), Barker assigned the poet and poetry two basic attributes, the first being a naturally anarchic disposition and the second, the assertion of human perversity: "The anarchy affirms the triumph of the imagination over the will, and the perversity asserts the triumph of the living over the dead" (Barker 1970: 11).[310] Thus, poetic creation becomes a preternatural act, a concept which derives directly from Breton's theories of automatism and the *alchemy* of the poetic word:

> in the composing of a poem the poet reaches a point at which he must surrender all purely intellectual calculations and invoke a superior power. [. . .] I do not know the name of this superior power but I am quite sure in the dark backward and abysm of my mind that it is neither Truth nor Beauty. I think that what is invoked looks like the Mask of Anarchy, for it is the visage of what we do not know disguised as the face of what we have got to learn. (Barker 1970: 12)

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[310] This was a lecture delivered at the Rencontre Mondiale de Poésie in Montreal, on the occasion of the 1967 International Exposition.

Barker's invocation of a superior reality (the echoes of a *surréalité* are evident here) as something unknown but nevertheless accessible through poetry is a re-elaboration of the Surrealist quest for the exhumation of the unconscious (present in Sykes Davies's theory and in Gascoyne's texts) and his Mask of Anarchy indicates that for him, as for the Surrealists, *hasard objectif* was a central element in poetic creation. His celebration of the unknown as poetry's ultimate aspiration was, as we have seen, also a fundamental aspect of Gascoyne's Surrealist poetry, and it implies that any attempt at pinning down meaning or significance destroys the very meaning it may contain. Therein lay for Barker the perversity of poetry.

Already in the 1930s, Barker's theories of poetic creation were very much in the line of Surrealist tenets. In "Poetry and Reality", which was published in *The Criterion* in October 1937, he defended that poetry has its own internal laws, and that it is with these internal laws (and not the laws of external reality) that the poet needs to comply. For him, poetry creates its own independent and autonomous reality and, thus, a crime that takes place in a poem is beautiful, regardless of its repulsive nature outside of it. This responds to what Barker called the "inexplicably poetic", directly connected to Surrealism's conception of dream content (which is also poetic content) as independent from aesthetic, moral or rational considerations. Furthermore, Barker's vision of crime as poetically beautiful drew on the Surrealist apologia of crime, derived, as we have seen in the section devoted to Sykes Davies, from the English Gothic tradition, the French *poètes maudits* and the Marquis de Sade; on the other hand, Barker's poetics of "intensification and exaggeration" was more in accord with Sykes Davies's poetics of excess, and emerged as the result of his conception of poetry as a process of exploration of unconscious fears and obsessions; all these elements are central in *Calamiterror*. But, as I have suggested, Barker never embraced completely the Surrealist creed, and at some points he distanced himself from its theories: his idea of the metaphor as a form of representation of the real contrasts with the Surrealist concept of the image (which he nevertheless deploys in *Calamiterror*), and although he defended the image as a distortion of reality, he also rejected irrationalism (Barker 1970: 83). Nevertheless, Barker's Romantic belief in the reconciliation of nature and imagination through poetry brought him radically closer to Read's and Sykes Davies's theories of Surrealism: "Coleridge describes the 'two cardinal points of poetry' as being 'the power of exciting the sympathy of the reader by a faithful adherence to the truth of nature, and the power of giving the interest of novelty by the modifying colours of the imagination'" (84). Thus, poetry was for him, not a process of contrasting, but rather of bringing together nature and imagination, object and subject, an idea which was central to the

Surrealists' concept of the image as the means of reconciling conscious and unconscious states.

Although Barker did not mention the unconscious as a creative source in his poetic theory (probably a deliberate strategy to distinguish himself from the Surrealists), he did imply that the material of poetry was of an unconscious nature (which also distinguished him from the Realists). His use of Aristotle's definition of the subject of poetry as "the actions of men" allowed him to expand on the concept of "action" as not only involving the material, but also the psychological:

> The subject of poetry is the actions of men, according to the definition of Aristotle [. . .] It may be taken [. . .] to embrace the subjective processes as well as the objective processes. The actions of men necessarily involve not only the real world, but all ascending spheres of the real. Not only the physical body of the human immediately caught up in the processes of the most minor action, but so to some degree or other is the entire human sphere. The poet, in dealing with the actions of men, deals with all degrees and all removes of reality. (85-86)

His reference to the mind's subjective processes as the "ascending spheres of the real" (i.e. what is above reality, the *surreality*) is a clear nod to the Surrealist exploration of dream content and the unconscious. Furthermore, he defended the poet's access to this surreality, which he, like the Surrealists, considered to be as important in the individual's experience as the conscious part. Indeed, he regarded the attainment of that transcendental reality as central to poetic creation, and his opinion of the political poetry of his time was that, whereas it might have an ethical value, it remained deficient for the exploration and interpretation of universal concerns: "If the poet [. . .] permits extraneous or partisan considerations to vitiate his apprehensions, then his poetry, although it may contain some value as applied ethics, immolates its worth as interpretation of the human" (87). So, in a reversal of Communist views of poetic creation, according to which politicisation implied universalisation, Barker considered that social or political considerations actually bring about the opposite movement, subjecting poetry to the merely anecdotal, as he explained in his essay "Poetry and Politics" (1937): "The one who examines the transcendental while suffering, for instance, from extreme hunger, is too prone to see visions of what his stomach rather than his spirit requires" (Barker 1937d: 100). Thus, for him, that transcendental unknown was the only object of poetry, which could only be reached if complete apprehension of the material was achieved.

All these aspects of Barker's poetic theory coalesce in *Calamiterror*, where the politicisation of subjective images transcends, not only the individualistic element inherent in

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the inception of those images, but also the merely political, offering a reconciliation of the ideal and the real, the unconscious and the conscious, a reconciliation which was also central to Surrealism. However, there are three further aspects of his poetic theory which are also present in *Calamiterror*, and which clearly distinguish him from the other British Surrealists: his concept of poetry as a form of elegy, his use of myth as a way to transcend the anecdotal element inherent in political poetry, and his sense of moral and ideological faith in the face of uncertainty. Two of Barker's essays are especially relevant for the study of these elements of Barker's poetics and politics in *Calamiterror*. In "Therefore All Poems Are Elegies" (1939) Barker describes poetry as an infinite series of minute deaths: "To be so closely caught up in the teeth of things that they kill you, no matter how infinitesimally kill you, is, truly, to be a poet: and to be a poet in fact it is additionally necessary that you should possess the tongues and instruments with which to record this series of infinitesimal deaths" (Barker 1970: 64). Thus, death, life and poetry are inextricably connected in the poet's imagination, and every form of poetry becomes a sort of elegy. The process of poetic creation is considered a constant dying and an eternal bleeding to death, something which is faithfully reflected in the movements in *Calamiterror*: to be eaten and to eat as destructive activities, and excretion as a form of creation. In this essay, Barker provided an essential clue towards the understanding of some of the most obscure and recurrent imagery of *Calamiterror*. The Surrealist image of the bowels coiling around the tree pervades the poem and remains ambivalent in its double association with the process of poetic creation and the image of birth-death. Moreover, his tracing of an ancestral mythology in the poem becomes only clearly discernible in the light of his poetic theory:

> the poet, embroiled daily in his own decease, is caught in the toils of reality as profoundly and as hopelessly as the consumptive who drowns in his own saliva. I can give you the image of the captive of the Gaels, whose torture was to unwind his intestines around a tree: for this is the poet, whose bowels are wound round the Eden Tree in coils at once agonizing and glorious: I mean each turn is a poem. (64)

This idea of poetic creation as agonizing and glorious, as a torture and a form of redemption at once, becomes clear in *Calamiterror*: it is an act of ingestion/consumption with a high risk of choking, which is elaborated through images of indigestion, poisoning, regurgitation and vomiting. Each poem is considered a bowel movement, an idea that is directly connected to the process of digestion as elaborated by Barker's excremental poetics. Poetry is no longer an act of the imagination or an act of inspiration, but rather a biologically determined function,

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very much in the fashion of Sykes Davies's conception of poetry as a biological instinct: poetry as excretion.

There is still one further layer of signification in *Calamiteror*, which is only clarified by these enlightening words in Barker's essay. Although, as was said before, *Calamiterror* can only with difficulty be considered a political poem, as only with difficulty may one consider Barker to have intended it to be so, the criticism tends to dwell on Barker's excessively personal approach to as political a subject as the Spanish Civil War. However, the process of mythologising that takes place in its lines provides an answer to the critics' concerns, for Barker's poetic imagination establishes a link between his own experience (his wife's miscarriage, the blinding of his brother Kit, his homosexual desire) and the Spanish conflict through the veiled evocation of the poet's Irish ancestry, which goes as far back as the mythical Iberian origins of the people of Ireland, as described in the mythological accounts of the Medieval *Lebor Gabála Érenn* (*The Book of Invasions*), of which Barker was probably aware through his mother. The mythological account of the early history of the Gaels in *The Book of Invasions* sets Brigantia (modern Spanish Galicia) as the home of Breogán's tower, from which Íth could see Ireland. According to the myth, Íth's uncle, Míl Espáine (from Latin *Miles Hispaniae*), is the ancestor of the Irish Gaels. Thus, Barker's mythical imagination links the images that represent his own genealogy (his Irish ancestry by means of the image of the tree, as well as his own truncated progeny through the birth-death) to the struggle of the Spanish people, which he experiences at a personal (subjective), rather than a social (objective), level. Whereas it is conspicuously noted that Barker had not been to Spain prior to composing *Calamiterror*, it is through this process of mythologisation of the Spanish people as his own ancestors (which is not immediately recognisable in the poem) that he could develop the deeply disturbing images that we find in the poem.

Elsewhere, in "Funeral Eulogy on García Lorca" (1939), Barker established his position regarding the relationship between the poet and war.[311] Although the Spanish Civil War is reduced to the usual two-sided vision of two opposing factions, he reveals a new perspective on the conflict and the role that poetry is to have in, or rather outside it. Barker, as opposed to many of his contemporaries, does not politicise Lorca's death for, considering him a martyr without a cause, he places the poet outside the contingencies of socio-political events, a victim whose cause was that he had no cause to fight. Barker's vision of Lorca, "who was no nightingale to sing the better with the needle of war in his eyeballs" (Barker 1970: 42), recalls the images that are ever-present in his *Calamiterror*: the nightingale as a symbol of deceitful

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[311] This was written in August 1939 to commemorate the third anniversary of Lorca's death.

inspiration, the poet's impaired vision as a consequence of a blinding catastrophe, and the piercing needle as a symbol of rape. Thus, "the act of war is a violation and a coldblooded crucifixion of the imagination: it is violated by mere horror, and it is crucified on a vertical of 'Patriotism' and a horizontal of 'Democracy'" (44). On this basis, Barker considers the antithesis of poetry to be, not science (as Wordsworth put it), but war, "the science of destruction" (44). When he talks about the "brute who looks upon the poem as the symptom of the paederast" (42), Barker is not only attacking Lorca's Fascist murderers, for he probably also has in mind the comments that the Surrealist imagery of his *Calamiterror* had occasioned, where disturbing images of birth and death are mixed with eroticised images of sexual penetration and the myth of the devouring parent. He sees Lorca's death as martyrdom, rather than a sacrifice or a murder, which should perpetuate the reign of poetic imagination, for which Lorca stands as a symbol. Barker's vision of Lorca, not as a political symbol, but a symbol of poetry contradicts the generalised politicised image of the poet. For Barker, his death does not serve the material/political world, but the realm of the imagination, and his cause is the cause of imagination. "With this cause", says Barker "like a foil in my hand I blinded my brother in his right eye" (43). As in *Calamiterror*, the cause of poetry and the Spanish Conflict become intimately associated in Barker's imagination with the act of obliterating vision. Also, the implications of the Civil War as an impairing, blinding, terrible act in which a brother violates his own brother are clear. And again, as in *Calamiterror*, he uses the Surrealist image of birth-death to establish the most appalling contrast between the positive pain (leading to life) and negative pain (leading to death), as he does in his poem: "the pain he felt in his chest as the bullet abused it was the ultimate antithesis of the pain his mother felt as he emerged from her womb" (44). In the poem, he also refers to "the mad eyes of the fascist beast" in his representation of the bullfight, something that recalls Picasso's *Guernica*, for this is a common reading of the obtusely powerful gaze of the bull in the painting. Indeed, Herbert Read's comments on Picasso's painting serve to illustrate Barker's poem:

> The light of day and night reveals a scene of horror and destruction: the eviscerated horse, the writhing bodies of men and women, betray the passage of the infuriated bull, who turns triumphantly in the background, tense with lust and stupid power, whilst from the window Truth, whose features are the tragic mask in all its classical purity, extends her lamp over the carnage. The great canvas is flooded with pity and terror, but over it all is imposed that nameless grace which arises from their cathartic equilibrium. (Read 1938e: 6)

Similarly, in the poem, Barker sees the Civil War in terms of the confrontation of human-animal in the arena, divided into light and dark as the country is at a moment when the bull has already killed the poet (at the moment of writing this eulogy, the Civil War was already over, and Franco was in power). However, Barker's vision is not that of defeat, for the poet may be killed, but not his poetry. It is this sort of faith in the poetic act that Barker also defends in *Calamiterror* in its double movement from destruction/ingestion to creation/excretion.

3.3. The Excremental Image in *Calamiterror* (1937).

To provide an exhaustive analysis of Barker's excremental imagery in *Calamiterror*, I shall begin by drawing attention to a series of aspects generally neglected in the criticism, especially the use of food imagery in Surrealism as an aesthetic response to physical hunger in the 1930s and how this was developed by Barker in the elaboration of a series of images related to processes of digestion and indigestion in the line of the dissident and scatological Surrealism of Georges Bataille. As we have seen, in *Calamiterror* Barker explores a series of recurrent obsessions or terrors by means of three leading images which become inextricably connected in the text: the image of the pierced eye (derived from the incident with his brother), the image of the lacerated womb (related to his wife's miscarriage) and the image of disturbed bowels (in connection with sexual desire). These apparently dissimilar images are brought together in the poem through the use of the motifs of food-defecation and birth-death, which also allow the incorporation of the theme of the Spanish Civil War. Significantly, in Barker's poetics, the act of excretion is intimately related to giving birth, as he states in *The True Confession of George Barker* (1950):

> The act of human procreation,
>
> –O crown and flower, O culmination
>
> Of perfect love throughout creation-
>
> What can I compare to it?
>
> O eternal butterflies in the belly,
>
> O trembling of the heavenly jelly,
>
> O miracle of birth! Really
>
> We are excreted, like shit. (Barker 1965: 13)

Both physical processes are described in similar terms, and both partake simultaneously of the life and death instincts that are at work in the act of poetic creation: for Barker, poetry itself is a sort of *giving birth* to excrement, which encompasses both the physical strain of child-birth as a life-oriented pain and the death-oriented act of pouring excrement or waste material on

to the world. However, in the poem, both processes are reversed, for birth is constantly associated with death (i.e. we are born to die) and excretion is presented as a physical and spiritual act of purification (i.e. purgation of the body's and the mind's waste matter). In this analysis, Barker's excremental images are studied through an approximation to the poem's main themes: sexual ambivalence and unorthodox desire, religious ambiguity and guilt, poetic creation as defecation, impaired vision as a truer form of perception, parenthood in relation to homeland, and finally the Spanish Civil War as the ultimate Cain-like struggle. The poem's complex structure of interwoven images favours the kind of thematic approach that I propose in the following pages, and which sheds light on the ways in which image and ideology are effectively brought together in *Calamiterror*, as Barker's irrational and abject images reflect the equally irrational and abject reality of the Civil War.

3.3.1. From Eating to Excreting.

The thirties' decade, a decade chronologically framed by the 1929 Crash and the outbreak of the Second World War, characterised by the rise of Fascism, mass fear of air raids and international political upheaval, is chiefly identified as *the hungry decade*.[312] It is in the midst of this decade that Surrealism emerged in Britain and Barker's Surrealist poetics seems to respond like no other British Surrealist's to an awareness of the widespread hunger that people were suffering in this pre-war situation, something that was further intensified by the hunger marches of 1932, 1934 and 1936. At the time, some of the most disturbing images of the *hungry* working classes in Britain were offered by the photographer Bill Brandt in *The English at Home* (1936), where he juxtaposed them with photographs of accommodated and well-nourished English people. In his introduction to the book, Raymond Mortimer asserted:

> I believe myself that decent housing and proper food and reasonable leisure can be found for everyone in this country without destroying the pleasant traditions and individual liberties which so many of these photographs illustrate. But while children are less well nourished than our dogs and worse housed than our pigs, these traditions and liberties are in danger of being suddenly and violently overwhelmed. (in Brandt 1936: 8)

Indeed, hunger, and fear of hunger, were conditions that favoured the rise of Fascism in Europe. In fact, Nazism emerged partly as a politically organised response to the the German people's critical undernourishment, whereas in Francoist Spain, a strong emphasis was placed

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[312] For a demystified vision of the period, see Adrian Caesar's chapter "The Hungry Decade" in *Dividing Lines: Poetry, Class and Ideology in the 1930s* (1991): 10-23.

on assuring that every (devout) Spaniard received their *daily bread*.[313] So, coincidentally or not, a sort of Surrealist poetics of food emerged in the vortex of a period of physical starvation which was Surrealism's poetic response to a socio-political situation. Thus, food became a key element in Surrealist poetics, with a vast array of images related to this semantic field, which ranged from actual references to food (several of Dalí's paintings and Picasso's 1937 prose poem *The Dream and Lie of Franco*), to the celebration of commemorative and ritualistic banquets (some of David Gascoyne's poems, and previously used by Lewis Carroll too) and, as in the case of Barker's *Calamiterror*, the description of eating processes or their stages: digestion, indigestion, regurgitation, vomiting, excreting. As it has already been suggested, in Barker's poetics, there is an indissoluble triad in which digestion, desire and poetic creation become inextricably connected, and this has ideological signficance: as David Gascoyne stated, "the child loves his own excrement until he has been *taught* that it is dirty. It is only by fully understanding the arbitrary conventions, dogmas and laws that make up our civilisation that we can hope to begin to remedy it" (Gascoyne 1935a: 78). Furthermore, probably as an unconscious response to the anxiety of hunger of the period, the Surrealist poetics of food is intimately connected to this physical and ideological hunger. Regarding this, in his essay "The Object as Revealed in Surrealist Experiment" (1932), Dalí wrote about this "*new hunger* we are suffering from. As we think it over, we find suddenly that it does not seem enough to devour things with our eyes and our anxiety to join actively and effectively in their existence brings us to want to *eat them*" (Dalí 1998: 242). As will be seen, Dalí's connection of hunger and desire found its way into Barker's *Calamiterror*.

A complex dialectics of consumption and consummation is created in the poem according to which poetry becomes a form of fulfilment of poetic, sexual and destructive appetites, since the process of ingestion necessarily involves the destruction of whatever is consumed. This process of ingestion works in two directions. On the one hand, the poet consumes himself in search of the fulfilment of his hunger (the idea of poetry as autophagy or self-eating). On the other, the poet offers himself as food to the reader, who devours him. In either case, poetry becomes a cannibalistic act, an idea which had already been explored by a series of Surrealist artists and precursors of Surrealism by the time Barker started work on *Calamiterror*. For example, Lewis Carroll's obsession with eating and food is ever-present in *Alice in Wonderland* (1865); in Rimbaud's poem "Hunger" (1873) the speaker devours himself;

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[313] Franco's words in a 1939 speech "Ni un hogar sin lumbre ni un español sin pan" ("Not one home without a fire nor one Spaniard without bread") echoed like a leitmotiv throughout the early years of the dictatorship.

in Sykes Davies's *Petron* the eerie cries that emerge from the ghastly wounds of a cattle-dealer are only answered by ravenous wolves, which are identified with the readers; Agustín Espinosa's *Crimen* (1934) begins with the image of a woman vomiting on the speaker (the word used in Spanish serves to prove the point, as "descomerse" means literally "to un-eat", the reversal of the process of eating); and in Dalí's *Autumnal Cannibalism* (1936), as in *Calamiterror*, the act of cannibalism is combined with evocations of the Spanish Civil War, incestuous desire, cainistic struggle and Oedipal themes.[314]

The reasons for the use of this motif in Surrealism are varied. One of them is related to the Surrealists' understanding of automatic writing as a visceral act through which internal material is forced out. Another reason is based on the difference between eating (seen as an instinct or a necessity) and taste (considered a bourgeois cultural construction). Taste, on account of its close connection with eating as a bodily necessity, has been historically deprecated as a minor cognitive tool: "Taste is early placed on the margins of the perceptual means by which knowledge is achieved; its indulgence must be avoided in the development of moral character; and it perceives neither objects of beauty nor works of art" (Korsmeyer 2002: 11).[315] Nevertheless, it is this connection with bodily functions and instinct that attracts Surrealists into experimenting with taste as a new form of knowledge and understanding of the external world. In Platonist philosophy, taste opposes other *more elaborate* forms of perception, such as vision, which require more complex intellectual processes and become therefore a more reliable cognitive tool, and it is significant that in Plato's Cave Analogy, sight, although deceitful at first, is the sense that reveals what Martin Heidegger calls *the essence of truth*.[316] Whereas taste is subordinated to a physical end, the aim of vision dwells on the mental, the moral and the intellectual. However, the Surrealists distrust vision precisely because, through cultural refinement, it has lost the immediacy of which the eyes of children and mad people are still capable. This is the reason why the Surrealists close their eyes (or slit them, or pluck them out) and resort to the visions of their dreams, or obliterate the pre-eminence historically bestowed on sight in favour of more unconscious forms of perception, such as taste. But in spite of this we also find their subversion of bourgeois sophisticated *tastes* (which include food, but also art), something which contributes to the collapse of the bourgeois commodity structure, where food is no longer a necessity, but a luxurious

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[314] For an analysis of the relationship between physical hunger and writing see Maud Ellmann's *The Hunger Artists: Starving, Writing and Imprisonment* (1993).

[315] For an interesting study of Platonist and Aristotelian approaches to the sense of taste see Carolyn Korsmeyer's chapter "The Hierarchy of the Senses" in her book *Making Sense of Taste: Food and Philosophy* (2002): 11-37.

[316] See Martin Heidegger's *The Essence of Truth* (1931-1932).

commodity, and overconsumption (in all senses, from big banquets to mass production of goods and food) brutally contrasts with the images of poverty and starvation of those years.[317] Thus, the Surrealist poetics of food tends to focus on the bodily processes associated with eating (from swallowing to excreting) as forms of sublimation of a physical necessity, rather than on tasting, which is a more sophisticated and physically less fulfilling activity. To illustrate this we can find a correspondence with Roland Barthes's exploration of Brillat-Savarin's theories of taste in *The Rustle of Language* (1986), where he describes taste as a form of *perversion*:

> At a period when the bourgeoisie knew no social culpability, [Brillat-Savarin] sets up a cynical opposition: on one side, *natural appetite*, which is of the order of need; and on the other *appetite for luxury*, which is of the order of desire. Everything is here, of course: the species *needs* to procreate in order to survive, the individual *needs* to eat in order to subsist; yet the satisfaction of these two needs does not suffice man: he must bring on stage, so to speak, the *luxury* of desire, erotic or gastronomic: an enigmatic, useless supplement, the desired food [. . .] is an unconditional waste or loss, a kind of ethnographic ceremony by which man celebrates his power, his freedom to consume his energy 'for nothing'. (Barthes 1989: 251)

Having been denaturalised, taste certainly became the less democratic of the senses, and it manifested itself differently according to class: the poor swallowed whereas the rich savoured. Hence, the Surrealists wanted to democratise taste by returning it to the realm of instinct and necessity.[318]

In "An Interview with George Barker" he describes the act of writing poems as an act of defecation, that is, a physiological necessity: "writing poems [. . .] seems to me to be an unpardonable occupation for a grown man, unless he's got to do it. Well, I found that I've got to do it in the same sense that I've got to defecate" (in Pondrom 1971: 397). And he linked this physiological necessity with a psychological act of liberation, which implies the expulsion, the elimination from the body, of that which cannot be digested:

> sometimes writing poems is like the act of defecation; it's getting out of one's system,
> to put it simply, things that, if they stayed in, would turn one into a sort of hyena

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[317] In 1939, members of the A.I.A. undertook the painting of billboards which dramatically denounced the conditions of starvation in Spain. One of them read "50,000 children are starving in Spain. Send them food" (in Remy 1999: 164).

[318] As in Oswald de Andrade's "Manifesto Antropófago" or "Cannibal Manifesto" (1928), which began thus: "Only Cannibalism unites us. Socially. Economically. Philosophically. The world's only law. The disguised expression of all individualisms, all collectivisms. Of all religions. Of all peace treaties" (my translation).

monster, so that one was filled up with accumulated filth, and one would explode of it in the end. In other words, it's some kind of liberation of conscience. I speak now of the poem as a piece of mechanics, a piece of psychological mechanics. (394)

Thus, for him, the cycle of destruction which begins at the onset of ingestion culminates in a productive/creative act, an idea which contributes to the understanding of Barker's poetics of consumption, where sex, poetic creation and excretion become inextricably entwined. The idea of poetry as exorcism and the psychological mechanisms that Barker alludes to are certainly a Surrealist inheritance. Also, since consumption is also self-consumption, excretion becomes self-excretion. Considering poetry a "physiological necessity" (and note that there are many physiological necessities, but the one chosen by Barker is precisely defecating) also echoes Sykes Davies's theory of poetry as part of the human biological configuration.

These statements rely on the Surrealist dialectical principle that construction must follow destruction and, therefore, in order for defecation to take place, a previous process of consumption is necessarily required, for waste cannot be created *ex nihilo*. As we have seen, Barker's scatology is intimately connected with food-based processes and so the excremental poetics of *Calamiterror* expands on the Surrealist imagery of food, taste and eating by focusing on the different stages of the process of digestion/indigestion, from feeding and being fed to excretion, regurgitation and vomiting. This imagery and Barker's excremental aesthetics in general can be placed within the unorthodox scatological Surrealism of Salvador Dalí, Reuben Mednikoff and Georges Bataille, who, with their voracious treatment of sexual desire and their faecal voyeuristic obsessions, were soon to be expelled from the movement. For example, the triple association of eye, sodomy and blood which is found in *Calamiterror* is also recurrent in Bataille's texts such as *The Solar Anus* (1927), *Story of the Eye* (1928) and *Eye* (1929). Also, Leo Mellor finds correspondences between *Calamiterror* and André Masson's works, which had been exhibited in London in 1936:

This particular exhibition included many of Masson's earlier drawings, both those of organic transformations and growth, but also those with the blooded eyes of fragmented, wounded, yet violent bodies. *Animaux se dévorant* (1929) and the drawing sequence *Massacres* (1932-33) serve as good examples. This conviction that a truth or message could be extracted from eye-wounds was also a parallel preoccupation of Barker's. [. . .] Here the eye is no longer just a natural organ and instead becomes a pathway to multiple layers of meaning, from personal pain to the struggle against fascism, while remaining tenaciously vulnerable and organic. Indeed, Masson's drawing, *L'Espagne Assassinée*, of an eye being scratched out by a claw while

weeping and bleeding, was for the 1938 book by French artists *Solidarité*, sold to raise

funds for orphans in Republican Spain. (Mellor 2007: 98)

Masson had illustrated some of Bataille's texts such as *The Solar Anus* (1927) and *Sacrifices* (1936), a fact which serves Mellor to establish the link between Bataille's ocular imagery and Barker's. Nevertheless, the similarities between both authors go further: their shared obsession with scatology crystallised in their excremental imagery, which earned them the dissident and unorthodox position which they both occupied in relation to orthodox Bretonian Surrealism. In the "Second Manifesto of Surrealism" (1930), Breton had suggested that Bataille was an "excrement philosopher" (Breton 1972: 185n), and it is in this sense that Barker could similarly be considered an *excrement poet*. In Bataille's texts, the eye is constantly associated with the sublimation of non-normative desire, cannibalistic acts (a "cannibal delicacy" he calls it in *Eye*), and processes of digestion, from eating to excreting. This creates a simultaneous effect of fascination and horror which is also present in Barker. In *The Solar Anus*, Bataille claimed that "when I scream I AM THE SUN an integral erection results" (Bataille 1985: 5). Barker's association of sexual and planetary activity (the two references to the solar system in *Calamiterror* are related to passages of sexual activity) find a correspondence in Bataille's own vision of the motions of the universe:

> The two primary motions are rotation and sexual movement, whose combination is expressed by the locomotives' wheels and pistons. These two motions are reciprocally transformed, the one into the other. Thus one notes that the earth, by turning, makes animals and men have coitus, and (because the result is as much the cause as that which provokes it) that animals and men make the earth turn by having coitus. It is the mechanical combination or transformation of these movements that the alchemists sought as the philosopher's stone. It is through the use of this magically valued combination that one can determine the present position of men in the midst of the elements. (6)

Similarly, in *Calamiterror*, associations of the eye with the sun and the objects revolving around it with the planets echo Bataille's representation of the anus: "The *solar annulus* is the intact anus of her body at eighteen years to which nothing sufficiently blinding can be compared except the sun, even though the *anus* is the *night*" (Bataille 1985: 9). In Barker's poem, the bleeding eye is gradually transformed, we might say, into Bataille's blinding sun, taking part in a staged rite of hysteria ("Objects revolve, as I proceed, / About my breast like solar system; / With the bleeding eye I bleed, / Event is staged hysteria"), which also recalls the final lines of Gascoyne's poem "The Rites of Hysteria" (1936): "A screen of hysteria blots out

the folded hemlocks / And feathery eyelids conceal the volcano's mouth" (Gascoyne 1936d: 40). Similarly, the organs of sight and taste (eye and mouth) are united in both Bataille's and Barker's Surrealist images, where they also become associated with sodomy and, therefore, with excrement. In his essay "The Metaphor of the Eye" (1982), Roland Barthes analyses Bataille's metaphor of liquidity in *Story of the Eye* and connects it with the leading image of the eye in terms that help illustrate the variations on the theme of digestion in Barker's text:

> The metaphor here is much richer than in the case of the globular: from 'damp' to 'streaming,' all the varieties of 'making wet' complement the original metaphor of the globe. Objects apparently quite remote from the eye are thus caught up in the chain of metaphor, such as the bowels of the gored horse spilling 'like a cataract' from its side. In fact (the power of metaphor being infinite) the presence of only one of the two chains makes it possible to summon up the other. Is there anything more 'dry' than the sun? Yet, in the field of metaphor traced by Bataille almost in the manner of a haruspex, the sun need only become a disc and then a globe for its light to flow like a liquid and join up, via the idea of a 'soft luminosity' or a 'urinary liquefaction of the sky,' with the eye, egg, and testicle theme. (Barthes 1982: 121-122)

Similarly, in *Calamiterror*, the eye also becomes associated with different forms of liquidity, which are always in relation to bodily excretions. Thus, a cataract of blood oozes from the eye, it burns and, like sweat, boils with foam on the arm. The tear that forms beneath the eyelid is a stalactite "pointing to sorrow wherever his eyeball veers", an image which is also connected to erotic desire ("the lark nests / In the socket of his eye, between his loins / The phoenix flames") and anal penetration ("Chrysanthemums blossom from his bowels"). Here, the chrysanthemum being carefully elaborated in his bowels is a symbol of death corrupting the body's entrails, whereas the sharpening of the icicle tear contains a clear reference to phallic erection. Thus, in the psychological mechanisms of the poem, the fulfilment of unconscious desire, poetic perception and death are all combined in the image of the pierced eye. Continuing in the same vein, the Dalinian image of the interminable tear makes the eye episode expand endlessly in time, and the Carrollian allusion is unmissable as "the extempore watercourse falling / From the blue eye of space like a continual tear" is forever reminiscent of Alice's pool of tears. Even so, the fact that Barker's Surrealist poetics in *Calamiterror* distances itself significantly from the more orthodox line of Bretonian Surrealism has contributed to a generalised misunderstanding of the poem. Although his association with Surrealism is generally acknowledged in the criticism, no critic so far has provided a reading of *Calamiterror* as, in fact, a Surrealist poem in which the psychological mechanisms of consumption and

excretion are at work. This is so, perhaps, because the Surrealism of *Calamiterror* is not instrumental but organic, and not formal, but profoundly radical.

3.3.2. Excremental Images.

Calamiterror is composed of a total of ninety three stanzas and introduced by a dedicatory sonnet. The sonnet is followed by eight "Introductory Stanzas to Book I" and a total of ten books of variable length which oscillate from five stanzas (Books III, VII and X are the shortest) to sixteen stanzas (Book II being the longest). Even numbers in general and the number eight in particular dominate the composition, for the stanzas are almost exclusively octaves, with only very few exceptions. As Leo Mellor has rightly noted, the poem's "neat framework implies a structural rigidity and simple progression that is however absent from the fluid, messily contingent, and recapitulatory nature of the work" (Mellor 2007: 81). Indeed the poem responds to Barker's defamiliarising technique, by which he presents a disturbing reality in constant metamorphosis and gradually distorts it so the reader loses all sense of a logical grasp and feels neither safe nor sure. It involves a continual deferral of a fixed and established position, as significance is extracted from the poem's elusiveness of meaning and suspension of precise referentiality. Related to this is the way in which Barker makes use of incremental repetition as the poem progresses (also a common technique in Hugh Sykes Davies's poems), and it becomes his main stylistic device. Hence, there are several elements that are constantly repeated throughout the different stanzas and, as these elements are reiterated and become motifs, they undergo slight variations, or new elements are gradually added to the whole inventory of Barker's obsessions. This produces an unsettling effect in the reader, for even if those elements soon become known and familiar (familiarity is further imposed by the recurrent, almost overwhelming, use of the determiner throughout), they are defamiliarised as new associations are constantly established among them. Thus, the "bare bloodred babe" of Book I becomes, first, "my babe in the bosom murmuring who", then "the crimson cockerel" in Book II; later, "the boy bud springing from the maternal tree" and "the bleeding cockerel" in Book III; and, finally, it is "Brilliantly glittering in the new-born eye" in Book VII. The effect that this kind of associations provokes is that of a rich web of intratextual connections, and the creation of a closed and hermetic universe in which nothing has a single meaning or significance, as every element refers continually, not only to itself (or the previous versions of itself), but to the other elements it is in contact with throughout the poem. Thus, Barker's Surrealist technique of unsettlement makes the reader distrust immediacy and apparent significance, for the poem itself constantly precludes such univocal interpretations and

questions the very nature of appearance as well as of the reality, if any, behind that appearance.

Calamiterror significantly begins with a dedicatory poem to Albert Gordon Barker, Barker's younger brother Kit. A whole series of references coalesce in this dedication. Fraser recounts that Kit was given the name Albert Gordon after his father's younger brother Albert, who had died at the age of nineteen, only days before Kit's christening (Fraser 2001: 9). Also, Kit suffered the blinding accident exactly at nineteen years of age, a fact which could not have been missed by Barker. Nevertheless, the poem was written, as we said, in 1936 (not in 1935, when the accident happened), motivated by the miscarriage of Barker's second child, which is constantly associated with Kit's blindness in Calamiterror, where indeed the association of death, blindness and birth is recurrent. Calamiterror was published in book form in April 1937. The deliberate connection established by Barker between the dedicatory poem and the rest of the book is fundamental towards an appreciation of Barker's peculiar poetic and political stance. Indeed, the Spanish Civil War, the other central theme in the poem, is only explicitly referred to at a rather advanced stage of the whole composition, and it is reasonable to suggest that the implicit references that appear at earlier stages were included once the Spanish conflict had found its way into Barker's poetic imagination. In fact, the poem becomes increasingly urgent as it approaches its end, and the "X Stanzas" published in Contemporary Poetry and Prose after the outbreak of the Spanish War show no explicit political concern: certainly, these are stanzas written before the war broke out. Thus, the Spanish Civil War cannot be considered a leading motif in the poem, but rather an opportune element which was later added to the images of death, birth and blinding that were already governing images in the poem. What made this possible was Barker's highly subjectivised use of two myths: the myth of the origins of Ireland (in which birth and death are reunited) and the mythical figure of Cain (to which the blinding accident is related). In this way, his psychological conflicts and seemingly personal obsessions (birth, sin, sex, pain and death), become universal concerns as they are articulated in terms of the human self-gratifying and self-mutilating forces (Eros and Thanatos), and the way in which these are at work from the moment of birth, a moment in which, according to Freud in Beyond the Pleasure Principle (1920), the individual is thrown into both life and death at once. However, Barker's universalising images become increasingly specific as he gradually approaches the theme of war and, thus, the poem goes from the more general and abstract exploration of the contradictory forces in the human unconscious to its particular historical materialisation in the dismembered body of Spain.

The "Dedication", worth reproducing in full here, places the reader almost instantly in a moment of intense mourning and of horror, the moment at which the image of the blinded eye and the miscarried baby coalesce; note also that the poem contains clear echoes of Eliot:

The April horror grows over my September.

I see my hand glittering with blood and tears

Hanging at the bend of my arm like a leech member,

Fatal, inspired to violence, sowing scars;

Elevating itself in the anaconda stance

Evolving devastation. I see my hand

Passing over the palace of his face,

Leaves it pale, bloody gap, blinded, blanched;

Leaving a wake of pain and leaving a loss

Not to be rehabilitated by

The perfect prize, the penny, or the cause,

The blue tulip, the forget-me-not, or the sky.

Therefore I render to my hell hand's Abel

The no less agonized blood my hand has bled. (Barker 1937b: 7)

The poem's forceful introspective movement is further reinforced by the recurrent use of the first person possessive ("my" is repeated six times throughout the dedication) as a form of anticipation of the personal and individual descent into the poet's psychological turmoil and obsessions that the reader is about to witness. Surrealist elements, such as the anatomisation of the body and dream imagery, appear this early in the composition as a sign of the poet's internal process of psychological commotion. The implications of this are that reality is so painful that its very materiality is questioned. Thus the hand, which becomes inextricably linked to the possessive pronoun ("my hand" in lines 2, 6 and 14; "my arm" in line 3) is endlessly reduplicated, shed with blood, bled by a leech, sown with scars and transformed into a violent anaconda. Metonymically the hand becomes simultaneously the eye and the womb. The red colour of the blood combines with the greenish-brownish shades of the anaconda and the leech into a revolting image of devastating death: a disturbing allusion with parasitical and anthropophagic sexual nuances. In a process of fragmentation and dehumanisation, the face (Kit's face, the unborn child's face) is reduced to the speaker's hollow bleeding hand, the empty eye socket or the death-filled womb. Apart from this, a deliberate rejection of the standards of bourgeois life is also present at this early stage (a feature which also brings Barker's poem closer to Roughton's and Penrose's) as bourgeois commodities (social

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accomplishment, material possession and petty visions of external beauty) cannot restore the damage or soothe the agony. Not even higher motives, such as moral or political convictions ("the cause"), can get the poet out of his hell.[319]

Fraser recounts that when Barker proposed the title "Calamiterror", T.S. Eliot applauded the choice, "explaining that in Latin 'calamus' meant a reed" (Fraser 2001: 92). Although Barker's etymology of the title clearly rests on the Latin *calamitas, –atis* (meaning "calamity", "misfortune", "catastrophe"), there is an interesting implicit reference in Eliot's false etymology which should not be obviated in the context of the work. This reference places *Calamiterror* in relation to Walt Whitman's "Calamus Poems" (from *Leaves of Grass*, first published in 1855), which Eliot even echoes in his poem "Ode on Independence Day, July 4th 1918".[320] It could not have escaped Eliot's notice that the continuous references to homosexuality and unorthodox visions of gender identity in his work were indeed related to Whitman's images of homoerotic comradeship in his "Calamus poems". Because of this, the title of Barker's poem and its multiple sexual references were later on mocked in Dylan Thomas and John Davenport's novel *The Death of the King's Canary* (finished in 1940, published in 1976), where a satirical allusion to Barker's *Calamiterror*, although intended to be degrading, manages to grasp Barker's eroticised images of non-normative sexuality and homoerotic desire as well as the increasingly suffocating atmosphere that the reiterative succession of leitmotifs and images creates in the poem: *Claustrophosexannal* is the mock title used by Thomas and Davenport for a volume of poetry by a character called Albert Ponting in their novel (Thomas and Davenport 1978: 2-4).[321]

A bisexual himself, Barker exhibits a peculiar attitude towards non-normative queer sexuality in *Calamiterror*. For example, he takes advantage of the plasticity of the term "gay" in ambiguous allusions to homosexuality in the "Introductory Stanzas", which present a dream-like bourgeois landscape of appearances and shades through which the poet wanders.[322] Thus, when the poet refers to "The gay paraders of the esplanade" or "The gay shadows of the shade", it is easy to integrate the term within the festive and shallow atmosphere that is

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[319] According to Fraser, the reference to the blue tulip refers to Barker's brother's Surrealistic delirium as he was undergoing surgery for the removal of the eyeball, when he saw the image of "an immense blue tulip swaying backwards and forwards gently, until severed at the stem" (Fraser 2001: 77).

[320] For further analysis of Eliot's poetry in relation to Whitman, see Sidney Musgrove's *T. S. Eliot and Walt Whitman* (1952) and James Edwin Miller's *T. S. Eliot's: the Making of an American Poet, 1888-1922* (2005).

[321] Ponting's title also includes a mocking reference to George Barker's *Alanna Autumnal* (1933).

[322] Although the term's implications of dissoluteness date as far back as the 1630s, the semantic shift to homosexual referentiality in Britain is first documented in the 19th century in relation to the London Cleveland Street Scandal. For further reference see Hugh Rawson's *Wicked Words* (1989).

recreated in the first stanza, with its paraders, harlequins, acrobats and tourists. However, the brothels of "shimmering mannequins" of the second stanza accentuate the dissolute tenor of the scene, previously masked by seemingly innocuous jesters and performers, and everything acquires a tinge of sensuality. Here, the mannequins impersonate a Surrealist sexual obsession as the plastic sublimation of repressed unorthodox sexuality. Something similar can be observed in works ranging from Giorgio de Chirico's *Disquieting Muses* (1917) to Max Ernst's manipulated headless female figure in *La puberté proche ou Les pléiades* (1921), in Hans Bellmer's *Poupée* (1934) or Man Ray's several photographs of mannequins, where the representation of the inanimate female body acquires a multifaceted external appearance (dismembered, distorted, duplicated, reduced to inexistence or elevated to living corporeity) which actualises a psychoanalytical double: in this case, sexual fascination and castration anxiety. In this part of Barker's poem, the subjects of "Love's display" ("Love" ironically written with a capital letter, and "display" suggesting prostitution) become objects of repudiation as he rejects the sublimation of conventional desire and yields instead to complacent homoerotic observation: "The shimmering mannequins of Love's display / Meandering through, glamorous and nude, / Loose at the hip; those whom they displease, / The glancers at the gay boy's beauty" (Barker 1937b: 9). Nevertheless, in spite of the obvious show of interest, same-sex intercourse proves equally unsatisfying as narcissistic desire always implies self-betrayal: "The mirror-gazer self-betrayed; / Loving shadows in the shade" (9).

The sensual ambience of this passage is obvious here and is further emphasised by a mythological reference to Hylas: "The mask of self though more than marvellous, / Glancing through ovals lovelier than Hylas' eyes, / Speaking with the tongues of the girls on the isles, / Languishing lips, coloured and loose / Like fruit, suspended and melodious" (11). These lines reinforce the idea of libidinal desire of the first stanzas through the evocation of Hylas's orgiastic encounter with the nymphs. Again, sensual and sexual nuances are evoked by the decadent images of a shared tongue, languishing lips, suspended fruit and the idle atmosphere. Here, Barker's constant lingering on the boundaries of conventional sexuality is made patent in the ambiguity of his lexical choices: Hylas does not speak the girls' tongues, but *with* their tongues; their lips are coloured (mouth) and loose (sexual organ); the fruit is melodious (voice) and suspended (breasts); the vacancy of their countenance does not only imply idleness but also an emptiness that is to be filled. In this way, the speaker remains in a cardboard world of shadows where the visual, the aural and the erotic become confused in the convulsion of desire. However, it is through these images, Barker establishes the connection between eating, seeing, speaking and copulating. The mouth is an instrument of

communication, but also the medium through which food is ingested and a typically erogenous zone.[323] Thus, the tongue is the organ that fulfils communicative, culinary and sexual appetites, as in Lee Miller's banquets of food in sexually-appealing shapes or Dalí's *Lobster Telephone* (1936), where desire, food and speech are amalgamated.

The frivolity of this world presented in the poem is highlighted by its insistent concentration on shade and shadow, which creates a misty atmosphere in which *cardboard* beings remain aloof from the impending catastrophe. The ambience of sophistication and licentiousness, of bourgeois frivolous entertainment, shows a world of mundane appearances which nevertheless acquires the aura of the magical-mythical: diamond harlequins and acrobats (reminiscent of Picasso's paintings), tourists "gloriously lost" in ancient ruins, the sound of "continental operas" and theatre plays in which the marvellous and the grotesque meet in a chiastic expression: "beautiful beasts and the beast beauty". Another feature of these stanzas is the insistence on sight and seeing which is highlighted by the co-occurrence of several words that describe processes of voyeurism: for example, the glancers, the mirror-gazer, a stare and the leer (this last reinforcing the sexual nuances of these first stanzas). Also, the voyeurism is counterpointed by different forms of exhibitionism (the paraders, the performers, mannequins in display, exhibits, views), but also hindered by "the mask of self", "The empty stare that dare not see", the shadow, the shade and the tomb. As has been suggested, in all of this there are correspondences with other Surrealists. In particular, the geography of this world and the references to the cliff and the melting face clearly evoke the Catalonian landscape of Dalí's Portlligat as depicted in *The Persistence of Memory* (1931). The observer's dreamlike visions make the liquid landscape gradually metamorphose into interlocking images of National Trust gardens with magnificent waterfalls leading scarf-like to London's central avenues. The growing sense of claustrophobic congestion of the bourgeois landscape (reinforced by the choking co-occurrence of alliterative plosive velars: "grinning cat", "cataracts that grace", "gardens like water-scarves", "exhibits", "perspectives of Kensington") contrasts with the solitary coast of Dalí's paintings (softly evoked in a succession of fricative –lateral and labiodental- sounds: "The falling cliff that like a melting face"), which is forcefully abandoned as it collapses leaving a stare and the lingering derisive grin of Carroll's Chesire Cat. All these ominous elements lead up to the fourth stanza, in which the categorical expression of fear ("The fourth dimension of this space is fear") introduces a new psychological, but also ideological, dimension to the previous apparently trivial world of bourgeois appearances. Now, the ritualistic repetition of phrases acquires a sort of black-magic

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[323] See Freud's essay "The Sexual Aberrations" in *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905).

power as shade gradually penetrates all aspects of existence and motionlessness turns into inertness. It is then that we find a final reference in the stanza to a tomb which, like earlier allusions, is also inconclusive: "Through apertures in his own tomb / The one who won against this shade / Contemplates the successors for whom / Out of his hand the world was made" (11). The apertures in it, the victory over shade and the world made anew are all, unexpectedly, positive symbols. However, they are strongly counteracted by the fact that he never leaves the grave, which becomes part of his body: the apertures become his eyes, and his arms' tendrils firmly attach themselves to the sepulchre for support. Finally, the incantatory repetition of the refrain reveals that the man is also a shadow. At this early stage in the poem, Barker's deepest obsessions and doubts acquire primary relevance. This is indicative of the tormented state in which the poet finds himself, unable to reconcile the unconscious deliberateness of his blinding action, the loss of his unborn son and his own personal obsessions and phobias in a single existence which becomes successively fragmented.

One of these obsessions, sex, acquires an even darker tinge as it combines with religion at several points in the poem. In the "Introductory Stanzas", a series of images of religion, sex and fear agglutinate in the disturbing description of a rite of passage into maturity: "Between the church-arch, the descending hand / Frightful like five bananas, on the shoulder; / The three figures that for ever stand / Beside, before, behind; as we grow older" (Barker 1937b: 10). The alliterative repetition of the plosive and the approximant sounds combined in long polysyllabic words almost forces a stammer: "The predecessor's omnipresent leer". The references to the leer, the church-arch, the descending hand with its banana-shaped fingers (which also appear as a claw in Book V) and the three figures standing "beside, before, behind" are not devoid of sexual content and the use of the adjective "frightful" has multiple simultaneous implications, for it does not only refer to the hand's trembling fingers (an older priest's fingers), but also, metonymically, to the speaker's fear and even repulsion at the descending hand.[324] Similarly, the reference to the three figures sacrilegiously brings together the traditional image of the Holy Family with sodomising visions of priests and altar boys. The following lines from *The True Confession of George Barker* (1950) seem enlightening at this point, as they point to Barker's troubled relationship with religion as well as to the dedication of "X Stanzas" to Reverend Vincent McCarthy:

There was a priest, a priest, a priest,

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[324] But there are also echoes of John Donne's elegy "To his Mistress Going to Bed" (composed in the 1950s but not published until 1669): "License my roving hands, and let them go / Behind, before, above, between, below" (Donne 2000: 163).

A Reverend of the Oratory

Who taught me history. At least

He taught me the best part of his story.

Fat Father William, have you ceased

To lead boys up the narrow path

Through the doors of the Turkish Bath?

I hope you're warm in Purgatory. (Barker 1965: 16)

Strong irreligious nuances are also finely woven into *Calamiterror*, not only as part of the irreverent position of Surrealism towards religion as a repressive bourgeois institution, but also as part of Barker's reaction against his traditional Catholic upbringing. Barker's position towards religion and the Catholic Church is peculiar for, although he managed to grow out of his family's Catholic heritage, complete rejection of this spiritual legacy was never achieved. He struggles in the midst of his frightful personal memories and the impossibility of his doing away with various related feelings of moral pain and spiritual guilt.

At the beginning of Book VI, the magic and the prophetic element appears; here, the poet becomes the prophet of the *calamiterror* through a series of omens conjured by natural elements (the September air, the moon). Moreover, esoteric and the impious become entangled in Barker's deliberate juxtaposition of explicitly religious terms that lead directly to the occult, creating the contradictory effect of a highly tormented/restrained/guilty mind counteracted by the magic release of Surrealist inspiration. Thus, religious terms such as "administering", "executing" and "Advent" are counteracted by "mystery", a "sleight of hand" and an "extraordinary event". The juxtaposition of these terms becomes even more striking as the lines' internal rhymes and alliterative echoes are observed: "The early September evening administering a mystery, / The moon executing its wavering sleight of hand, I sense the / Advent of the extraordinary event" (Barker 1937b: 35). After that, the descending of the mountain upon the poet as a kind of divine revelation recalls the biblical episode of Pentecost in which the apostles are visited by the Holy Spirit. Then, the final lines in this first stanza reinforce the magic element, now in conjunction with the socio-political reference to the mass: "the mountain descending upon me / The moment of terror flashes like dead powder / Revealing the features of the mass as mine". Thus, the "dead powder" reveals, as in a psychic session in which the coffee grounds are interpreted, the communal body in which the speaker and the mass are reunited. Nevertheless, the mountain which was previously the symbol of the divine revelation now collapses on the speaker, burying him in his own shadow, which is again a sign of Barker constant eluding direct and univocal signification in his poetry at a point

where any possibility of a future has already disappeared, "undermined by present, / Falling appallingly backward" (35). At this point, his concept of time is regressive, as future eternally reverts to a stale present in which the painful shrieks of the mass become his own: "I catch / The agonized glint of years in a fall of / Rubble, the time clatters down with branches / I hear a broken life scream and sob like me" (35).

In Book VII, religious imagery is combined with sexual imagery in the figure of the nascent baby. A process of visual regeneration seems to take place as the image of the baby is now reduced to a "new-born eye", which contrasts with the images of impaired vision and blindness that pervade the poem. This is reinforced by the divine visitation of the "flame of grace", an allusion to the Pentecost Biblical episode. Nevertheless, the religious references remain ambiguous, and the baby is also the victim of original sin: "What when born upward breaking from heaven downward. / Brilliantly glittering in the new-born eye, firing / The flame of grace, what when descending on the babe / Terrible in the toil of original sin, shines, showers, / Cleanses, charges, redeems the demeaned divine" (41). The very act of being born is seen as a painful and terrible toil, not only for the mother (as god's message in the Book of Genesis warns) but for the baby as well. Painful birth becomes the punishment for the parents' original sin which, in Barker's mythical imagination, is intimately related to the sexual act.

Sexual desire is also associated with death in Book I, where the hooded vulture and the walking skeleton unite in a fatal necrophilic act in a stanza that is utterly dominated by death. The powerful sexuality of the female vulture, which "seizes the skeleton of love", is indicative of Barker's stigmatisation of female sexuality which he sees as castrating. This queer intercourse between a clearly female vulture and a sexless "skeleton of love" takes place on a barren lunar landscape which is not only reminiscent of Eliot's *The Waste Land*, but also of de Chirico's 1917 geometric depiction of the encounter between Hector and Andromache on a similar sterile background, and especially of Dalí's renderings of Jean-François Millet's *Angelus* (1857-1859) in *Atavism at Twilight* (1933-1934) and *Archaeological Reminiscence of Millet's Angelus* (1935), a motif which is associated with typically Dalinian iconography as early as 1929 in the final scene of *Un Chien Andalou*. In fact, Dalí's paranoiac-critical study of Millet's *Angelus*, which offers a deeply disturbing interpretation of the painting, provides an insight into its poetic equivalent in Barker's lines.[325] Dalí's image of the castrating female as a man-eating and child-devouring mechanism and his paranoiac projection of infantile death onto Millet's canvas are also present in Barker's lines, where the death of the child, which for Dalí is

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[325] See Salvador Dalí's *The Tragic Myth of Millet's Angelus. Paranoiac-Critical Interpretation* (written in the 1930s and first published in French in 1963).

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merely an intuition, becomes a terrible and tangible reality. Also, the necrophilic element acquires relevance in Barker's convulsive description of death's fatal act of self-gratification, where the alliteration of velar plosives creates a mechanical and choking effect: "the rocking of their interlock / Confuses categories, convulses shape, rocks the rocks" (Barker 1937b: 14). Then, the offspring of death's narcissistic act of onanism is further death, disintegration and confusion, and this contributes to understanding the cataclysmic effect that desire and death (Eros and Thanatos) have in Barker's imagination, where they become equally destructive and alienating forces. In the following lines, paroxysmal and convulsive visions of sexual intercourse are infused with death, and the references to erection and penetration become clear: "Or from whose appalling paroxysm of love / The lightening shoots impregnant with death" (15).[326] Although Barker's reference to the "geometry of love" carries positive connotations of symmetry and beauty, its association with the "appalling paroxysm of love" distorts the image of love's geometrical perfection. Thus, the abstract and perfected idea of love is corrupted by its sexual materialisation, the result of which is the gestation of death, a stillbirth. Although the sexual experience can only be redeemed in the child's birth, redemption and catharsis are never achieved as the moment of birth is constantly truncated in the poem.

Another aspect of Barker's sexual imagery has unexpected connotations. The erect phallicism of his images and the emphasis placed on active penetration and rape are central to the ideological stance that the poem intends to convey, for they encode a political message. As opposed to Bataille's "round phallicism" (Barthes 1982: 122), which, according to Barthes, is "a case of signification without a thing signified" (23), Barker's phallic images are heavy with ideological signification. In Book II, a visual simile is established between the penis and the gasmask, both hanging "terrible, green and fatal" (Barker 1937b: 19).[327] War is thus described in terms of sexual rape, an idea which is further developed in the twelfth stanza of Book II: "The penis shooting metal death / Explodes the womb of the life room: / The penis shooting mental life / Wastes its shells against the tomb" (21). The fact that sexual intercourse tends to be described in the poem in terms of a violent act of domination is also indicative of Barker's troubled conception of heterosexuality. Notions of oppression, subjugation and anthropophagy emerge as capitalism, imperialism and normative sexuality become the

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[326] In "X Stanzas" the word "orgasm" is less effective than Barker's final lexical choice "paroxysm".

[327] During the thirties, the gasmask had become the symbol of a new type of warfare. Pamphlets warning of the danger of gas attacks were circulating at the time, which is indicative of the social fear of mass death at the fatal prospect of a second international conflict. One of these pamphlets, *Gas Attacks*, is advertised in the August 1936 issue of *Left Review*.

symbols of a decaying society that progressively advances towards a Second World War. Nevertheless, even the reference to the gasmask is ambivalent, for it is also associated with the passivity and hollowness of the womb: "The gasmask womb hanging at his thigh / Transforms the phoenix ashes into tears, / The tear leaps to the ground as child" (19). The image of the gasmask-womb remains ambiguous, for it is not made clear whether this fusion of male and female elements is achieved through sexual intercourse, or whether this is a case of sexual hybridism, as the previous images of gender blurring and the parturient male seem to suggest: "The green dream hung in the male tree is womb" (19). Regarding this ambiguity, in "An Interview with George Barker", the poet explained his understanding of duality as inherent in the individual, an idea which appears recurrently throughout the poem: "The inevitability for me of the schizoid feeling is so great that it's not unnatural or perverse at all, but perfectly natural. I can't visualize anyone, in other words, not having a sense of his own duality" (in Pondrom 1971: 376).

In Book VIII, the notion of physical sexuality is contested by Barker in the encounters of the speaker with a ghost, a woman and a boy. The brief description of these encounters has strong sexual nuances, with references to bowels (the ghost), a red bosom (the woman) and guts (the boy):

> The ghost I dog through Twickenham turns round,
>
> I see the bridge involved with its bowels;
>
> The Richmond lady gathering Spring flowers
>
> Reveals the ache of Time like rhododendron
>
> Red in her bosom; the boy with the bright hair
>
> Shows me his guts with the tame mice there.
>
> And I in turn bare the nerve of soul,
>
> They leap in and sleep on the bright curve. (Barker 1937: 44)

From these encounters, a hermaphroditic entity emerges containing both female and male elements. The phrase "heavy with" ("heavy with ghost, the Richmond lady, boy") implies pregnancy, with which Barker is also subverting the natural laws of reproduction. The reference to the finger and the tree point to the eminently masculine, whereas the flower and the wonder wound contain the notion of the feminine. The speaker, now turned into a sort of universal androgynous, is described as a cosmic being around whom the universe revolves ("Objects revolve, as I proceed, / About my breast like solar system"), which involves imagery that connects with the anality of Bataille's poetics through the reference to the bleeding eye, in which a series of simultaneous associations coalesce: these go from Barker's Bataillean

obsession with the eye motif (expressed now through a homophonous pair and a chiastic structure) to the biographical episode of Barker's brother's accident (constantly revisited and re-elaborated in the poem). At this point, this developing imagery is also related to the act of sodomy and even to menstruation, as it still refers to the universal hermaphrodite:

> Henceforth wandering with my womb
>
> Heavy with ghost, the Richmond lady, boy,
>
> I hang at finger the tree like toy,
>
> The flower wear like a wonder wound.
>
> Objects revolve, as I proceed,
>
> About my breast like solar system;
>
> With the bleeding eye I bleed,
>
> Event is staged hysteria. (44)

After reading this, the "eye dividing" which appears in Book I and VIII does not only recall the initial scene in Dalí and Buñuel's *Un Chien Andalou* (1929), but also points to the inherent duality of the self (through the latent homophony of "eye" and "I"), which is a recurrent element in Barker's poem. Thus, because sight is obliterated as a reliable cognitive tool, optical splitting allows for a deeper apprehension of reality.

It has been argued above that excremental, artistic and sexual activities are, in spite of their destructive potential, conceived in Barker's poetics as forms of production and creation. In Book IV, even rape is seen as a constructive force as the speaker commands "My martin swallow enter the November, / The sorrow season of my year. / Violate the numb atmosphere / With aerial ballets of ecstasy" (27). The arrival of the martin swallow would signal the end of autumn, "the sorrow season", which brings memories of the "April horror" of the dedication. Thus, the speaker makes use of intense imagery to indicate his desire to put an end to his pain, but it is only through violent acts (the violation and the ecstatic ballets) that this may happen. This is reinforced by the highly visual terms of Barker's paroxysmal vision of creation: "electrify", "aerial" and "ecstasy". The act of violation and destruction is also reminiscent of Breton's definition of the ultimate Surrealist act in the "Second Manifesto of Surrealism" (1930), which consists of shooting blindly into the crowd (Breton 1972: 125). In Barker's text, the destructive element acquires a significant role, for creation can only be preceded by a terrible act of masochistic self-annihilation or by the sadistic infliction of pain. So, the potentiality of Breton's murderous act (which is effective insofar as it remains a virtuality) is realised in Barker's poem, which emerges as the consequence of a real act of terrible violence (the poking out of his brother's eye, the miscarriage and the Spanish War). In this sense,

Barker's poetics is not only scatological but also violent per se, as the reader feels constantly menaced by its destructive power. Related to this, in his essay "Poetry and reality" (1937), Barker explored the theme of imagination and poetry as gendered faculties and opposed the feminine nature of the intellect to the masculine nature of imagination:

> The intellect reverts to feminine, receiving the impregnation of the imagination, which it gestates and feeds and eventually delivers into words. The gender of imagination is masculine. The act of writing the poem corresponds to the act of generation; the materials of poetry are feminine; the element of poetry is masculine. (Barker 1970: 90)

Thus, the act of penetration/violation on the part of the (masculine) imagination is necessary in the process of poetic creation, where feeding and eating become forms of sexual and artistic consumption. In Book IV, the speaker commands again to be consumed, violated and immolated in lines which show the dynamics of construction-destruction in sex, eating and writing: "My masculine salamander consume / The feminine flamingo of desire", "Violate me with your violence!" and "Immolate me upon my own desire, / Consume me in the fire of your fact" (Barker 1937b: 28,29).

Other ambivalent images appear throughout the poem. In Book VII, the maternal figure is identified with the white swan.[328] Although the symbolism of the white swan in literature is complex, there are two basic associations which are relevant in the context of Barker's poetics.[329] On the one hand, Kinghorn traces the origins of the song of the dying swan back to Aesop's fables; there, it is a myth which is ever-present in the English literary tradition, from Chaucer to Coleridge and Tennyson (Kinghorn 1994: 509), and it is a presage of death. However, in Barker, the swan's piercing note, traversing time and splitting the womb, is a symbol of male sexuality as much as a symbol of death. In Gaston Bachelard's psychoanalytic study of water as a poetic element, *Water and Dreams* (1942), the swan is interpreted as a symbol of hermaphroditism (Bachelard 1983: 36), bearing both male and female attributes, where the sensuality of the feminine merges with the violent action of the masculine, a reading which complements Barker's use of the swan as both an eroticised object of desire and a violent devouring parent. This vision of the hermaphroditic parent is reiterated at several points throughout the poem, where gender is never a stable, polarised category, but rather a fluid and protean reality, as in Gordon Onslow-Ford's painting *The Determination of Gender*

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[328] An idea which appears again in Books IX and X, where the swan also becomes a symbol of the motherland.

[329] In the theoretical notes on the Surrealist image which open the present study, I have referred to the swan as a quintessential symbol in the poetry of Baudelaire and Mallarmé (pages 45-46). See also A.M. Kinghorn's "The Swan in Legend and Literature" (1994).

(1939). It is a return to the primal intra-uterine unity of the sexes. Thus, in Book VII, the green dream (which is simultaneously the apple-womb, but also a symbol of desire and death) hangs from the male tree. Their progeny feeds from the swan, which nurtures it, but whose piercing note simultaneously rapes the womb:

> The green dream hung in the male tree bled when I burst
>
> And burning boy out of the apple I fell.
>
> The womb like apple hangs on the starry tree
>
> Which willow is along the Time-Thames banks.
>
> The bursting apple frees the feathered babe
>
> Who flies and falls at the world's swan breast.
>
> My mother swan of Windsor white and gold,
>
> Was it your swan note split the autumn womb? (Barker 1937b: 42)

Ambivalent images crowd this stanza, in which the speaker is both the baby and the parent, the parent is both the male tree and the swan, and the swan is finally identified with the monarchy, which both nurtures the baby and annihilates the womb. This last image also bears ideological significance in the context of Britain's policy of Non-Intervention in Spain during the Civil War, as it implies the involvement of the powers in the disastrous events that are taking place.

As it has been already anticipated, ocular imagery and images of pierced vision are recurrent in Barker's poem and, although there are implicit references to the empty eye socket in the "Dedication" ("Leaving a wake of pain and leaving a loss") and in the "Introductory Stanzas" ("The apertures become his eyes"), it is in Book I where the image of the eye takes on an even greater significance that goes beyond these. As in Max Ernst's *Histoire Naturelle* (1926), the eye is conceived as an organic entity that is in connection with elements of the natural world. In Barker's poem, the eye-shaped leaf and the leaf-shaped eye become eternal reflections of each other, while simultaneously the leaf becomes a bird carrying the eyeball, metamorphoses into a rising tongue, and finally envelops the bone as in a burial ritual (in "X Stanzas" the reference to the blinding episode becomes even more concrete, for it is the eyeball, and not the bone, that is buried and accompanied by a cortege of blind doves). The dream-like imagery of these lines provides the Surrealist landscape in which Barker's nightmarish visions take place. He is at this point the dreamer and, as in dreams and unconscious memories, the objects are reinterpreted, reorganised and transformed in his mind. Placing it all in a more ample context, the eye-leaf conceit, together with the references to the skeleton, the process of decomposition of matter and the natural, although fragmented,

landscape all belong to the Gothic tradition of Sykes Davies's Surrealist writing. Moreover, Barker's synthetic style also recalls Sykes Davies's as each stanza, almost each line, becomes a whole, a closed and self-sustained universe with no fissures and no openings to the external world. This is achieved through the constant repetition of the same words and phrases which, as we said, creates this idea of self-contained autonomy: "The eye-shaped leaf, the topmost of the tree, / Examines heaven, the leaf-shaped eye examines / The eye-shaped leaf, and each observes in each / Heaven and heaven" (13); or in "Where are the abandoned abandoned or the buried buried / As the born are born here and the consigned consigned?" (14). This makes it clear that the poem becomes increasingly self-conscious, as it goes on about itself in an isolating process of self-reference. Thus, the reader becomes immersed in Barker's nightmarish universe which eternally refers back to itself, hindering any interpretation that takes us beyond the text.

Related to this preoccupation with vision, in Book II, imagery of blindness pervades the thirteenth stanza, where the fall of man is symbolised by the lark and the whippoorwill falling "with eyes blinded and with feathers seared" (note the reference to Icarus), and by the man falling into the sea, hindering any possibility of escaping the tragedy (of blindness, of death). The Surrealistic description of the frenzied man "grazing / His frightful eyeballs on mountains" clearly bears strong echoes of Sykes Davies's image of the hand being wiped "in the sharp grass till it bleeds" after being tempted in "In the Stump of the Old Tree" (Sykes Davies 1936b: 129). As in Sykes Davies's poem, temptation and punishment, in which guilt originate, are central to Barker's re-enactment of the blinding accident. The grazing of the eyes leads to multiple interpretations: war as a mechanism of distortion of reality, the need to scratch one's eyes out after the vision of horror, or the deliberate destruction of the organs of sight so that a deeper form of apprehension of reality is achieved. In fact, the latter corresponds to one of the interpretations of the slitting of the eye in *Un Chien Andalou*, where the suppression of conventional vision, and the shock that it therefore produces in the individual consciousness, allows for a truer form of perception that is not mediated by the senses.

Apart from this, the image of the pierced eye is also associated with homoerotic desire in Book IV, suggesting that the blinding accident was also a form of rape. Here, the sting of April is softened through a flower simile ("Sting like a crocus finger at the eye") and the eroticism of the stanza is furthered by Barker's lexical choice (note the homoerotic and sadistic echoes of words such as "waterpipe" and "tinsel spangle"): "This is the mad March boy of the year, / Who ties the primrose on the waterpipe / Suspends the tinsel spangle, runs around / Exhibiting himself in store windows" (Barker 1937b: 26). This last line is probably drawn from

Gascoyne's highly sexualised images in "And the Seventh Dream is the Dream of Isis" (1933): "She was standing at the window clothed only in a ribbon / [. . .] / little girls stick photographs of genitals to the windows of their homes" (Gascoyne 1933a: 11). This connection between sight and desire is further explored through the explicit reference to the 1936 London Surrealist Exhibition in Book VI, as the speaker metamorphoses into the Surrealist phantom "with a mass of roses face" (Barker 1937b: 37).[330] This image does not only contribute to Barker's further development of the transgender motif in the poem, and the motif of hindered vision, but also conveys an image of the poet as a phantom-like tantalising figure (as no doubt Sheila Legge was in her silk dress and mask). This figure is a snare, like the spider who attracts the bright boys to its web, hungry like the menacing hawk, and also ubiquitous and omnipotent like the sun: "I hung like hawk / Hungry over the running world, I hung / Like sun that pulls the bright boys, like the spider" (37).

Optical imagery also becomes associated with references to William Blake in Book VI, where he is praised as the figure of the true genius. Indeed, Blake was indeed considered one of the predecessors of Surrealism in Britain, as Herbert Read acknowledged in his "Introduction" to *Surrealism* (1936). Also, in his contribution to Read's *Surrealism*, Hugh Sykes Davies set Blake as the foremost example of the *perverse* tradition to which Davies's (and Barker's) writings belong. Regarding this, in *Surrealism: the Road to the Absolute* (1986), Anna Balakian has established the terms in which the idea of Blake as a predecessor of Surrealism ought to be understood:

> the surrealists have seen Blake as a visionary in Rimbaud's sense of the term and have extolled him for rejecting exterior reality as a subject of artistic expression and for transforming the physical world in his effort to alter its dimensions. Blake's eye, they thought, absorbed but did not determine: as an intermediary instrument, a recorder of physical sensation, it left the matter of interpreting to the imaginative faculty. By refusing to make of nature the object of aesthetic creation, Blake had removed painting and verbal imagery from the controlling factors of phenomenal reality.[331] (Balakian 1986: 39)

Thus, we see that Barker's poetry drew largely on Blake's ideas about poetic creation as the imaginative interpretation of data recorded by the senses and, in "Poetry and Reality" (1937),

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[330] On the occasion of the opening of the 1936 London Surrealist Exhibition, Sheila Legge impersonated the Surrealist Phantom dressed in a white satin dress with her face completely covered by a mask of roses.

[331] For a deeper understanding of the influence of Blake in French Surrealism see Anna Balakian's "The Literary Fortune of William Blake in France" in *Modern Language Quarterly* (September 1956): 261-272.

Barker defends a similar process: "The exploitation, by the imagination, or process of poetry, of the sensual world of events and persons, in such a manner that an intuitive rather than a rational evaluation of them is achieved –I take this to be the highest and the best ability of the poet; and perhaps, indeed, the only truly poetic ability of which he is capable" (Barker 1970: 87). In this way, poetry becomes a form of knowledge, a system of intuitive/imaginative cognition and interpretation of reality. This makes Blake's rejection of exterior reality as a source for poetic expression and his distortion of the natural world the only means to transfer it on to the work of art and all this finds its correspondences in Barker's poetics of exaggeration and distortion: as he says, "the process of poetry involves the imaginative exploitation of Newtonian reality" (83).

In *Calamiterror*, all the elements that have so far been associated in the poem with poetic creation appear now in relation to Blake: the worlds in his abdomen, the birds in his bosom, the branches sprouting from his hand. Hence, the highly visual image of Blake's eyes as cinema screens projecting his soul bears the imprint of the modern in the poem, while at the same time it draws on Barker's Surrealist fixation with sight and vision. There is also a reference to Swedenborg, who was a great influence to the predecessors of Surrealism, Blake and Baudelaire, that brings forth the importance of dreams in Barker's poem. Significantly, Swedenborg's interest in the process of dreams anticipates Freudian psychoanalysis: in fact, his work *Heaven and Hell* (1758) is reviewed and criticised by Blake in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1790), which, in its reconciliation of opposites, also anticipates Jungian theory. In the poem, William Blake symbolises the destruction of external reality and chaos as the speaker hears "the catastrophic / Fragments of his torso breaking past me, it was / The object of the physical world breaking on me" (Barker 1937b: 39). And perhaps owing to these influences, or drawing on them, the speaker, for the first time, does not merely perceive or recollect, but rather *recognises* (a form of deeper cognitive process which implies both perception and recollection) the cosmology of the universe as a chaotic totality.

In this chaos, which the poem's internal world and convulsive imagery transcribe, the exploration of the theme of digestion is central. As we have seen, it appears already in the "Introductory Stanzas", where there is an initial contrast set between mind (consciousness of the self) and gut (social consciousness). This suggests that the profundity of the mind's abysses (which suggest solipsism and subjectivity) opposes the "abdominal abysms" from which the spirit of the collective must emerge: "Down what escarpments can the man escape / Consigned to profounds of his mind's abysms / None till his spirit like the thermometer climbs / Out of his own abdominal abysms" (10). This is the first reference to the digestion theme in

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the poem and, although this reading of individual and collective pulls in consciousness is plausible (the reader is warned that "The one always remaining in / Self's skin, remains a shade"), other possible interpretations related to allusions that are woven throughout the poem should not be ignored: the abdominal abysm as the empty womb, the description of a gastro-intestinal disorder (through the reference to febrility, and which is also present in other sections of the poem), the idea of poetic creation as a bowel movement, or a political reference to hunger and starvation.

Although in many ways reminiscent of Dalí's *Soft Construction with Boiled Beans* (1936), an ad-hoc premonitory symbol of the Spanish Civil War, the synthetic nature of Barker's lines in Book I creates a rich self-contained *totum* in which the personal and the social become inextricably entwined. As in Dalí's painting, we encounter the horror of a self-divided body which tears itself apart in a double vertical movement: "What when born upward breaking from heaven downward" (13).[332] The inner tension of the body releases self-mutilating forces which are presented in these Surrealist explorations of the death instinct as natural and inherent within human existence. Dalí's body against itself attempts to reach upward in orgasmic delectation while it simultaneously holds itself down thwarting all possibility to rise. Similarly, a parallel movement takes place in Barker's paranoiac description of the moment of birth, which is not wanting in sexual references either, as the unnatural image of an *upward birth* reverses the process of child delivery and also evokes the idea of penetration. On the other hand, biological and religious references become entangled as the baby falls from heaven, an image which is suggestive not only of the breaking of waters that precedes birth, but also of the fall of man. The parallelism is clear as in both cases man is expelled from an Eden-like paradise into a world of pain, and this is indicative of Barker's fixation with the idea of original sin and his existential feeling of guilt and fear of punishment. Barker's religious conflicts have connections with the idea of war as punishment and also, on a more concrete level, with the role of the Catholic Church in the Spanish conflict as one of the main supporters of the Fascist cause. However, the main idea that derives from these lines is Barker's treatment of the Spanish War in terms of a personal *calamity*, placing it at the same level as the loss of his brother's eye and of his unborn baby. In effect, a parallelism is established between the moment of the child's birth and the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War, in which the life and death instincts of Freud's theory interact. Seen from this

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[332] Book VIII also presents a faithful poetic rendition of Dalí's painting in which self-inflicted pain is described as a highly sensualised experience and a source of delectation: "The giant I, crucified to my spine, / Who stretches and crushes me---I suffer / Seeing the bruises burgeon along the body / Blossom to bring the suffocator rose" (45).

perspective, just as the child of the poem (like Barker's) becomes a sort of stillbirth, Spanish freedom is crushed by the advancing forces of Fascism (like the terrible foot in Dalí's painting). In both cases, the double paranoiac image is effective in its rendering of this twofold reality. Furthermore, the image of the "shambles in the bowels" reinforces the idea of devastation and carnage that the poet tries to convey, as the sudden interruption of the process of digestion (implying also the putrefactive and corrupted faecal matter as a result) agglutinates a series of implicit references: the interruption of the pregnancy and Spain's own intestine struggle as a reflection of man's self-mutilating (self-eating) drives, and of Barker's attack on his own brother. His painful description of the moment of birth in Book I mixes the beautiful and the grotesque: "The bud beginning, the burning salamander / Suspended in his breast, the shambles in the bowels" (13). This actually functions as an unconscious poetic rendition of Dalí's painting (a dismembered body gradually decomposing), and it also contains clear references to Christ's sacrifice on the cross: "The tall tree spine supporting vertical / The crucified to life bare body blood" (13). The simultaneity of these contrasting images of beauty, horror, life, death and sacrifice, and the way in which they interact in his Surrealist imagination, help elucidate Barker's conceptualisation of the Spanish conflict as the outcome of complex psychological processes, which cannot be reduced to the image, generalised in the late 1930s, of the Spanish Civil War as a moral or ideological opposition between two mutually exclusive factions. Rather, as the poem shows, for Barker it is a more complex and unresolved conflict of a people against itself in the search for spiritual, but also material, nourishment.

Along similar lines, Barker's macabre and grotesque description of the man's entrails in Book II is presented through similes in which the food element becomes central, resembling some of the images in Gascoyne's *Man's Life is This Meat* (1936) and Dalí's painting *The Bleeding Roses* (1930): "The ribs like branches hanging meat like leaves / Makes the green tree red" (18). This image also bears close resemblances with the Freudian myth of the devouring parent (because in Barker's poem the tree is also the parent), and is disturbingly reminiscent of Goya's painting *Saturn Devouring His Son* (1819-1823). Both Goya's *Saturn* and Barker's violent man have parallel political implications, as both represent Spain as a consuming and annihilating begetter that simultaneously gives and takes life from its offspring. In the case of Barker, there is a further twist in the equation, as the violent man also becomes the maternal figure breeding violence in a further process of metamorphosis as s/he gives birth to the embryos: "Coiled in the ribs / The embryos of life and death lie, one by one / Ravaging a surgeon's groove of agony, / Break from the belly, stand on the bloody thigh, / Cockcrowing like man and babe and bird" (18). The grotesque caesarean birth "makes the green tree red".

The identification of the blood-red child with the crimson cockerel, whose feathers are also stained with blood, is followed by convulsive images which re-enact yet again the moment of birth. However, the ambivalence of these lines also gives rise to violent images of war which seem to anticipate Picasso's *Guernica*: "The fragments of his mother's meat hanging horror, / Agony, agony, bowls and blood, the trumpet screaming, / The flags of flesh waving, the arch of pain, / The mannikin marches down the thigh, / Trampling a bowels' shambles in his rear" (18).[333] Here, the term "mother's meat" echoes Gascoyne's poem "The End is Near the Beginning" (1935), where the expression means "*Until the end*" (Gascoyne 1936d: 20), which suggests that the mother is fertile, providing spiritual nourishment for her offspring. In Barker's poem, on the other hand, this mother (which eventually becomes the motherland too) is incapable of begetting anything but horror, an image which has psychoanalytical (the mother is now devoured in the process of labour) and ideological implications, for this is also Barker's vision of the Spanish Civil War. The horror, the agony, the blood, the scream and the shambles are all elements associated with birth, blinding, sodomy and war in Barker's imagination, whose mastery of poetic ambivalence redefines the other elements in order to provide double images: the trumpet that announces war screams like a woman in labour; the flags (warfare symbols) are actually flags of flesh, which may be understood both as torn tissue as a result of giving birth, or as the result of war wounds; the arch, which is a symbol of conquest or triumph, is actually the arch of pain, which may be understood as the pubis, or the place of military capitulation; the marching manikin (a soldier, a militiaman or even a militant activist, like the Surrealists themselves were) is also the baby coming down the mother's thigh. The latent allusion to the combatant is made patent in the tenth stanza, where the war element becomes more explicit: the manikin is now "the militant man", whereas the ambivalent "shambles" is substituted by the more explicit "carnage" (Barker 1937b: 20).

Further images of birth and consumption are present in Book III ("Drinks from the red jet of the female thigh", "the blood baited boy", "The odour of the puerperal gush"), combined with scenes of sexual arousal ("The doped colt on the Caliente course", "the erect tree") and rape ("a mole gnawing, / -I hear the ceaseless meshing of his jaws- / tunnelling up the abdominal tube"). Rape is punished as the violated girl becomes also the emasculator, an image that recovers the references to the castrating woman that have previously appeared in the poem. However, the ambivalence of these images makes significance elusive. For instance, the tree acquires a fluid identity, becoming a symbol of totality: it is associated with life and

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[333] *Calamiterror* was published in April 1937, the same month the town of Guernica was bombarded, and only a few weeks before Picasso started the first sketches for the painting.

death, it is male and female, it is green and it is red, and now it is the rapist and the raped, the emasculated and the emasculator. The excremental references appear again in Book IV, where the odours of the internal fluids excreted during childbirth (blood, sweat, urine, faeces) are evoked ("My autumn odour of the nine month horror"), together with the reference to death through the chrysanthemum growing in the bowels. There is a call to reaction or responsiveness, provoked by the images of starvation, as the speaker asks not to remain untouched at the sight of hunger: "Electrify the tepid heart and charge the mind / With the starved figures of obligation" (25). The hand which, as a metonymic reference to the poet's creative activity, was fecund before, is now sterile, and the speaker explicitly rejects a romanticised vision of poetry ("no flower festoons") in favour of the experience of gut and hell ("Distort my bowels", "The thinning elongated guts of fact"). Thus, hunger (at this point it is "The Derbyshire starvation") is not tackled with food, but rather with the destruction of the organs which enable the process of digestion: the body is presented as the locus of starvation, but also of disfiguration. In this part of Book IV, the destruction of the bowels defers the possibility of digestion, and the speaker goes through the convulsive and excremental process of destruction-creation again and again: "I tear my guts out on the platform / Or rummage in my stomach with bloody hands / To catch the mole or bird that gnaws or sings / Infrequently as the solstice miracle" (27). The womb-stomach-intestine (they have now become one and the same) is gnawed by "My interminable mole of soul" and, through a process of self-duplication, the speaker becomes at once the woman, the child and a replica of himself: "like the kangaroo I caress / The second me I keep within" (27). Thus, poetry becomes a search "in the bowels' caves and thunder" (note the emphasis on the scatological element), and the psychic mole "endeavours to dislodge the fruit", an image in which progeny and food become connected, and which reinforces the idea of poetic creation as a cannibalistic act in which the poet is *consumed* by the reader.

Barker's excremental imagery becomes increasingly urgent in Book VI, combining images of raw physicality (bowels), mental condition (hysteria) and desire (sex): "the distorted mountain of the bowels, / The hysterical tree that branches to the arms, / The lunar river from the sexual fountain" (36). Here, poetic inspiration is considered a self-mutilating act (a constant process of dying, as Barker explained in his 1939 essay "Therefore All Poems Are Elegies") in which the subject and the object feed on each other and become the same (which recalls the idea contained in Hugh Sykes Davies's *Petron* that literary creation responds to a cannibalistic urge): "Feeding on self, the internal cannibal / Stands like a gap over its

swallowed self" (Barker 1937b: 36). This idea also connects with Carolyn Korsmeyer's description of the cycle of hunger:

> The inescapable cycle of hunger and eating is in a sense commemorated by the fragility of food itself, which melts, collapses, is eaten and digested, rots, molds, and decays. Because eating is a repetitive and transient experience, because food does not last but spoils, because it not only nourishes but poisons, eating is a small exercise in mortality. Rather than transcend time, as romantic ideas of art suggest is the goal of master works, food succumbs to time – as we do ourselves. (Korsmeyer 2002: 145)

It has been argued above that the food motif emerges in British Surrealism as a response to the politics of hunger that dominate the thirties' decade. Within this context, poetry is offered as food and, in metonymic extension, the poet also offers himself in a quasi-mystical sacrifice to the readers. However, Barker goes one step further along these lines as poetic creation becomes a self-eating process, in which the distance between the subject and object is obliterated and the subject consumes himself and the object simultaneously. Similarly, Barker understood the poem as a bowel movement and each coil of the intestine as a further circle in the descent to man's psychological abysses (an idea obviously borrowed from Dante) and a further stage in the digestive process which culminates in poetry-excretion. In this fourth Book, the idea of poetry as spiritual growth, aesthetic ornament and musicality is rejected in favour of poetry as a process of self-eating and self-defecation. Thus, writing as well as reading become, not only cannibalistic, but also coprophagic activities, as the individual feeds on his own "swallowed self" (Barker 1937b: 36). Similarly, in the following stanza, Barker's image of miscarried pregnancy and poisoning culminate in the ultimate poetic act of vomiting, again associated with both digestion (dyspepsia) and gestation (nausea): "The abdomen of youth is the balloon world / Twisted to fit between the ribs. The Spartan boy / Had his own fox-globe hidden at his belly. / The youth of sorrow mourns this indigestion, / The world swelling in his guts. I vomit. / This is the act that I now execute" (36). Thus, images of pregnancy (the abdomen of youth, the balloon world) are in constant metamorphosis: the world swells, not in a woman's womb, but rather in the Spartan boy's guts, and the pregnancy becomes an indigestion provoked by a poisonous plant.[334] A final process of metamorphosis takes place as

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[334] The term that appears in all the editions since 1937 is "fox-globe". However, in the particular context of this stanza and the general context of the poem, it seems plausible to suggest that Barker is actually referring to the toxic foxglove plant whose consumption may cause severe indigestion in the form of abdominal pain, swelling of the abdomen, vomiting, but also other neurological symptoms such as hallucination and delirium.

it is the speaker, rather than the Spartan boy, who suffers the consequences of the plant's toxicity, and vomiting becomes the ultimate poetic act.

Through these images of pregnancy and birth, the maternal figure eventually emerges as a universal symbol in Book VII, where she bears the burden of her innumerable offspring and nurses the whole of humanity in the Dalí-like image of her elongated breasts: "Dipping your wild laboured breast in Time like Thames" (41). This image combines several elements from a series of Dalí's paintings from the thirties: the wetnurse in *The Weaning of Furniture-Nutrition* (1934); elongated body parts in *The Enigma of William Tell* (1933) and *The Spectre of Sex Appeal* (1934); and overstretched breasts in *Soft Construction with Boiled Beans (Premonition of Civil War)* (1936) and *Drawer-Woman* (1936). In Dalí's paintings, these motifs are closely associated with Nazism (*The Weaning of Furniture-Nutrition*), patriarchal authority (*The Enigma of William Tell*), the castration complex (*The Spectre of Sex Appeal*) and sterility (*Soft Construction with Boiled Beans*, in which a hand squeezes a woman's dry breast, and *Drawer-Woman*, where two drooping breasts lack nipples).[335] In Book VII, the element of food and nutrition is ever-present, either directly through the image of the nursing mother, indirectly in the evocation of Dalí's paintings, or in the figure of the devouring mother (a reversal of the nurturing mother). Whereas Barker is more generally concerned with processes of digestion and indigestion, at this point it is the very process of eating and nurturing that infuses his Surrealist poetics. Nevertheless, this remains an ambiguous process, for the struggle for food becomes in the end a struggle for survival ("The myriad of human struggling at her breast"), and there is always the looming fear of the reversed process, the fear of being eaten by the devouring mother. Although Barker's maternal figure is nurturing and fertile at this point, it also represents Barker's own configuration of the Oedipus complex: it is an elusive figure that the speaker can only equivocally follow in his pursuit of carnal possession (i.e. the return to the womb). As in the Orpheus and Eurydice myth, the speaker follows the mother-wife to the underworld: "I follow my white swan along the westward dark flow, / Gathering the odd few feathers fallen from her breast / Tossed in the dark, lost in the tremendous dark. / I am her consort like the pilot fish, / The Eurydice of her Orpheus" (42). Through the speaker's identification with the pilot fish, the maternal figure also becomes the mother ship, a symbol of the womb, where the speaker returns: "Breaking through boughs I made towards her". However, the image of the mother is again ambiguous for it is "her one note traversing Time / Awoke me in the bower of the womb". Here, the mother adopts an active role as her piercing

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[335] For a comprehensive study of Dalí's use of Nazi iconography see Robin Adèle Greeley's chapter "Dalí, Fascism and the 'Ruin of Surrealism'" in *Surrealism and the Spanish Civil War* (2006): 51-89.

song traverses time, an idea that is further developed in the last line of Book VII where the "autumn womb" is pierced by the swan's cry; also, the phonetic echoes contained in "bower" evoke "bowel", a word that appears twelve times in the poem, directly or indirectly associated with the womb, and always in connection with the process of digestion and the awakening of social consciousness, as the following lines suggest: "I rose / And saw her passing on the dark westward stream, / The myriad of human struggling at her breast" (42).

Finally, images of throttling, choking and asphyxiation constitute a new variation on the theme of digestion in Book IX, as the speaker ends up choking on his own intestines (an act of self-eating or self-vomiting). The initial references to "the rope of glory" and to "heaven" seem to indicate a progressive approach to the divine. However, this kind of spiritual/cosmic perception proves deceptive, for in the end he becomes aware of the self-regurgitating movement: "The rope of god throttling me was my guts" (47). At this point the image of the swan mother also re-appears. The speaker is called to leave the womb (now presented as protective and safe) and, whereas he is compelled to *see* by the fluttering of the bird at his eyelids, he is now compelled to *act* by the dying cry of the swan-motherland. Now, a process of self-duplication takes place as the speaker feels "the free one in me move". Here, Barker skilfully elaborates a Chinese-box structure in which a double gestation takes place and the speaker becomes simultaneously the son and the mother, whose legacy is a world of chaos, corruption and solitude: "The inheritance of chaos I leave him [. . .] / I leave him the lost, the stolen, and the strayed, / The strange, the erratic, the rich, the mad, / I leave him himself, for this was all he had" (48). The motif of the terrible legacy appears again at the end of this Book, where the child is, like the speaker and the poet, coiled in his bowels (reminiscent of Barker's conception of poetry as coiled bowels whose every turn is a poem), and alone: "Self-born, self-fed, self-alive, and self-dead" (50). The image of the self-fed baby (which contrasts with the image of humanity feeding on the mother's universal breast) is interesting at this point: expanding on the idea of poetic production-reception as an anthropophagous activity, the speaker-poet's legacy is one of self-consumption, and eating oneself up becomes (like vomiting oneself out) the ultimate poetic act. Ultimately, an *enumeratio* of fears and obsessions conforms the speaker's legacy to the child, leaving him a self-eating disorder ("the serpent continually swallowing itself"), a futile quest ("the terrier chasing its tail"), a castration complex ("the love that fears the lunar valley / The sanguinary moon and the breeding amoeba"), and a mirror vision which eternally projects images of himself as in the Narcissus myth ("his eyes like mirrors / Repeating his image in innumerable recession"). Although the speaker has felt the child moving inside, the birth never takes place. It is interrupted, and the

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description of the miscarriage becomes one of the most perturbing Surrealist passages in the poem, as Barker's obsessions are projected onto the unborn baby. Thus, bursting bowels, asphyxiation, the infanticide-parricide and Narcissist drives are associated with the baby's death as a way for Barker to expiate his own guilt:

> The bowels I burst from lying askew about him
>
> Tremble and move and coil like life about him.
>
> The stranglehold they throttle at his throat is
>
> The serpent brood murdering its parent.
>
> He loved himself so much that the act of love
>
> Made with himself, gave him, as hybrid, death.
>
> But phoenix, beetle, snake, from his blood,
>
> I rose and felt the throes of Spain. (49)

The death of the unborn baby is poetically enacted as a self-consuming act. As such, it becomes intimately connected in Barker's lines with the Spanish War, which is, above all, also a self-mutilating act.

3.3.3. The Spanish Civil War.

"Calamiterror", as a term, is a portmanteau word which does not bring together two distant realities, but rather has the power to fuse and incorporate two complementary realities in the utter expression of apocalyptic horror. The collage-like creation of new words (and therefore new realities) out of pre-existing ones was a dear activity for Dadaists and Surrealist alike.[336] The Spanish Civil War was a new reality which needed naming. With "Calamiterror", Barker named the unnameable, as his title effectively evokes this new and monstrous reality. The lexical amalgamation of the two Latinate terms makes it instantly intelligible to a wide readership through its powerful conjuring of an awe-inspiring twofold reality. On the one hand, there is disaster and catastrophe. On the other hand, the reference to Fascist repression makes itself clear in the use of the term "terror", which in the 1930s had become an unequivocal allusion to Fascism, as the various publications of the time show. For example, the November 1936 issue of *Left Review* reproduced an interview with José Bergamín, where he condemned the official alliance of the Spanish Catholic Church and the Fascist *terror*. Bergamín's words are also enlightening when considering Barker's own religious stance in *Calamiterror*:

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[336] This form of lexical amalgamation is also a prominent feature of 15th-century Spanish poetry (Juan de Mena's 1438 *Coronation* of Marqués de Santillana was entitled *Calamicleos*), as it is of Shakespearean poetry and, of course, of the Surrealist lexicon of Lewis Carroll.

Separated from the people, the church had placed itself at the side of the aristocracy, the new-rich, the landowners, the army. [. . .] I began to experience a growing repugnance, indignation, at the interlacing of the Catholic hierarchy with the privileged classes and with their politics. The church had taken a position that was anti-popular and anti-Christian. [. . .] The church identified itself with the bloody repression and cruel terror of 1934, directed against the workers and liberals. When the bishops and priests openly supported Fascism, a Christian could not help but oppose them and denounce the three great spiritual falsehoods supporting Fascism and destroying culture in Spain: the official church; the corrupt aristocracy and bourgeoisie; the army. The church in its real role as Christian, Catholic, is not under attack anywhere. But the church as belligerent is. [. . .] we cannot help but fight the church Fascist, the church belligerent, because Fascism is the negation of all that is Christian. It denies all the human values that Christianity has fought for through the centuries –all that we associate with liberty and with human dignity. (Bergamín 1936: 775)

In 1930s' Europe, the term "terror" came to be exclusively associated with Fascism and its methods of deathly extortion and bloody repression. This process makes the referentiality of Barker's title more specific for his contemporaries than it is to present-day readers. Similarly, Barker's use of the term "mass", which also appears early in the composition, is not devoid of explicit political significance in a 1930s' text. As it happens with the use of "terror" in the title, any reference to "mass" is not coincidental, as the term had already become, by 1937, a recurrent motif in left-wing publications in Britain. Its incorporation in the left-wing political and cultural agenda (the need to work and write for the mass but also *from* the mass) was furthered by Charles Madge's application of the term to his anthropological and psychoanalytical studies on the observation of mass behaviour, Mass Observation. The mass had not only become a socio-political phenomenon, but the result of a collective process of self-awareness, which was as much indebted to Marx's material dialectics (economy) as to Freud's psychoanalysis (psychology) and Frazer's anthropological studies (myth and religion).

The conflict in Spain becomes an intrinsic part of this poet's fears and obsessions and, in *Calamiterror*, through the biblical reference to Cain and Abel, which appears as early as the dedicatory poem, Barker establishes the link between the blinding accident (treated at several points as the incestuous rape of his brother's eye) and the intestine struggle of the Spanish people. In general terms, and also in the poem, the Cain episode implies the loss of innocence and purity in the Western world (through the fulfilment of an unconscious destructive desire, as it happened with the blinding accident) and the defeat of humanity in a mythical battle

against itself (in a way, the brothers can be regarded as the same being, as well as the unborn baby and the father). The fall of man is the result of this narcissistic murder and the burning salamander on the child's breast, which is reminiscent of Cain's birthmark indicating his sin, is suggestive of a sinful heritage which the speaker passes on to his unborn child. Nevertheless, the implications of martyrdom (Abel is the first martyr in the Bible) and the supernatural condition of the mythological salamander as a resilient creature emerging from and therefore being resistant to fire, may bring a positive future outcome. Although Barker's political filiations are clear, he is clever enough to detach himself from the Manichean positions of his contemporaries and to provide, through his Surrealist poetics, an ambivalent and multifaceted reading of historical fact, which is enhanced by the various unconscious associations that are voiced in the poem. Not making the Spanish theme the centre of his composition is what makes *Calamiterror* a powerful Surrealist text in the line of Picasso's *Guernica*, which initially had a negative reception for its lack of any explicit denunciation of or moral judgement on the bombing of the Basque town. As we have seen, Picasso's critics were annoyed by his Surrealist subjectivism, and so seemed Barker's.

Regarding the Cain-Abel motif present in the poem, it becomes clear that the inherent duality of self is present from the moment of birth, something that is described as a painful process of self-dividing and self-consumption through echoes of Dalí's painting *Soft Construction with Boiled Beans* (1936). Towards the end of Book I, it is no longer the child that is pulled by these two contradictory forces, but the "sin man", the Cain-like speaker, who is pulled by opposing forces, "The downward demon pull, the upward angel" (Barker 1937b: 16). A process of identification (of the brothers and of the father and son) takes place as demonic and heavenly forces pull simultaneously from one single being which is torn apart by opposing forces, reinforcing the idea of the self-mutilating body of Spain. In this way, Barker's revision of the Spanish conflict in these terms is effective for it creates a psychological landscape in which these opposing forces interact, not as mutually exclusive but as complementary and interdependent drives of the human psyche. It should be made clear, however, that his psychological rendering of the conflict is not a form of escapism or a thwarted attempt at collectivism. On the contrary, subjectivity functions as the only filter that can provide an accurate analysis and an objective understanding of the modern individual's inner conflicts, and the way in which these shape the socio-political conditions which have favoured the rise of antagonistic forces in Europe. The vacuum of limbo where the child-man burns and is torn apart is indeed the veritable hell of war in which man is suspended, fighting against himself. Thus, the "sin man hangs in a vacuum / Suspended like a world between pull of opposed

forces" (16). Also, it is interesting to note that a similar image appears again in Books I and VIII, where the same stanza is repeated: whereas in the former it is the child that "blazes in vacuum of being's horror" (14), in the latter it is the speaker (45). In Freudian terms, it would be a place halfway between the fluidity of the womb and the dry air of the external world (i.e. the vaginal passage). In Marxist terms, it would be a country where a civil war is being fought (i.e. Spain). Both readings are significant in the context of the poem. Also, the persistent reference to summer as a time of death ("the green dream in the summer tree is death, / And birds in boughs are embryos of life, / Dancing and singing among the summer horror") makes the reader increasingly aware of the temporal correspondence between the "summer horror" associated in the poem with pregnancy ("My Mary May maternal with the summer / [. . .] / The garb of leaf and tree cannot conceal / That summer magnificent bigness. It is my season / That bearing summer you bear me the sun") and the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War: "I saw the summer penis with the green dream / Hung like a gasmask terrible green and fatal" (19).

Besides all this, the fatal physical consequences of war are materialised for the first time in Book II, where the impact of projectiles creates a highly visual image of the dismembered body. The speaker becomes gradually involved in the battle and, whereas before he was a distant observer, now the pieces of shattered bodies fall right at his feet: "And at my feet falls the burnt out fragment, / The finger or the face sheered off clean" (20). Further disturbing imagery of sexual abuse and war appear in the description of a military attack against a passive, death-struck civil target. Then, the word "war" appears for the first time at this point, which is symptomatic of the urgency to materialise the abstract existential pain described in the previous stanzas into the concrete reality of war: "The weeping shell propelled from war / Drops in a chaos of life and death" (21). Although Spain is not mentioned, the Spanish conflict remains latent in Barker's images, which remarkably anticipate the terrible scene in Picasso's *Guernica*: the effect of the phrase "weeping shell" (it is the shell that weeps rather than the people against whom it is thrown; it also refers to the showering of shells against the people) is powerfully evocative of the agonising female bodies in Picasso's *Guernica* (1937) (a theme which he revisited in his 1937 *Weeping Women* series), and it also serves to anticipate Barker's own image of the "three women weeping in Irun's ruins", which appears at several points in the poem. The "chaos of life and death" and the "death dark room" into which the baby is thrown just as he is expelled from the womb are striking poetic premonitions of the murdered child in Picassos' painting, held by his mother whose breasts, like those of the mother swan in the poem, are still full with milk. Finally, the carnage is described in sexually explicit terms as the penis shoots "metal death" into the womb. As it

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keeps shooting sadistically, deranged and grotesquely aroused, the penis wastes its shells on the dead people, becoming the cruel perpetrator of, not only a physical crime, but a cultural and intellectual one as well ("shooting mental life"), which is a direct allusion to Fascism as the murderer of culture.

Book IV introduces the theme of "My winter women", which also anticipates the image of the weeping women of Irún in Book VI: "My winter women of margarine and tears, / Shivering with sorrow in the corner" (26). The winter women become the speaker's muses as he asks for their inspiration: "Inhabit my word and render it deep and terrible. / [. . .] / O winter women , expert in lamenting, / Instruct my speech in the accent of despair" (27). But in the meantime, the speaker continues his psychological exploration too: "Here I go down descending my mine of man / Searching for something, probing for the soul" (27). The image of the mine is ambivalent, for it simultaneously evokes two very distinct realities which Barker tries to bring together. It has both a Freudian and a Marxist reading for, although it refers to man's descent into the depths of the unconscious, it also contains a clear allusion to the working class, directed towards the reunion of the individual and the collective. However, this probing for the soul is also ineffectual, and nothing can be extracted from self-exploration as nothing is extracted from the mines or, metonymically, from the exploitation of the miners. This nothingness, this emptiness ("When I descend, I shall find nothing there") is reminiscent of Eliot's *hollow men.* Nevertheless, even this assertion is attenuated by Barker's use of syntax and verb tenses: "when" and "shall" indicate that the speaker has not actually experienced the depths of the mine (literally and metaphorically), and the assertion remains tentative, especially since it is implied that he prefers perhaps the safer or more effective inspiration of the lamenting women over that of the deep probing into the mine.

The political element appears again through the explicit reference to war in the final stanzas of Book VI. Although Barker's Surrealist poetics is, as has been shown so far, eminently visual, it is interesting to note that at this point his apocalyptic images acquire a conspicuously aural quality. In the last two stanzas of Book VI, the verb "hear" is repeated five times in different forms, and there are at least a dozen terms which refer directly or indirectly to the production of sound or to aural perception: "sounds", "ear/s" (repeated three times), "music" (repeated twice), "choral" (repeated twice), "echo", "rumbling", "voice" (repeated twice), "orating", "weeping", "shrieking", "hymn" and "aural". Thus, an eminently physical experience (the perception of noises, sounds and voices) brings about a spiritual realisation (the anticipation of war), giving way to a sort of synesthetic effect in which the physical and the spiritual become confused:

I heard first the Rhondda choral echo up the valley

Trying to find god's ear, I heard the presage

Ironically rumbling along the Channel, war:

The ancestral voice, the ancestral voice. And

I saw in a fog of gas Mr. Baldwin orating:

We must repair the deficiencies of our forces.

I heard three women weeping in Irun's ruins.

Nothing I could not hear, *Berliner*

Tageblatt, *Daily Telegraph*, *L'Humanité*, *Isvestia*,

The air like newsboys shrieking, recounting

Instances of hate, of insult, aggravation, and

The Rhondda choral, the Durham hymn, over all.

I met seven saints in Salisbury with cotton wool in their ears.

I remembered with shame my own music.

The splitting of the central pillar like aural lighting

 I felt it crack my abdomen, the world. (39)

Thus, the announcement of war takes place in a variety of aural forms: the male choirs of Rhondda, the rumbling of war across the Channel, the ancestral voice of Spain, Stanley Baldwin's declarations, the three weeping women, the cries of the newsboys and the cracking of Salisbury cathedral. Now, the significance of September as a black month in 1936 (in the dedicatory poem) is further corroborated by the reference to Stanley Baldwin and to the taking of Irún, which re-appear later in the poem. Regarding this, it should be remembered that Stanley Baldwin, the British Conservative politician, was Prime Minister from 1935 to 1937. He began a rearmament programme which quickly and aggressively re-equipped and expanded Britain's Army, Navy and Air Forces, and which was strongly opposed by a considerably large section of the British population, as well as being publicly denounced by the leader of the Labour Party, Clement Attlee. Barker's reference to the rearmament process very likely indicates that he was writing the poem as these events were taking place and flooding the pages of the newspapers and journals of the time. A further point worth mentioning regarding his significance for the poem is that Baldwin, together with France's Prime Minister Léon Blum, had also been the initiator of the Non-Intervention Committee. The first meeting of the Committee was held in London in September 1936, only a few days after the fall of Irún. Although Barker's self-criticism ("I achieved apocalypse –hearing slowly the

sounds / Against which my ears had made their own music" and "I remembered with shame my own music") may be understood as Barker's deliberate abandonment of his previous individualist stance in favour of collectivism, his own poetic theory confirms (in *Calamiterror* as well as in his essays) that this is not the case: Barker's excessively self-critical position at this point responds to the poetic urge that the Spanish Civil War and his Surrealist aesthetics imposed on him. In the poem, individualism is never completely abandoned, for the motif of the Civil War is always associated with that of the miscarriage and the blinding accident.

The aural element acquires relevance in Book IX again, where the weeping sounds of the women in Irún's ruins are linked to the swans' dying cries: "Continually the women weeping in Irun's ruins / Call in distress with voices like swans" (49). Here, the piercing cry of the swans-women breaks the protective ostracising womb, forcing the poet out: "I hear that cry which breaks the womb or room / Wherever I stand, and forces me to go". Also, the struggle of the Spanish people is presented as a universal struggle for survival as they fight to reach the motherland's breast: "The swan my world with a myriad at her breast, / The foaming human struggling, I hear their cry". Both the cries of the women and the agony of the men make up the swan's song, which is a presage of death: "The feminine weeping and the masculine agony / Meet at the throat and make the swan's song". Now, the reference to the throat as the passage through which the dying cry is emitted helps us understand all the previous allusions to the blocking of air passages (through choking, throttling and asphyxiation) that appear in the poem. However, Barker's most conspicuous political message appears in stanza eight where he questions the possibility of remaining aloof from the political upheaval of the time: "How can he cease / From political fight, how can his word sleep in his hand, / When a dark time in a dark time / Inundates and annihilates the mind?" (49). In this way, the cultural and political annihilation that Fascism brings about is denounced (a common denominator in the political and theoretical texts of the time). However, it would be difficult, in the context of Barker's own poetics, to consider these lines as advocating of poetry as a socio-political activity. Although he explicitly alludes to the role of the poet/writer within society and distrusts the passivity of the *sleeping* hand ("how can his word sleep in his hand"), Barker does not confuse poetic and political commitment.[337] He would certainly not commit his aesthetics to an extra-poetic cause (which at the end of the Book IX he calls a "private cause"), bearing in mind that he managed to retain a considerable degree of poetic autonomy

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[337] The reference to the sleeping hand may be a scornful remark about orthodox Bretonian Surrealism. It is also reminiscent of Blake's lines in his preface to *Milton a Poem* (1804-1808): "I will not cease from mental Fight, / Nor shall my Sword sleep in my hand: / Till we have built Jerusalem, / In Englands green & pleasant Land" (Blake 1998: 213).

from the politico-literary circles and labels of the time, including the so-called Auden Group and the Surrealists themselves.

Finally, Book X, the last Book in the poem, is probably the most political in its references, although this does not mean that Barker's Surrealist poetics has been abandoned. The political significance of the poem has been gradually built up throughout the different Books, and reaches a poetic climax in this Book. Thus, structurally, the poem reproduces its content, becoming a long and painful labour that finally delivers the political message. By doing this, Barker is successful in his poeticisation of politics, as he has managed to create a whole new Surrealist poetics of war in which war itself is the continually decentred centre of the composition. The first stanza in this Book focuses on geographical images of expanding terror, and makes use of concrete political references such as the Nazi remilitarisaion and occupation of the Rhineland, which had taken place in March 1936 ("The Rhône and the Rhine run mellowing with promised horror"), the occupation of Ethiopia by Italian Fascist troops also in 1936 ("Rome / roars") and an explicit condemnation of Britain's inactive role in international political affairs, which clearly favoured the Fascists, while at the same time implementing a strong rearmament programme ("London lies like a huge rot along the Thames"). The description of Spainas "my golden red" reproduces the colours of the Spanish Nationalist flag (*rojigualda*), although these were also the traditional colours of the Spanish flag before the Second Republic, and therefore Barker is probably just referring to the colours that are historically associated with Spain. Also, in his reference to Spain as golden and red, he is also combining a reference to key elements in the poem: the blood and the red tree (the speaker himself), the golden swan and, finally, the image of the militant man in Book II whose trajectory "trails like a carnival comet gold and blood" (20). Furthermore, there is a final image of gestation that recalls the ones that appear early in the poem, in which the mole gnaws the abdominal wall of the pregnant body: "Her Madrid middle growing vague with ravage, / Labouring to let out liberty, with the rat and the rot at her heart" (51). Here the "rat" alludes to "The Franco gangs that furrow in her heart", whereas the "rot" clearly refers to Britain. Spain is further described in the third stanza as a red rose whose petals-tongues speak of "privations, poverty, / Duplicity, oppressions, camouflaged collusions" (52). The red rose spilling blood as it speaks is also a variation on the theme of bodily secretions (regurgitation and vomit). Also, speaking and bleeding become almost identified as the same act. As this section advances, Barker's play on colours continues, and now it is the fuchsia and the crimson heart that are associated with Asturias as images of blood and death are conjured: "The dead is dead, but he gives and not takes his poppy. / His hammer his hand and his badge his blood"

(52). Nevertheless, Barker finds hope, as before, in the passage of time, which is measured through a long process of crying and bleeding oneself out: "It is already time to triumph, for tears and blood like time / Take tears and blood as time takes time to make good") and the poem comes to an end with a return to the image of the swan-motherland and her children fighting each other at her breast, an atrocious image of the Civil War in which the poem's key motifs are reunited (feeding, maternity, death and war): "I see the large parasites that dilate like leech / Torn, with war and agony, from my mother world's front" (53) (note that "leech" also takes us to the image of the eye falling from the socket in the "Dedication", and that "front" does not only refer to the mother's breast, but also has clear military connotations). Finally, the speaker is multiplied and reunited with the struggling mass that fights itself: "And my mother world, with bomb holes in her bosom, / Goes gradually on, with the myriad of me at her breast". Regarding this part of the poem, Leo Mellor has commented pertinently on the reference to the "myriad of me", not as a political image, but rather as an almost philosophical conception of the "body in flux", a body that is "full of holes [. . .] so fragmented and tunnelled as not being reducible to a unified whole" (Mellor 2007: 114). This idea appears frequently in the poem, with the gnawing mole perforating (actually, "tunnelling") the womb-intestine-abdominal wall, the piercing power of the cries and multiple other references to holes in the body, such as the eye socket, the anus, the mouth, the vagina or, as in those final lines, the holes left by the bombs on the bosom of the Spanish body, from which blood, not milk, trickles now as nourishment.

As we have seen in this analysis of Barker's excremental imagery of pierced eyes, lacerated wombs and disturbed bowels and its connection with the Spanish Civil War, his ideological commitment to a political cause did not jeopardise his aesthetic commitment to poetry. Thus, *Calamiterror* became exemplary as it showed that the reconciliation of image and ideology, a sought-after reconciliation in British Surrealist writing, was possible. But this reconciliation is far-reaching: the universality of Barker's text lies, as in the case of Picasso's *Guernica*, in its configuration of a poetics of pain that goes far beyond and above the strictly material. Barker presents the act of being born to life as a death-driven painful experience. However, he never resorts to existential or apocalyptic pessimism, which would be the easiest (and therefore less effective) routes in that direction. Rather, he resorts to a Surrealist poetics which allows him to unite two motifs, the motif of food-defecation and the motif of birth-death, in order to express the communal calamity (war) through his individual terrors (miscarriage, blindness and sexual desire). As in the case of Hugh Sykes Davies's and David Gascoyne's Surrealist texts, Barker's *Calamiterror* is the result of a process of politicisation of

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poetry because the composition is not motivated by a predetermined ideological element, but rather this element emerges from the poem's imagery as it is constructed. Although Barker is the most explicitly political of the three, he nevertheless manages to retain equilibrium between the aesthetic and the ideological, as the images of war and destruction and the references to Spain are always finely woven into those of his own personal obsessions in the painful re-enactment (which is also a form of exorcism and a form of expiation) of this veritable Surrealist nightmare. In the following chapter, I deal with writers of a very different kind: in the Surrealist texts of Roland Penrose, Roger Roughton, Humphrey Jennings and Charles Madge, a process of poeticisation of politics takes place which shows yet another way in which image and ideology were reconciled in British Surrealist writing of the 1930s.

CHAPTER 5
SURREALIST IDEOLOGIES: THE POETICISATION OF POLITICS

1. Coded Messages: Roland Penrose.

> But reality can never be discovered
> once and for all. Truth will always be new.
> Guillaume Apollinaire, *The Cubist Painters* (1913): 10.

Roland Penrose was possibly the most important figure of the British Surrealist movement during the 1930s, and beyond. His role was central, not only to the development of a Surrealist aesthetics in Britain, but most importantly to the cohesion and stability of the Group in the years leading up to the Second World War. In spite of this central position, Roland Penrose is virtually unknown to the general public, having been eclipsed by all the artists whose work he decided to promote rather than his own: lifelong friends such as Paul Éluard, Pablo Picasso, Joan Miró and Antoni Tàpies. The fact that Surrealism reached Britain the way it did responded to Penrose's desire to shake the British public, a stultified public which, according to Herbert Read, had *no taste* (Read 1935e: 67), out of their aesthetic and moral complacencies with the works of the most subversive continental artists and poets, whom he admired. No wonder he earned for himself Breton's appellative of "Surréaliste dans l'amitié" (Penrose 1981: 60). Charming and amusing, he enjoyed meeting, hosting and entertaining artists, establishing the *liaisons* between Britain and the continent, arranging the loans for the exhibitions and supervising the latest works. In the meantime, he would avoid drawing attention for himself as a painter and, above all, as a poet: he was the showman behind the scenes.

This kind of *camouflaged* personality was also partly responsible for the fact that most of Penrose's texts (both political and poetic) were not published during his lifetime (and still remain unpublished), for he never prided himself on being a skilled writer. Nevertheless, these are essential for an understanding of the development of the ideology of British Surrealism in the late 1930s. In this section, I define and study this development through Penrose's acute grasp of international politics, and explore its different stages, from pacifism to the adoption of Anarchism and, in the early war years, the use of camouflage and code, which was instrumental for the continuation of Surrealist activity in the early war period. Of special significance is the effect that the Spanish Civil War, and the *institutional lies* of official discourse, which contributed to its dramatic denouement, had on Penrose, and how his first-hand experience of the conflict shaped his theories on the role of the poet and the artist in society as both guardians of the artistic legacy of humankind and as searchers for truth. It is

precisely this search for truth which underlay Penrose's incursions into poetry. In my analysis, I mainly, although not exclusively, focus on *The Road is Wider than Long* (1939), his most significant contribution to Surrealist writing in the 1930s. In it, this search for truth is articulated through a process of mythologisation of nomadic life in which four key motifs (woman, time, magic and sound) are used to encode a highly subversive ideological message: his defence of a stateless and classless society. Indeed, Penrose's poetry, apparently devoid of ideological content, responds to a definite political agenda: as will be seen, his poetic texts are, in a way, *camouflaged* political tracts. Finally, I use my analysis of Penrose's poetic texts to demonstrate that he did not understand truth as a predetermined entity, but rather as a dynamic, self-contradictory and ever-widening concept: in this way, his texts, which were used to unveil the lies and gaps in the monolithic discourse of power, did not risk becoming totalising statements on reality (that is, lies), contributing to the double aim of the Surrealist reconciliation of image and ideology: to expand awareness of the self and of material reality.

1.1. The Surrealist Behind the Scenes.

In a recent interview with Roland Penrose's son, Antony Penrose, he regrets that his father tended to understate his artistic and poetic talent during his life for, even though in the thirties and forties he became a well-known artist and poet in Britain as well as in continental Europe, he is only vaguely remembered now as a biographer (his is the most influential of Picasso's biographies) and as an art collector, none of which he ever considered himself to be in his lifetime.[338] Even his lover and later wife, the Surrealist muse and wartime photographer Lee Miller, has eclipsed the once leading figure of British Surrealism. Although his pictorial work, as well as his supporting role in the advancement of modern art, has started to receive more attention in recent times, it is his written work that remains utterly neglected, and unpublished, in the Roland Penrose Archive in Edinburgh. An analysis of his unpublished texts (political, poetical) of the thirties is a necessary (and as yet unaccomplished) task in order to understand, not only Penrose's central position within the British Surrealist Group, but the very character of Surrealism in Britain.

Born in London into a Quaker family in 1900, Penrose fought throughout his life against the moral and religious conventions that his family had imposed on him and, although he managed to overcome them in many ways, the influence remained somehow impossible to

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[338] Interview carried out after a tour around Roland Penrose and Lee Miller's home, Farley Farm, in East Sussex on 4 September 2010. Unpublished script included in the Appendix on pages 635-648. The Roland Penrose Collection, most of which is now part of the National Gallery of Modern Art in Edinburgh, is one of the most important collections of Surrealist art and documents in the world.

avoid.[339] His Surrealist and free-spirited life proved liberating in this sense. Surrealism freed him not only from the constraining atmosphere of his father's pictorial academicism, but also from a morally repressive conception of sexuality. Nevertheless, Penrose's character was in many ways shaped by his Quaker upbringing, much of which is to thank for his conciliatory disposition, his unassuming non-conformism and his unconditional pacifism, all of which proved essential in his becoming the unseen-to-the-public leading figure of the Surrealist movement in Britain. He devoted his whole life to the promotion of modern art, from young artists to established masters, and founded, together with Herbert Read, E.L.T. Mesens and others, the Institute of Contemporary Art (I.C.A.) in London in 1946. His death in 1984 meant the loss, not only of one of the most brilliant art scholars of the twentieth century, but also of one of the very few true Surrealist spirits in Britain. His last collage, which he premonitorily titled *The Last One*, dates from 1984, and his last poems, which include "Crack Down" and "This is the End of the Road" were written in the early 1980s, which shows that he was a Surrealist until the very end.[340]

Early in the 1920s, the University of Cambridge became, in spite of its remoteness from the Avant-Garde circles on the continent, a sort of springboard for a series of artists who would later become some of the most relevant figures in British Surrealism in the thirties. Penrose's years at Cambridge (like those of Hugh Sykes Davies, Humphrey Jennings and Julian Trevelyan) were a catalyst for his artistic quest for *the modern* which, he soon learned, was not to be found there. However, it was his Cambridge years as an Architecture student that in a way developed his flair for working behind the scenes, as he made use of his creative abilities as the designer of the new cover for the Queens' College journal, *The Dial* (1906-1953), as well as of the costumes and scenery for the representations of the Marlowe Society. The generally myopic and artistically deadened world of Cambridge was blissfully counteracted by informal meetings with John Maynard Keynes, Manny Forbes and Roger Fry, who were crucial in

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[339] For further biographical information see Roland Penrose's autobiography, *Scrapbook* (1981), Antony Penrose's *Roland Penrose, the Friendly Surrealist* (2001) and the unpublished script of my interview with Antony Penrose, "New Insights Into the Poetics and Politics of Roland Penrose" (2010), included in the Appendix to this study.

[340] The dates for Roland Penrose's last poems are not exact for, with the exception of two poems which were published in the catalogue of the exhibition of his collages at the Gardner Arts Centre in Brighton ("From a Bedroom Window" and "The Wheel of Misfortune"), the rest of them remain unpublished and the dates are mostly approximate. They are kept in the Roland Penrose Archive, The Dean Gallery, Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, Edinburgh. Archive Reference GMA A35/1/1/RPA466.

Penrose's final decision to go to Paris and meet the "magic names" (Penrose 1981: 27) that had become so frequently associated with modernity (Picasso among them).[341]

During his years in France (roughly from 1922 to 1935), Penrose established friendships with some of the key members of the modern movement, such as Yanko Varda, Georges Braque and Man Ray. Yanko Varda and the Surrealist poet Valentine Boué, who would later become Penrose's wife, were decisive in Penrose's approach to Surrealism, and in the late 1920s, he was already part of a militant group of Surrealists which included André Breton, André Masson, Tristan Tzara, Joan Miró and Salvador Dalí; among his closest allies were Paul Éluard and Max Ernst. The influence of Valentine Boué was, in spite of their failed marriage, crucial in Penrose's development of magic concepts in his poetry. Boué's interest in the esoteric found its way into Penrose's lines on many occasions, although Penrose may be better described as cynical in these matters. His work, especially his poetry, was subject to Boué's powerful and magic influence: during a trip to Egypt in 1929, Boué and Penrose studied Oriental mysticism and alchemy with the Spanish mystic Galarza (whom they would meet again in 1933 in India). On their return, Penrose brought a small eroded stone from the desert as a souvenir which Max Ernst kept and worshipped as a sort of Philosopher's Stone and a Surrealist *objet trouvé*. The emergence of the magical element in Penrose's poetry was reinforced by his friendship with Max Ernst, whose alchemical work and magic compositions, especially *Histoire naturelle* (1926), had had a great impact on him.[342] Joan Miró, on the other hand, was also an important influence on Penrose's transcendental conception of space: "He [Miró] is almost the shaman, the witch-doctor in his strange transcendental myth. So many of his images are based on the ladder, the ladder of escape, which is not just shirking things. It's escape into another world of vision and thought" (Penrose and Young 1977: 8)

Early in the 1930s, and prior to his return to England in 1935, Penrose was already deeply immersed in the official programme of the French Surrealist Group. He attended many of their meetings and joined in their activities, including a small part which he played in Luis Buñuel's film *L'Age d'Or* (1930) and the funding of both Ernst's collage novel *Une semaine de bonté* (1934) and Robert Bresson's first film *Affaires Publiques* (1934). Well equipped with the artistic stimulation of the French artists and writers, a fully-developed Surrealist sensibility, magic inspiration and lifelong friendships, Penrose moved back to England in 1935, not before

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[341] In a 1977 interview with Alan Young, published in *PN Review*, Penrose recalled Forbes as "a strange, rather mad and wonderful character" (5), the only one at Cambridge with a real interest in the British and European Avant-Garde.

[342] For an analysis of Ernst's influence on the Surrealist writings of David Gascoyne and George Barker see pages 324-326 and 374-375.

the chance encounter with David Gascoyne took place, the definitive detonator of the Surrealist revolution in Britain.

Although several publications had made the British public slightly aware of Surrealism, it was Roland Penrose who, in the quarterly *Axis* (1935-1937), veiledly announced the gestation of the movement in Britain, providing already new insights into a movement that was still to be born.[343] His "Notes on the Ratton Exhibition of North Western American Art, Paris" (1935) showed Penrose's interest in so-called *primitive* cultures: in the ancient representations of weather, the role of magic and the natural elements, in pre-industrial and pre-capitalist societies characterised by the satisfaction of basic needs (which so clearly opposed the commodity structure of modern Western civilisation). Penrose thus familiarised the British public with the key elements of Surrealist theory, all of which would also find its way into his poetry. Behind the seeming naivety of Penrose's sympathetic review, there is a cleverly orchestrated strategy to introduce Surrealism into what was considered a strictly Abstractionist publication, and the next issue of *Axis* (spring 1936) already contained the first favourable review of Gascoyne's *Survey* (1935), also written by Penrose. Nevertheless, as it has been argued in the chapter devoted to the Surrealist image, Abstract Art and Surrealism had several points in common, and *Axis* was only Abstractionist in theory: like Herbert Read, Penrose was capable of understanding better the connections between Abstract art and Surrealism, and could see that those that were hailed as pure Abstractionists (conspicuously Henry Moore, Joan Miró and Pablo Picasso) had long before crossed over the fine line that separated them from Surrealism, or simply oscillated between one and the other. Also in November 1935, Penrose wrote a letter to *The Listener* in reply to Douglas Lord's criticism of Surrealism as a movement with *no future* (Lord 1935: 811-812). Although Lord's letter focused eminently on Cubism and non-figurative art, his mention of Surrealism was enough to trigger a reply from Penrose who, so far, was one of the very few public voices in Britain sympathetic to the French movement. Penrose's reply already reveals the embryonic stages of the London Exhibition, as well as an understanding between him and Herbert Read:

> there has been no opportunity for the London public to judge for itself as to the merits
> of this movement as a whole [. . .] in Paris the Super-realists continue to do more
> than any other group of intellectuals to open up new possibilities for painting as well
> as the other arts by revolutionising existing values and testing the depths of human

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[343] Central in the early introduction of Surrealist theory to British literary and artistic circles were the Paris journals *This Quarter* (1925-1932) and *transition* (1927-1938), Herbert Read's study *Art Now* (1933), Charles Madge's article "Surrealism for the English" (1933), Hugh Sykes Davies's essay "Homer and Vico" (1934) and David Gascoyne's *A Short Survey of Surrealism* (1935).

consciousness. It would be as foolish to say that there is no future for Super-realism as that science has come to the end of its task; in fact, in both domains the end is only possible owing to the failings of the individual –the field of research is limitless. Super-realism is the first attempt to explore and systematise with critical sincerity the process of artistic creation in the light of modern psychology. It stands to reason that such an effort is not likely to find itself without a future. [. . .] it would be very helpful if a retrospective exhibition of Super-realist painting could be arranged in London. (Penrose 1935: 932-933)

Thus, London was gradually getting ready for the 1936 International Surrealist Exhibition. Penrose's role was decisive in the successful outcome of what was described in the press as an *outrageous* event. Through his contacts and friendships in France, he acted as the link between isolated Britain and the continent and, whereas Breton and Éluard arranged the loans from the French and Spanish artists, Roland Penrose and Herbert Read were in charge of selecting the autochthonous exhibitors, which was not an easy task, for Surrealism had barely reached Britain at the time and, therefore, whoever was a Surrealist at the time, was not consciously so. Artists who, like Eileen Agar, had been working under the dictates of the unconscious genuinely considered their inspiration to be of a personal and subjective kind. Most of them found their inclusion in the Group enhanced the advancement of their work in a definite direction which they already shared. As had happened in Spain and elsewhere, Surrealism in Britain was, so to speak, in the air, but artists and writers had been working independently, and the movement required a certain degree of structuring and organisation in order to spread its subversive message more effectively. Penrose and Read's task of selection and organisation, although not always sufficiently acknowledged, was of major importance, not only for the institutionalisation of the movement in Britain, but also for the development of a truly British Surrealist aesthetic which would still remain faithful to the movement's original tenets. Penrose had an acute Surrealist sensibility and a remarkable visionary capacity which allowed him to gather a vast array of magnificent works of art throughout his life. This ability was crucial for the successful assessment and selection of the works and artists that would take part in the London Exhibition. Despite the obviousness of this mere fact, Penrose's own discretion is still noticeable in his *Scrapbook* as he withdraws again behind the scenes, giving the others the credit and central position which he never thought he had occupied, unpretentiously content that Surrealism had finally reached Britain: "Centred round Herbert Read, gentle, sensitive, eloquent and an immensely intelligent scholar and poet, a small group came to life which included Humphrey Jennings, Henry Moore, Paul Nash, Hugh Sykes Davies,

Eileen Agar, all stimulated by the visionary presence of the young David [Gascoyne]" (Penrose 1981: 60).

Penrose's central role within the movement was reinforced by the fact that his house at 21 Downshire Hill became the main headquarters of the Group, a frequent meeting point for the Surrealists in London. Many of the decisions concerning the development of the movement in England before and after the Exhibition were made at this address, including the signing of the *Fourth International Surrealist Bulletin* on 7 July 1936. Downshire Hill also became a sort of temporary residence for the European Surrealists during their visits to London, which furthered Penrose's hosting skills: E.L.T. Mesens, André Breton and Paul Éluard stayed there at different intervals during 1936, and many others would also gather there in the war years, as they would later on in Penrose's definitive home, Farley Farm, in Sussex.

In 1936 Penrose had been introduced to Picasso by Éluard. This would be one of the most crucial meetings in Penrose's life, both from a professional and a personal perspective.[344] It would not be too far-fetched to suggest that this friendship shaped in many ways Penrose's vision of the Spanish Civil War, which had broken out just a few days after the London Exhibition's closure, and that it accounts for much of Penrose's deep personal involvement in a series of political activities in aid of Spain during those years. Prior to his trip to Catalonia in the autumn of 1936, Picasso gave Penrose several contacts in Barcelona, and a *recado* to call on his mother. Back in England, Penrose and Picasso collaborated in different acts in support of the Spanish Republic, such as the Spain & Culture meeting at the Royal Albert Hall in 1937 or the tour of Guernica around England in 1938. Again, Penrose's name is difficult to find on the public programmes.

When Roland Penrose and Lee Miller met at a costume party in Paris in June 1937, little did he know then that that was not their first encounter, for he was already well acquainted with Miller's fragmented anatomy, even if only at a visual level. Miller had been Man Ray's former muse and lover and, as such, she had become the obsessive object of many of his creations. As early as September 1932, a drawing of her eye in Man Ray's *Object to Be Destroyed* (original of 1923, retitled in 1958 as *Indestructible Object*) appeared in the Surrealist issue of *This Quarter* in 1932. Later on, in 1936, her sensuous lips had dominated one of the walls at the London Exhibition in Man Ray's huge painting *Observatory Time* (or *The Lovers*, 1934). Miller and Penrose became the perfect Surrealist companions, and remained so until

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[344] For a detailed and accurate chronology of the beginnings of their friendship see Elizabeth Cowling's "The Foundation of the Friendship, 1936-1939" in the exhibition catalogue *Mirar de Reojo. Roland Penrose y el Surrealismo* (2008): 163-207.

her death in 1977. Many of Penrose's major paintings, collages and poems of the thirties and beyond contain references, explicit or otherwise, to Miller or to experiences they both shared.

Throughout the thirties, Penrose took active part in several exhibitions of Surrealism in Britain and France, such as the Surrealism Exhibition at the Gordon Fraser Gallery in Cambridge (1937), the Surrealist Objects and Poems Exhibition in London (1937), The Realism/Surrealism Exhibition in Gloucester (1938) or the Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme in Paris (1938), just to name a few. As was normally the case, Penrose organised or helped organise all of them, contributing with paintings, collages and objects of his own as well as with works from his already bulging collection. In 1938, as political disillusion ran sharp among the British Surrealist ranks (the Spanish Republic was being crushed by the Fascist forces, and the imminence of a second international conflict was being felt), Penrose led again a crucial part in encouraging Surrealist activity in Britain as he took on the London Gallery in Cork Street, which became the official gallery of the Group, and the publication of a journal, the *London Bulletin* (1938-1940), its official publicising organ. As usual, Penrose remained in the shade of all this hectic activity for most of the time, leaving Mesens at the forefront as the manager of the gallery and as the main editor of the bulletin. In spite of the fact that Penrose was the major benefactor in both these ventures, he managed to remain conspicuously absent from both, only appearing occasionally as assistant editor in the magazine's credits, and contributing with anonymous speeches that were read by others at the opening of exhibitions.[345]

Roland Penrose gave himself a bad reputation as a writer. All his speeches, the ones that he did deliver, begin with an apology for trying to express with words what he would rather express with paint, but his *captatio benevolentiae* was a sincere gesture, for his severe dyslexia prevented him from being at ease with the written word. He nevertheless was a captivating communicator and a penetrating poet. The following analysis of his political and poetic texts shows the centrality of Penrose's position within British Surrealism, as they clearly outline the development of the Group's aesthetic and political stance in the years leading to the Second World War, even if those texts still remain, very much like the poet himself, behind the curtain.

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[345] In his autobiography *Indigo Days*, Julian Trevelyan recalls that "The [London Gallery] opened with an exhibition by Magritte for which a party was given one evening. For the occasion Roland had written a little script that was to be spoken by a blind explorer in a topee, and I was chosen for the role. 'I am an explorer and I have been in search of sight,' I began as I came tapping my way into the room" (Trevelyan 1957: 73).

1.2. Roland Penrose from Pacifism to Camouflage.

If only one name had to be chosen to represent the spirit of 1930s British Surrealism, it would certainly be that of Roland Penrose. A true Surrealist in spirit, who lived as such until the end of his life, Roland Penrose epitomises like no other member of the Group the true character of the Surrealist movement in Britain. In many aspects he can be rightly considered an atypical Surrealist. He was unconventionally amiable and extensively conciliatory, which was a rarity in a movement marked by unyielding antagonisms; his controlled and orderly ways contrasted with the vociferous nature of many Surrealists; his personal and artistic treatment of woman differed from the misogynist and objectifying positions of many of his fellow Surrealists; finally, Penrose never embraced a political creed which was exceptional in its firm resistance to party affiliation, whereas other members of the Group were conspicuous in their eager approach to Communist positions (especially Hugh Sykes Davies and Roger Roughton) or to genuine Anarchism (like Herbert Read). Nevertheless, it is Penrose's more general (more tolerant as well) attitude to politics that is so relevant in the context of British Surrealism, for the distinctness of his position becomes representative of the very peculiarities of the British Group within the more general framework of European *Surrealisms*: as we saw in the second chapter of the present study, the ideology of the British Surrealist Group was not static, but dynamic, and it frequently incorporated contradictory views and positions, something which was also reflected in these writers' works. The development of Penrose's ideological stance, which I define here as a movement from pacifism to camouflage, serves significantly to outline the progressive evolution of the Group's politics throughout the thirties: as I have already stated, the Group evolved from a sort of Socialist pacifism to a strategic advocacy of war and, finally, towards Anarchist positions, always retaining a significant degree of ideological tolerance. As will be seen, in the case of Penrose (but also of other British Surrealists who continued their activities after the outbreak of the Second World War, such as Humphrey Jennings and Julian Trevelyan), this evolving ideology was camouflaged under the appearance of unconditional patriotism in seemingly propagandistic art works for the British Establishment in the early war period.

Penrose was simultaneously a revolutionary and a wholehearted pacifist throughout his life. The rebellious side of Surrealism was not lost on him, as remaining a pacifist at such a politically and psychologically distressful time as the thirties was indeed a subversive option. In his texts from the thirties, Penrose defended pacifism and other non-violent means as more effective than war in the revolutionary process. Although many of his contemporaries shared Penrose's practical faith in pacifism, the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War triggered their

gradual abandonment of pacifism as a realistic and feasible position, as they became urgently aware of the shortcomings of pacifism as an effective strategy against the overpowering threat of Fascism. In spite of (or maybe due to) his close experience of the Spanish conflict, Penrose remained a committed pacifist until 1939. Franco's victory over the already receding Republican forces would bring, Penrose knew, disastrous consequences for the individual liberties in Spain. The example was already set by many of his Spanish artist friends in exile or already annihilated, physically or psychologically. This disturbed profoundly Penrose's deeply-rooted pacifist stance. In a letter to Herbert Read of January 1939 (around the time of the fall of Barcelona), he transmitted his despair and disillusionment with the left which, in its self-destructive and self-dividing activities, had proved ineffectual in the fight against the advancement of Fascism, and showed his support of the more insurgent line of Read's revolutionary Anarchism.[346] The seemingly unstoppable expansionism of Nazi imperialism culminated in the German occupation of Poland and the subsequent outbreak of the Second World War in September 1939, which marked the beginning of Penrose's active involvement, as a civilian, in activities directly related to warfare. However, he remained a Surrealist and, ideologically at least, a pacifist in disguise. This was the beginning of his camouflage period.

As with every other aspect of Surrealism, Penrose took active part in political matters and, as opposed to other members of the British Surrealist Group, he did take on the task of writing political texts and delivering political speeches. Penrose's political facet is virtually unknown to the public (as opposed to, for example, Roughton's more vociferous involvement in politics) as his texts never reached print. In the late thirties, Penrose wrote at least four texts in which he, as the representative of the British Surrealist Group, addressed the political situation of the time from a clearly stated Surrealist position.[347] Although there is no specific reference as to the occasions for which these texts were written, it is probable that "What's your enlistment number?" (the only of these three texts that bears a title) was initially conceived as a political speech to be delivered in front of an audience. The two untitled texts are first drafts, composed mainly of annotations and scattered points, likely to have been used towards lectures on the political significance of Surrealism. The final text, "Attitude to Politics", is a speech probably delivered at the Artists' International Congress organised by the A.I.A. in April 1937.

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[346] Letter kept in the Roland Penrose Archive. Archive Reference GMA A35/1/1/RPA718.
[347] These texts are kept in the Roland Penrose Archive under the heading "Writings on Politics and Surrealism". Archive Reference GMA A35/1/1/RPA642.

"What's your enlistment number?" is significantly prior to "Attitude to Politics", and probably dates from early 1937. Although both texts express similar ideas regarding the current social structure and the importance of preserving individual freedom, there are basic differences that help us establish the chronology of both texts. In the first place, "Attitude to Politics" is a much longer text, probably a second or third draft, whereas "What's your enlistment number?" may be seen as an embryonic version containing ideas which were further developed in "Attitude to Politics". Also, there is a main distinction in tenor and, whereas the former text seems fierce and defiant (responding to a state of dissent and resistance), the latter is reflective and composed (responding to a state of awareness and endurance). The development from one state to the other can only be granted by time (the reversed movement would be incongruous with Penrose's own political actions).

A desire to define the Surrealist *attitude* to the current political situation pervades "What's your enlistment number?" Nevertheless, as the title suggests, the text focuses eminently on what Penrose sees as one of the most dangerous of the early consequences of an armed international conflict: forced enlistment of the civilian population. Although he observes the formation of a spontaneous (extramilitary) People's Front as a remote possibility, Penrose considers that refusal to enlist in any sort of military organisation is the only way for the revolution to be viable: "If the means of serving in a spontaneously formed people's army are not forthcoming refusal to enlist in any form of organisation even in these allotted to conscientious objectors is our only path" (Penrose 1937d: unpaged). This kind of frontal opposition to any sort of military action and Penrose's ardent defence of non-violent strategies is indicative of the author's outright defence of a pacifist, albeit revolutionary and dissident, stance. However, Penrose was aware of the implications that the term "pacifism" had for a 1937 audience, and therefore distances the Surrealist pacifist stance from "the other brands", the counterfeit pacifism that came to be associated with the British Government's Non-Intervention policy. The underlying idea is that the Surrealists are pacifists because they do not want to take part in the war that is gestating, because it is a war for preservation: preservation of the socio-economic structure of the capitalist/imperialist countries and preservation of a deadened bourgeois culture which does not express or accommodate the needs of the modern individual. It is an imperialist war which, whatever the outcome, will not destroy the values on which imperialism rests. The Surrealists would need to fight from a dissident platform of unorganised forces. In his reference to the Spanish workers of July 1936, Penrose sees the "organisation of indiscipline" as the only way to subvert the military organisation of the population and to stop the rearmament process, two telling symptoms of the impending

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war.[348] The call to mass disobedience that the Catalan Anarchists propounded in the early months of the Civil War connected with the Surrealist interest in mass consciousness and collective action. Pacifism through disobedience becomes Penrose's (and the Group's) main political aim at this point, only to be achieved through strikes, non-cooperation and an anti-recruiting campaign, which became vividly enacted in the May Day demonstrations of 1937, where the Surrealists carried a huge banner with a quotation from Blake inscribed on it, "A warlike state cannot create", which provided a literary counterpoint to the more functional messages of workers and trade unionists.[349]

Penrose's speech "Attitude to Politics" acts as a companion to the pamphlet *We Ask Your Attention* (1937), issued by the British Surrealist Group on the occasion of the British Artists' Congress and Exhibition.[350] Although it has been argued that the issuing of *We Ask Your Attention* implied an evolution of the Group's attitude towards pacifism, Penrose's texts provide a new context for analysing the political significance of this pamphlet, which is in fact a redefinition of the terms in which the concept "pacifism" is to be understood.[351] Thus, a clear distinction is drawn between pacifism as a personal ideological position (individual pacifism as a trigger of revolutionary and dissident activity), and pacifism as a political subterfuge (institutional pacifism as an institutional lie implemented by the enforcement of the Non-Intervention Agreement, the 1870 Foreign Enlistment Act, revived in January 1937, and Baldwin's rearmament programme). Through the charge imposed on the British Government of "fascism by deceit", *We Ask Your Attention* functioned as an eye-opener for those who still believed the pacifist lie. The significance of this long political manifesto mainly lies in the fact that it, like Penrose's own speech, marks a crucial point in the development of a defined Surrealist ideology in Britain. Michel Remy has used the term "maturity" in order to describe this new period (Remy 1999: 111), which is appropriate for a number of reasons. In the first place, this is the longest and most significant political declaration issued by the Group in the thirties and, as is noted in the chapter devoted to the ideology of the British Surrealism, it shows the Group's autonomy within the broader context of the A.I.A.'s unitary actions. The pamphlet expresses a certain anxiety and the urgent need to reject the official policy of Non-Intervention, which they considered, not as an expedient strategy in the context of the Spanish Civil War, but as a political philosophy attempting to isolate politics from the individual. This

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[348] This was the Anarchist motto that most attracted the attention of Roland Penrose and the Soviet Ilya Ehrenburg in their respective visits to Barcelona in 1936.

[349] The year of this demonstration is indeed 1937, and not 1938, as it is sometimes believed.

[350] Organised by the Artists' International Association in April-May 1937.

[351] This is, for instance, Michel Remy's view in *Surrealism in Britain* (1999): 109.

shows the Group's desire to re-politicise the role, not only of the artist, but of the common individual as well, in international affairs. By doing so, they placed Surrealism right at the centre of political action in Britain, both asserting Surrealism as a deeply committed political movement (in the light of the Communist attacks against their purported aloofness) and furthering their involvement in the Spanish conflict. It is in the context of the Non-Intervention Agreement that their rejection of pacifism is to be understood. They did not reject pacifism as such (i.e. their attitude still remained a pacifist one in so far as they did not endorse an armed conflict), but rather they denounced the political instrumentalisation of pacifism through Non-Intervention as a cover to lull the collective fear of a second international conflict. Thus, they rejected the political counterfeit pacifism of Non-Intervention, for it concealed, they understood, a series of pacts and concessions to Fascist countries and an unprecedentedly rapid process of rearmament, which actually contributed to further violence, instead of hindering it. A similar attitude is found in Penrose's speech, where pacifism is not yet entirely abandoned as an individual option. It is in this sense that the political attitude of the British Surrealist Group at this point may be understood as mature in their understanding of political or institutional pacifism as an endorsement of violence and war, which as committed pacifists, they still rejected.

Although the external note on "Attitude to Politics" states that the text was written "circa 1938", there are internal references in the text that confirm an earlier date, which would coincide with the celebration of the Artists' International Congress: Penrose's stress on the need for the joint actions of the Communist Party and the Independent Labour Party towards the revolution indicates that he is writing at a moment in which the liaisons between both parties are endangered. The launching of the Unity Campaign and the publication of the Unity Manifesto in January 1937 seemed to turn the previously failed idea of a United Front into a feasible reality. Nevertheless, unity started to founder in spring 1937, when international awareness of the Moscow Trials and the Stalinist annihilation of the Spanish Anarchists in Catalonia was rapidly undermining the relations between both parties. In spite of Penrose's inborn distrust of Stalinist policy, in this text he still supports the alliance with the Communist Party (largely ruled by Moscow) and deems it necessary for a successful revolution. It was probably at this time of crisis for the Unity Campaign that Penrose felt the need to support united political action as the only means to fight Fascism. In the spring of 1937, this attitude remains coherent within Penrose's, and the British Surrealist Group's, ideological development.

The fact that Penrose felt the need to define his political position as a Surrealist, to the point of producing this speech, at a time when the Group had already issued the broadsheet *We Ask Your Attention*, is symptomatic of his concern regarding the generalised distrust towards the Surrealist commitment to the Communist programme. The acrimony of several members of the A.I.A., namely the supporters of Socialist Realism, was already evident in the pages of *Left Review* (1934-1938), and would be further exacerbated when, after a review in the January 1938 issue of the *A.I.A. Newsheet* which attacked the indecipherability of Picasso's *Dream and Lie of Franco* (1937), the Surrealists threatened to abandon the A.I.A. (Morris and Radford 1983: 43). After several disputes which have become legendary, such as Breton and Ehrenburg's public strife in 1935, the Communist distrust effectively crystallised in Breton's definitive rupture with Communism in July 1938, when he and Leon Trotsky (who initially signed as Diego Rivera) issued the Manifesto "Pour un Art Révolutionnaire Indépendant", which was published in French in the October 1938 issue of *London Bulletin* (in English in the next issue), with Penrose as the bulletin's assistant editor.[352] In this scenario, it is interesting to note that Penrose's speech "Attitude to Politics" was not in fact an attempt to clarify his (or the Group's) political stance, but rather an attempt to overcome the internal divisions within the left, and affirm their support of a United Front in collaboration with the Communist Party. This was still considered feasible at the time (spring 1937) but, as we know already, this attitude would be transient, as the Surrealists became gradually aware of the criminal policy of Soviet Stalinism.

In his speech, Penrose still envisages the possibility of some form of non-military action in order to put a stop to the looming threat of war. Conscription remains a main concern for him. His experience of World War I with the First British Red Cross Ambulance Unit in Italy when he was only eighteen probably informed his visions of a dreaded time of mandatory militarisation which would erase individuality. The question of the forced military enrolment of the civilian population was also dealt with in *We Ask Your Attention*. This shows the extent to which the Surrealists considered individualism and autonomy as necessary conditions for the individual to be, for the artist to create, conditions which could not be granted in a state of war. On a different level, this idea also connects with their categorical rejection of the formulas imposed by orthodox Communism (in many ways also those of orthodox Surrealism), which hindered the artist's individualism. In his lecture "Exuberance is beauty" (1936), Penrose had already criticised the Communist idea of poetry as craftsmanship:

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[352] See the events that took place during the celebration of the 1935 International Congress of Writers for the Defence of Culture in Paris on pages 130-134.

There can be no doubt that of recent years the artist has been hard pressed. Menaced on all sides –by economic changes which have not helped him to preserve his position of independence, by political changes which have menaced his freedom of expression, by moral changes which have sought to restrict his individuality and class him as a craftsman.[353] (Penrose 1936c: unpaged)

Thus Penrose stressed the need to work outside the organised forces of the state ("organisation of indiscipline") as the only way to oppose the process of conscription which had already started with the British rearmament programme. Penrose's main concern was the loss of individuality that an armed conflict would bring through forced military recruitment, at a point when non-combatant tasks and civilian volunteering would no longer serve the defence of peace. Curiously enough, in his reference to camouflage Penrose was foreseeing what would be his central political activity during the war years.

Through a reference to Ronald Kidd's speech at the opening meeting of the A.I.A. Congress, Penrose elaborated a rationale of the Surrealist intervention in political matters. Kidd had referred to the early symptoms of war, among which the artist's gradual loss of freedom was one to be feared, as it would inevitably create the perfect breeding ground for Fascism in Britain (the sudden reinforced conservatism of the British government was probably in Penrose's mind). In setting the example of what had happened elsewhere to artists and poets (the reference to Spain, Lorca and probably the Tenerife Surrealists is implicit here), Penrose showed just how much was at stake for the artist. Although he urged artists to take up action that is *distinct* from their ordinary artistic occupation, he was also aware of the difficulties that accompanied artists in their decision to become politically militant: the inexorable contradiction of being naturally unfitted for political roles while, on the other, more deeply in contact with the collective consciousness.[354] The artist's natural and necessary contact with society (it must be remembered that the modern artist, as opposed to the decadent artist, was capable of expressing the ideas of his time) conflicts with the need, established by the material conditions, to exercise a political role which, paradoxically, hindered his contact with and understanding of the individual (note Penrose's reference to "collective hysteria", which encodes a reference to Surrealism as a more accurate form of knowledge).

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[353] Unpublished lecture of unknown date, probably 1936. Archive Reference: GMA A35/1/1RPA642/5. Similar arguments appeared in the collective pamphlet "To the Workers of England", issued by the Surrealist Group in England in late 1936.

[354] The idea that direct political action on the part of the artist was necessary is also present in *We Ask Your Attention*.

In this state of affairs, Penrose rejected the conservative and liberal political programmes, based on the preservation of a social structure which was gradually leading the western world to war, and he recovered the original Marxist programme in an attempt to restore the philosophy on which Surrealism was initially based. Thus, by recovering Marx's watchword, "wider consciousness", as a tendency rather than as a dogma, Penrose was also implicitly rejecting extremist positions which might lead to an equally distrustful dictatorial stance, and which only contributed to diminishing the left. This was indeed very much in accord with the character of the ideology of British Surrealism, which resisted accommodation in well-defined totalising positions and becoming a form of false consciousness in itself. The interest in achieving a "wider consciousness" also connected with the Surrealist quest for continuous exploration of the human condition, bringing the Surrealism closer to original Marxist tenets. By defending Surrealism as the artistic application of the theories of both Marx and Freud Penrose made a clear statement as to his own position regarding the internal scissions within the left: he defended the idea that a more tolerant policy within the United Front was required, stating that

> There are differences of opinion even among Marxists and I shall refrain from making any distinctions between the parties of the United Front. Some of us may see salvation in one –others prefer the teachings of another– they are, however, all working for the same revolution of the proletariat which must come sooner or later, violently or by degrees, and we consider this to be the necessary condition for cooperation, deploring any friction which may hinder development of the campaign. (Penrose 1937a: unpaged)

After the days of the London Exhibition and the derisive commentaries in *Left Review*, the main accusation that the Surrealists had to face from the Communists had to do with the fact that the proletariat could not relate to their art, mainly because of its bourgeois origin. Penrose showed his awareness of the Communist attacks, although he also understood that it was the current social structure that had led the artist to rely on the patronage of the bourgeoisie, something which could not possibly happen in the classless society that he defended. Through this defence of a classless society Penrose got closer to the Anarchist stance which he would eventually support, and advocated the artist's unity with the proletariat in his endorsement of Lautréamont's dictum that poetry should be made by all.

Unity does become in fact a major concern in Penrose's understanding of leftist politics for, as was said before, his speech "Attitude to Politics" initially served as a clarification of the Surrealist political stance regarding the need to take a definite position about the

discrepancies among Marxists and the splits within the United Front. Penrose's speech, by alluding directly to these strains within the left, becomes a faithful document and an unparalleled witness to the conflicting situation in which the British Surrealist Group found itself. Penrose's advocation of cooperation and collaboration among the parties of the United Front already placed him well within the Trotsky field of influence, and implicitly denounced the actions of those who hindered such unity (not only Labour Socialism but also Stalinist Communism). It must be remembered that the British Surrealists and other writers such as Cecil Day-Lewis were particularly critical of the Labour Party for frustrating the attempts to form a People's Front in Britain; on the other hand, during their trip to Catalonia, Penrose and Gascoyne were genuinely sympathetic towards the Catalonian Anarchists, who were being suppressed by the Communists. Although Penrose's trip to Spain had an almost definitive impact on his perception of Soviet policy implementation, it would not be until 1938 that he publically condemned the Moscow-based Stalinist control of purported dissident Communists, whose responsibility for the lack of unity within the broader Marxist doctrine he only implicitly suggested in 1937. Finally, Penrose's defence of the autonomy of the artist and his rejection of propagandistic means as the only alternative available to the artist is a clear statement against the requirements of the Comminterm, and an affirmation of Surrealist tenets (liberation of the unconscious, the poet as visionary, revolution as a psychological process):

> the artist, while realising his responsibility in this domain [politics], should be less than ever ready to renounce his prerogatives in the field of expression. Artists and poets, for we can make no distinction between them in the sense that they are both visionaries of a new life, know that they cannot obey formulas –their work is a direct exploration of human desires and possibilities– they will be the first to sense the necessary changes that must be brought about and the first to criticise any shortcomings –they will always be in advance of their times– revolutionaries in ideas. But it is not necessarily by direct propaganda that these ideas can be brought to life. Valuable as it is, the weapon of the propagandist is rapid but superficial in its effect. (Penrose 1937a: unpaged)

Thus, whereas it is understood that the poet must intervene in the process of re-politicisation of modern life, he must not do so through the politicisation of poetry. On the contrary, poets are asked to intervene as poets, and not as politicians, without renouncing their individual expression, and without committing themselves to external impositions that would annihilate their capacity for subversion. The stimulation of desire and the realisation of dreams (i.e. the psychological liberation of the individual) as the means to carry out the revolution imply that

the process must be reversed, and that it is the poetisation of politics that the poet must achieve. Penrose's speech effectively echoes and develops some of the ideas contained in the pamphlet *We Ask Your Attention*. Comparing both texts, it becomes clear that they were written around the same time. At this point, a pacifist stance is still held, as the actions of the Surrealist Group are eminently orientated towards the avoidance of an armed conflict. Also, although there is a gradual overture to Anarchist positions, the alliance of the British Group with the Communist Party is still considered a necessary political stance for the success of the revolution, at a time when the relationship between Communism and Surrealism was already deeply troubled on the continent. However, this position is only a transient one, and the urgency of the international political situation would require a further redefinition of the Surrealist position.

The moment of redefinition came at a point between spring and autumn 1938, when Penrose delivered a lecture on the political significance of Surrealist painting at the Realism/Surrealism Debate organised by the A.I.A. The text that is kept in the Roland Penrose Archive is probably a first draft in which the main lines of the new political position are outlined. In his lectures and speeches, Penrose was accustomed to use a slideshow of photographs of paintings that he owned. By the spring of 1938, he had already acquired Surrealist masterpieces such as Picasso's *Nude Woman Lying in the Sun on the Beach* (1932) and *Weeping Woman* (1937) and, in 1937, René Gaffé's collection of well over forty paintings which included Miró's *Head of a Catalan Peasant* (1925) and de Chirico's *The Jewish Angel* (1916). For this lecture, although the actual titles of the paintings used are not provided in the text, the names of the artists reveal Penrose's preferences: Picasso, Miró, Magritte, Moore and Jennings. Also, a reference to Alfred Thornton, a former member of the London Group, whose paintings and drawings of Spain had been on show at the Fine Art Society in London in January-February 1937, shows that Spain still occupied an essential part in the definition of Penrose's political conscience. There are several points in the text that point to a decisive turn in the development of his politics. In the first place, a clear rupture with Soviet politics has taken place, as Russia is, for the first time openly denounced as a Fascist state at war. Although Penrose equates the German and the Soviet cases, his attacks are directed almost exclusively towards the latter, as its enforcement of a strong control policy under the pretence of a Marxist policy poses a main threat to the development of individual freedom in anti-Fascist countries. As early as the spring of 1936, Penrose had echoed Gascoyne's rendering of the discrepancies between the French Surrealists and the Communist Party, and commented: "It appears that the step between revolutionary ideas and their political realisation is a perilous

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one in which it is easy for the ideas to become distorted and abandoned completely by those in power" (Penrose 1936e: 30). In spite of Gascoyne's and Penrose's early, albeit tentative, criticism of Stalinist policy, Gascoyne would become a Communist himself in 1936, whereas Penrose would keep his dissonance low for some time, especially on account of his friendship with Paul Éluard. It must be noted that at this point Surrealism had not officially reached England yet and, although in Paris the disagreements between Surrealists and Communists were evident, it would still take two years and an unbearably repressive Soviet policy for the British Surrealists to publically ditch Stalinist Communism.

Penrose's lecture "Realism/Surrealism" reflects a significant change in the Surrealist attitude towards the role of war, which is, for the first time, seen as unavoidable. In spite of his declared opposition to the totalitarian control over the population that modern warfare would impose, Penrose was forced to redefine drastically his pacifist stance. In his previous speeches and lectures, Penrose's revolutionary attitude, his ardent defence of pacifism and his antimilitary campaign revealed a state of negation which time still allowed. In 1938, a series of factors contributed to Penrose's evolution from revolutionary pacifist to revolutionary strategist. The most decisive of these was probably Surrealism's final rupture with Stalinist politics as a direct consequence of Stalin's implementation of totalitarian measures against artists and writers (the third and most significant of the Moscow show trials, against the *rightists* and the Trotskyites, had taken place in March 1938). In the light of Stalin's repressive policy of control (which further contributed to mutual suspicion between Surrealists and Communists), Breton took the final step towards the definitive rupture with Communist politics in July 1938 with the manifesto "Pour un Art Révolutionnaire Indépendant".[355] The F.I.A.R.I. manifesto was welcomed by the British Surrealists, and this was indicative of the British support of Breton's attitude. Indeed, although the core group of Surrealists decided to *go Trotskyite* and, as has been shown, Penrose himself distrusted Stalinist politics from the outset, his friendship and deep personal alliance with Paul Éluard (who remained pro-Stalin), placed him in a difficult position at the time. As Antony Penrose acknowledges, Penrose probably "had to turn a blind eye to Éluard's politics" (in López 2010: 9), for he valued friendship over political beliefs. Nevertheless, his friendship with Éluard did not prevent, as this lecture shows, his breach with Communism. Whereas he had previously felt that the

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[355] The F.I.A.R.I. (Fédération international pour un art révolutionnaire indépendant) was set up by Breton and Trotsky in 1938 as a sort of popular front for artists and writers who condemned both Fascism and Communism and demanded total freedom in art.

collaboration between the Communist Party and the Independent Labour Party was necessary for the revolutionary process, now he was unyielding in his denunciation of the Soviet regime.

This lecture is also significant as Penrose explored in it the possible nature of the unavoidable conflict which was to come. This was, effectively, Penrose's first attempt to theorise about the international conflict that was gestating, and to delineate possible lines of action for an armed conflict. Thus, Penrose became the first English Surrealist to take active part in theoretical manoeuvring, which anticipated the role that he would later play as a Home Guard camouflage instructor. In his theoretical approach to the international political situation, Penrose envisages two possible conflicts in which Britain may be involved. The natural question that was raised at the time pertained to Britain's political allies, and the only two apparent options were equally disheartening. On the one hand, Chamberlain's policy of Appeasement, through which a series of negotiations with and concessions to Nazi Germany attempted to ensure Britain's imperial status quo, was feared to encourage Fascist ideology on British soil. On the other hand, the alliance with Soviet Communism at this point was considered both unviable (Chamberlain deeply distrusted Soviet politics) and undesirable (Stalinism had already proved as repressive as Nazism). Penrose saw fast-approaching European Fascism as a "more immediate danger", especially since Chamberlain's Appeasement was proving unpopular with public opinion (at the time it was already doubted that it would put a stop to Hitler's imperialist aspirations), as well as with institutional opinion (Anthony Eden, the British Foreign Secretary, had resigned from his post in February 1938, a fact which Penrose mentions in his text).

The possibility of the creation of an anti-Fascist front in conjunction with Russia was, as Roland Penrose acknowledged, unlikely: as early as April 1938, Chamberlain had announced publicly his intention to sign, as part of his Appeasement campaign, a Four-Power Pact in Europe which deliberately excluded the Soviet Union.[356] On May Day 1938, the Surrealists took part in the Trade Unions' parade in Hyde Park. This did not only show the Group's political cohesion, but was an unmistakable sign of their total opposition to Chamberlain's policy which, they knew, would lead to an international armed conflict. In spite of their abhorrence of the "rule of the military and the police", which would imply the total loss of individuality through conscription, they understood that pacifism was no longer a viable political option. The inevitability of an armed conflict pushed them into believing that war could be "the first step to revolution", given that Chamberlain's attempt to preserve the *status quo* of imperialist

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[356] *Evening Post* 125.95 (23 April 1938): 9. It would crystallize in the Munich Agreement of 29 September 1938.

Britain (and therefore of Fascist countries) were subverted, and the motives of war re-directed towards the abolition of the capitalist state.

Thus, Roland Penrose, Julian Trevelyan, and other Surrealists set off on May Day 1938 dressed up as four Chamberlains, wearing masks which F. E. McWilliam had designed, and emulating the Nazi salute, in mocking disapproval of Chamberlain's support of Nazi policy. Under the rallying cry of "Chamberlain must go!" they denounced Britain's fundamental role in the implementation of Non-iIntervention in Spain and Chamberlain's Appeasement Campaign, which would reach its climax in the September 1938 Munich Conference and the signing of the Four-Power Agreement by France, Germany, Italy and Britain.

The prospect of war was gradually shaping the nature of the conflict, which was soon established as an ideological conflict of democracy against Fascism. As had happened with the lie of Non-Intervention before, the mask of ideology served to hide the imperialist motives for the conflict, which was in fact a struggle of conflicting imperialisms. For Penrose, it became clear at the time that, even if Stalin had a similar repressive policy to that of Hitler's, the latter's expansionist policy threatened Britain's status as an imperialist power. Joseph Goebbels's Commission for the disposal of *Entartete Kunst* and its implementation of highly repressive measures against artists that were considered "degenerate" and a threat to the German state, forced many of these artists into exile. Around November 1938, a group of German artists sent an appeal to Roland Penrose, who immediately contacted several British artists, Paul Nash and Herbert Read among them, and they set up the Artists Refugee Committee, in conjunction with other organisations, such as the A.I.A. A subcommittee to assist Spanish refugee artists was also formed. Among the very few Spanish artists that they managed to bring over to Britain was Joan Miró's teacher at the Escola D'Art in Barcelona Francisco Galí (Radford 1987: 105).

Penrose's last political speech during the 1930s probably dates from 1939. Also a first draft, and the shortest of his political texts of this period, it contains an idea which becomes central in his understanding of international politics, and which also helps clarify the Surrealist position regarding British international policy in the late 1930s. The Surrealist attacks on the Non-Intervention Committee set up in London in 1936 had had an ideological basis. Since the situation in Spain was initially considered an isolated event which did not interfere with British international politics, the ideological distress of the left (including the Surrealists) was thought accessory. In 1939, when the Nazi advance in Europe seemed unstoppable and war was

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inevitable, the simplistic idea of the Spanish War as a conflict of opposing ideologies had already been propagated in the press. As war approached, a similar instrumentalisation of political ideology took place, and people were made to believe that war was not only unavoidable but necessary, in order to defeat the evil of Fascism. The war had become ideological.

Through their previous pacifist position, the Surrealists showed that they had long abandoned the idea of war as an ideological confrontation. They did not want to fight a war for the preservation of a decadent capitalist system, of "the crumbing monuments of the past nor the imperfect edifices of the present" (Penrose 1937d: unpaged). As pacifism was gradually abandoned, they rejected the motives for Chamberlain's Appeasement because they also implied preservation, this time, of the *status quo* of imperialist nations. Through their developing political attitude, the Surrealists showed their unconditional adherence to the cause of revolution. In this last of his political speeches, Penrose presented an outright rejection of war as the result of opposing ideologies. His definition of "the next war" as "psychotical" (Penrose 1939e: unpaged) is indicative of his lucid political understanding of the international situation at a time of intense ideological manipulation and deceit. Penrose understood war as the outcome of the psychosis of European imperialist powers (namely France and Britain) that felt the stability of their political and economic status threatened by the Nazi occupation of European territories. Under the deceitful appearance of an ideological war (a war to defend the ideology of democracy over Fascism), they were actually fighting for imperialist dominance. In spite of the constant attempts to turn the Spanish War into a kind of ideological or religious crusade, Penrose's own experience in Barcelona provided him with a deeper understanding beyond this simplistic and mediated vision of the conflict. The fact that Stalinist Communism and Fascism had become almost indistinguishable from one another made it all too clear for him that the Second World War would not be a conflict of opposing ideologies. The sort of ideological propaganda that was enhanced by British politicians in order to secure public favour forced the Surrealists to adopt a definite ideological *and* moral position. The idea of a moral revolution was also present in a previous lecture entitled "Why I am a Painter" (1938):

> The Surrealists have attempted to stress the fact that the artist has a duty to tackle the
> social problems for which he is particularly fitted. Rather than becoming a militant
> political agitator, his approach should be from the moral and psychological point of

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view. No revolution can be complete unless it is moral as well as economic.[357] (Penrose 2001: 32)

Thus Penrose did not only defend the need to expand social consciousness, following Marx's materialist propositions, but also to awaken awareness of the self through the liberation of unconscious repressions, according to Surrealism's original Freudian postulates.

Penrose's open distrust of party politics and his resistance to support established political creeds may seem at first sight a sign of his individualistic character. However, as we have seen, this was characteristic of the ideological stance of British Surrealism as a whole, and some of the members of the Group who were strong supporters of party ideologies, such as Hugh Sykes Davies, Roger Roughton and Herbert Read, indeed revealed a significant degree of openness and tolerance in their attitudes. As has been stressed, Penrose's own stance was representative of the Group's political development throughout the thirties. At a meeting at the Barcelona Restaurant in April 1940, E.L.T. Mesens, the editor of *London Bulletin*, intended to redefine the Group's stance by imposing stricter artistic and ideological guidelines which nevertheless faced the opposition of the other members. Prior to that, Reuben Mednikoff, Grace Pailthorpe, Eileen Agar and Ithell Colquhoun among others had agreed on a point which Penrose had defended during his career as a Surrealist: the Group, as a whole, would not be officially aligned to any sort of closed system of thought, granting individual choices a welcome within the widely tolerant core of the Group. Although Pailthorpe and Mednikoff soon left for New York, Mesens's efforts towards the implementation of a more definite line of action for the Group did not seem to fit the disposition of the other members of the Group, mostly because Mesens's impositions conflicted with the furthering of their artistic activities at the time.[358] In the end, the Group's political stance ended up not being that much of an issue for Mesens and, although he suggested unconditional adherence to the proletarian revolution, the Group's open political outlook (as had been ratified by Penrose, Agar and Colquhoun) remained uncompromised.

Penrose's final political move during the thirties came in September 1939, when all his ideals, tactics and theories foundered at the outset of the Second World War. A moment of sudden realisation must have assisted him for, as Antony Penrose recounts, Penrose, Trevelyan and other Surrealist friends decided voluntarily to abandon their previous pacifist

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[357] Archive reference GMA A35/1/1/RPA642/6. The lecture is also reproduced in the volume edited by the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art *The Surrealist and the Photographer: Roland Penrose and Lee Miller* (2001): 31-32.

[358] The draft of one of Mesens's declarations is in the Roland Penrose Archive. Archive Reference GMA A35/1/1/RPA708.

stance and become immersed in the machine of war which they loathed so much (in López 2010: 10). Penrose and Miller had stayed in France with Picasso until the outbreak of the Second World War. Although Penrose recalled having made the decision to engage in camouflage design during the journey on the last boat to England (Penrose 1981: 124), Trevelyan's recollections of the conversation with Penrose differ:

> In St. Malo we had to leave our car and take the last peace-time boat to Southampton. At the bar I discovered Roland Penrose and his wife Lee Miller; they had been with Picasso and had also stayed on till the bitter end. We talked of the future and what it would have in store for us, and Roland declared that for his part he would make no move to get himself a job, but would wait to be caught up automatically in the great machine of war, and would let himself be pushed where it wanted to push him. Finally we groped our way along the darkened decks to bed. Next morning in the train to London, Roland came into our compartment, and rather charmingly and shamefacedly confessed that he had not meant quite what he had said the night before. (Trevelyan 1957: 109)

Whatever the words spoken on that last boat to England, one can only imagine the confusion and the frustration that Penrose must have felt at the time, a pacifist being thrown into yet another war whose phoney motives he had publically unveiled, forced to leave some of his best friends in France, under the threat of Nazi occupation.

As artists, the idea of taking part in designing and teaching camouflage must have appealed to the likes of Trevelyan and Penrose: this was an *art* to which a considerable number of artists had contributed since the First World War (from painters and sculptors, to designers and illustrators). Penrose and Trevelyan, among others, decided then to join the Industrial Camouflage Research Unit. Penrose excelled in his theoretical treatment of camouflage techniques, which eventually crystallised in a series of successful lectures on camouflage methods to Home Guard units, and his book *Home Guard Manual of Camouflage* (1941). Before, he had volunteered as an Air Raid Precautions warden, but the horrible reality of the London Blitz discouraged him, and probably made him look for a less traumatic post in which his artistic talent and his communicative skills would be put to better use in the task of assisting people. His decision to take a non-combatant post as a lecturer on camouflage was influenced by a series of factors. Lee Miller had started to photograph the absurd reality of war, images in which, through her humorous Surrealist vision, she combined the beauty of her

intuitive poetic lyricism with the crudity and violence of war.[359] Humphrey Jennings, one of Penrose's closest friends in Britain, was also recording images of war through his clever Surrealist lens, which he then put into code in his interestingly subversive documentary films for the Crown Film Unit (the former G.P.O. Film Unit): the war documentary *London Can Take It!* (1940, co-directed with Harry Watt), a disturbingly ambiguous combination of grandiloquent speech and pathetic and absurd images, is a perfect example of this. In spite of the overtly propagandistic content of Miller's and Jennings's work, their subversive nature does not go unnoticed to the Surrealist eye. Their artistic approach in their denunciation of war was not conventional and, by no means, propagandistic in its intention. Certainly, although this propagandistic element may not be denied, their works reveal fractures in an otherwise apparently seamless patriotic discourse: their ironic and even humorous depictions of the reality of war suggest that for them the British Government was not entirely exempt from responsibility in this destruction. Thus the Surrealist aesthetics in Britain managed to retain its autonomy from, while seemingly supporting, official discourse, whereas the ideological stance of the Surrealist Group resisted accommodation into a monolithic and totalising ideological belief in democracy: it must be remembered that Penrose and Read among others considered parliamentary democracy and constitutional monarchy to be despicable institutional lies to ensure the continuity of the dominant ideology, and genuinely believed in the classless Anarchist society that they had witnessed in the early months of the Spanish Revolution. This sort of camouflage aesthetics through which a subversive ideological position was revealed is another clear example of the self-disruptive nature of the ideology of British Surrealism, for whereas it unveiled the gaps in the ideological *continuum* (the myth of the British endurance and morale fostered by the British Establishment), it also acknowledged its power: this certainly became the only way for Surrealist activity not to be discontinued during the war. It is in this sense that Penrose's artistic contribution to camouflage techniques within the context of Surrealist art and theory, as well as its significance within the British Surrealist Group's political delineation, is generally overlooked. Camouflage and code represented an essential part of the Group's political stance in the early war period. Their use of a seemingly political/propagandistic frame in which to inscribe a deeply Surrealist content was a necessary strategy to continue the Surrealist enterprise in Britain at a time when it was no longer feasible in countries like Spain. The forced interruption of Tenerife Surrealist Group's activities shows the freedom that artists were still allowed in Britain, even if it had to be

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[359] Some of Miller's photographs were published during wartime in Ernestine Carter's *Grim Glory, Pictures of Britain Under Fire* (1941).

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exercised under cover. Penrose used camouflage as an innovative creative strategy at the service of his Surrealist imagination and, like Miller, he resorted to Surrealist humour as a defence mechanism against devastation. For example, in his *Scrapbook* (1981), he recalled the time when he was asked to test the effectiveness of a green ointment, and he decided to use this camouflage paint on Lee Miller, which became a sort of aesthetic-erotic experience:

> Thinking that the experiment should be done thoroughly, I went with Lee one hot Sunday afternoon to a large secluded garden in Highgate belonging to our friends Peter and Gertrude Gorer. Lee, as a willing guinea-pig, stripped and covered herself with the paste. My theory was that if it could hide such eye-catching attractions as hers from the invading Hun, smaller and less seductive areas of skin would stand an even better chance of becoming invisible. (Penrose 1981: 130)

This kind of comic-erotic relief of the war experience that camouflage offered him came at a time when his painting could not elude the tragedy, entering a much darker phase, with works such as *Black Music*, *Night Orchestra* or *Nightfall* (all from 1940), which clearly contrasted with the generally colourful quality of his pre- and post-war paintings.

Camouflage also became a form of artistic sublimation for Penrose, who applied Cubist principles to his pictorial study of the relationship between form and background: the "optical disruption" of an object's form against a given background was Penrose's aim in his application of Cubism to the art of camouflage. Being a Surrealist, Penrose was also familiar with the *trompe-l'oeil* effects that were commonly found in Magritte's paintings. Penrose himself had made use of this technique, which would prove useful towards his camouflage methods, in paintings such as *Boat Bath* (1937) and *Untitled (Hair Boat)* (1938). His knowledge of the use of colour became evident in his postcard collages, which trained him in the artistic skill of making things look what they are not, or even of making things *be* what they are not (for that is the point at which *surreality* emerges).[360] In his lecture "Why I am a Painter" (1938) Penrose explained the development of his postcard collage technique, in which striking resemblances with camouflage can be found:

> Last summer I came across a series of highly-coloured picture postcards of the seacoast, rocks, towns, gardens etc. It occurred to me that by mere repetition of the same image a strange transformation took place –a personality was born- one reality lost itself in another. An avenue of trees became the hair of a girl, a row of large flower-pots became a back-bone, the arcades of a pleasure palace became a face.

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[360] René Magritte and Paul Nougé had studied the use of colour in Penrose's postcard collages in "Colour - Colours or An Experiment by Roland Penrose" (1939): 9-12.

Fascinated by this idea I set to work to make pictures in which one image repeated became absorbed into another. We are used to an object repeated many times taking on a new shape –many bricks make a house– but here each unit has a reality and a colour of its own, it condenses itself into a new reality, with the satisfying sensation that we have power even over reality. (Penrose 2001: 32)

Just as an unknown reality emerges from the unconscious associations created in the postcard collages, in camouflage there is also a reality lying underneath the deceitful appearance of the constrained forms imposed by reason or convention (in a forest, one reasonably expects to see trees, not tanks). Similarly, in Penrose's poetic texts of the late 1930s, there is an aesthetic form that *camouflages* and encodes a definite ideological position: paradoxically, whereas Penrose engaged actively in warfare and propagandistic activities, using these as a cover for his Surrealist experiments, his texts were seemingly escapist and uncommitted. However, as will be seen, this was also a form of camouflage, as writing became for him the only way to face (rather than to escape from) the reality of war: his poetic Surrealist images responded to a desire to counteract the ugliness of war and to denounce those whom he felt were responsible for it. In this too, he was following a political agenda and an ideological programme: the Surrealist programme to expand consciousness and to act on reality. In this process of making things be what they are not the reader discovers the subversive character of Penrose's images: for example, the subtitle of his only published poetry book *The Road is Wider than Long* (1939) is "An Image Diary from the Balkans July-August 1938", which seems to describe objectively what the book *is*. However, the text is not (at least not only) that, for it was intended, not to recollect the experience of Penrose and Miller's journey to the Balkans, but rather to capture the ideological transcendence of that experience. In this way, the text *is* in fact a denunciation (albeit coded) of civilisation, its political powers and economic systems, its obtuse morality and exploitative methods, which brought the world to a Second World War. Very different from this kind of coded messages was Penrose's poetic reaction to the Spanish Civil War, to which I devote the following section.

As we have seen, during the early war years (1939-1940), the *camouflage period* of British Surrealism was intimately related to the Group's ideological stance: within the political tolerance that the Group exhibited as a whole, it also exercised a kind of *camouflage politics*. Without completely abandoning their wholehearted pacifism, it had to be pacifism in disguise. It was, as has been seen, through the continuation of under-cover Surrealist activity that this was achieved. The art of camouflage is the art of make-believe, and they had to make the *enemy* believe that they were working within the system, and therein lay the subversive

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nature of their apparently propagandistic activities during these years. Their enemy was, as Penrose stated in the last of his pre-war speeches, Fascism as much as institutional policy, the military, the police and the church: they remained opposed to everything that had led them to the state of destruction that they were forced to witness. The fact that the British Surrealist Group, with Penrose at its front, did outlive the war period (in spite of desertions and internal confrontations in the early forties) is *per se* a clear sign that the Group's dissident character did not fade during the war years.

1.3. The Spanish Civil War and the Fascist Lie.

Before taking up camouflage both as an officer and as a poet, Roland Penrose had first-hand experience of the Spanish Civil War, which also had a not insignificant effect both on his poetry and his ideological stance. As I have sufficiently demonstrated in the chapter devoted to the ideology of the British Surrealist Group in the present study, the Spanish Civil War was crucial in the development of Anarchist positions within British Surrealism. In his *Scrapbook* (1981), Penrose described the ideological implications of the outbreak of the Spanish conflict in Britain:

> There was in London a general feeling of dazed confidence which deliberately ignored the gathering signs of coming catastrophes. But the menace became obvious in July 1936 when Franco marched into Spain and with the help of his Fascist allies the civil war which eventually overthrew the republican government began. The hideous violence that accompanied this aggression was a factor in the polarisation of opinion. It became obvious that if democracy were to survive anywhere a stand would have to be made sooner or later. The threat of Fascism began decisively to outweigh the fear of Communism that influenced so strongly all those who wished to preserve the status quo. (Penrose 1981: 62)

The polarisation to which Penrose refers here mainly resulted from the efficiency of Nationalist Spain's propaganda apparatus and its echoes in the British press. Certainly, the early news of the Spanish Civil War that reached Britain denounced the vandalic acts that the Communists were carrying out in Spanish churches. As early as 24 July 1936, the *Daily Worker* denounced that "Atrocity stories against the Republicans, and particularly the Communists, are now being worked up in the Press", and by September 1936 the Committee of Investigation appointed by the National Government at Burgos was preparing for publication a report on the

atrocities committed by the Communists in the South of Spain.[361] Penrose had an immense interest in researching the veracity of these rumours, as did David Gascoyne, who eventually joined Penrose and Boué in Paris. There they would meet up with Christian Zervos, the editor of the French Avant-Garde journal *Cahiers d'art* (1926-1960), and then continue on to Barcelona, where they arrived on 23 October 1936. Penrose and Boué had previously become temporary members of the Independent Labour Party which, through its affiliation with the P.O.U.M. (Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista -Workers' Party of Marxist Unification), was able to provide them with safe-conduct passes to enter Republican Spain. The safe conduct issued by the Secretary of the I.L.P., Fenner Brockway, shows that Penrose's visit was initially aimed at assisting Joan Castanyer in the production of a film documentary "to win support for the workers' struggle".[362] Permits were provided by the Propaganda Commissar of the Catalonian Generalitat, Jaume Miratvilles, to take pictures and visit schools, libraries and museums, which would facilitate Penrose's research, and to leave the country on 25 November with all kinds of documentation, from posters and postcards to photographs and articles.[363]

Penrose's role as a reporter in Spain should have been very similar to that of several contributors of *Left Review*, such as Ralph Bates, who was also in Barcelona at the time of Penrose's visit. It is probable that all of them, as Britons in Barcelona, actually knew each other and even met at some point during their stays. Nevertheless, Penrose's trip proved to be very different from that of the contributors of *Left Review*, and his experiences (which he recounted in Zervos's volume on Catalan art, and in two other texts now kept in the Roland Penrose Archive) never found their way into the pages of the leftist journal, probably because of Penrose's own abhorrence of party politics, and his desire to remain detached from the official organs of the Moscow-led Communist Party.[364] This explains every aspect of Penrose's significant dedication to artistic (rather than directly political) questions. On the other hand, it is probable that *Left Review* also wanted to keep Penrose at a distance, on account of his suspicious position as a Surrealist. Indeed, Penrose's journey was of a very different kind since, whereas the contributors of *Left Review* had to stick to the official programme dictated by the

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[361] See the Committee of Investigation of the Burgos National Government's *A Preliminary Official Report on the Atrocities Committed in Southern Spain in July and August 1936 by the Communist Forces of the Madrid Government*, published in London in October 1936. Also, David Deacon analyses the conservative bias of press coverage of the Spanish Civil War in Britain in his chaper "Rear-Guard Reactions: Governmental and Commercial Influence on Spanish Civil War Reporting in Britain" in *British News Media and the Spanish Civil War* (2008): 81-113.

[362] Document kept in the Roland Penrose Archive. Archive Reference GMA A35/1/1/RPA630.

[363] Like Penrose himself, Jaume Miratvilles had appeared in Luis Buñuel's *L'Age d'Or* (1930).

[364] Zervos's volume was *Catalan Art from the Ninth to the Fifteenth Century* (1937).

party, Penrose had an inside track, of which he took advantage as soon as the official activities were over. It is likely that Penrose made several connections through Picasso, who had eagerly asked him to pay a visit to his mother and sister Lola in Barcelona. It was probably through Picasso too that Penrose met people who would become lifelong friends, such as the art dealer Joan Prats, one of Penrose's first hosts in Barcelona, who later introduced him to Miró. And through his collaboration with Zervos he also met Ferrán Soldevilla and Josep Gudiol, who must have been Roland's closest connections in Barcelona. However, not much more is known about the almost six weeks that Penrose spent in Catalonia, or about the connections that he made there. He wisely considered that his moves and his connections had to be kept secret, in case the situation would worsen for Republican Spain in the course of the war, which of course it did. Thus, little is known about Penrose's unofficial agenda in Barcelona, something which is to be regretted. What is certainly clear is that, whereas the contributors of *Left Review* were engaged in meeting the political and the military delegates, Penrose met the artists and the people.

The tendency to consider the Spanish Civil War in contradictory, oppositional terms (as a fight between Fascism and Communism, between religion and atheism, or between barbarism and culture) has contributed to the consolidation of a preformed idea that in Spain religion and culture cannot go together (and this happens precisely in a country which, even nowadays, is still deeply religious in its beliefs, even if not in its practices). When one reads the accounts of the self-appointed *guardians* of the Spanish cultural heritage (of the left as well as the right) back in the years of the Civil War, one cannot help but feel extremely doubtful about the parameters that were used to decide which works were to survive and which were not. The correspondents of the left tend to focus on the neglectful behaviour of the priests themselves who either abandoned to their fate their churches and the works of art contained in them, or allowed religious buildings to be used as strategic shooting vantage points or storerooms for arms. This raises inevitable questions as to the coercive methods that might have been used by both sides in the struggle. The written story of the Spanish Civil War is full of accounts of priests and religious people (artists and writers among them) who strongly opposed Franco's rebellion and the burning of the churches, and resignation seemed the only way to face reality: "One dances the way the music plays" was the answer of a Catholic when Ralph Bates asked him what he thought of the burning of a church (Bates 1936: 682). Thus, it was not a question of opposing ideologies, and Penrose soon realised how crucial the role of

artists and other experts was towards the preservation of the works of art in a state at war.[365]
As Penrose acknowledged in his texts, the churches had become indeed a target of the people's wrath and, since the Republican ranks were mostly composed of low-class workers and people with little or no education, one is forced to question the criteria that were used (if any) to decide the fate of Spanish religious art. Penrose poses the same question in the first few lines of his chapter in Zervos's book, "Art and the Present Crisis in Catalonia": "In a country shaken by military revolt, civil war and revolution the question as to who are the natural guardians of the cultural inheritance confronts us in the light of actual events" (in Zervos 1937: 28).

As Ian Patterson acknowledges in *Guernica and Total War* (2007), the thirties were a time of lies and deception, and he agrees with the historian Piers Brendon that "All the major occurrences of the day were the subject of organised deception which ranged from the big, amplified lie to a delicate economy with the truth" (in Patterson 2007: 5). On his diary entry for 1 September 1939, the official date of the outbreak of the Second World War, David Gascoyne pessimistically claimed that

> the last glimmer of light has disappeared: there is nothing left now but this struggling, chaotic, fateful obscurity formed of half-truths, fragmentary truths subjective truths - opportunist, compromising, deceptive, superficial, *negative* truths- under which reality lies buried. (Gascoyne 1978: 129)

As early as November 1936, the British Surrealists issued a political tract entitled "Declaration on Spain", in which they denounced the institutional lies of the British Government regarding the Spanish Civil War. The declaration, a parody of institutional rhetoric, reiterates the expression "No one can continue to believe" several times, drawing attention to the gaps in the official versions of what was happening in Spain: thus, they dismantled the idea of Non-Intervention as a pacifist measure and of Fascism as merely an isolated phenomenon. These were for the Surrealists deplorable *lies* which discredited the British Government as a democratic institution, and unveiled the capitalist and imperialist aspirations behind Non-Intervention.

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[365] When in 1930 the International Bureau of Revolutionary Literature in Moscow asked the Surrealists what their position would be if the capitalist states declared war on the Soviet Union, Breton replied that they would place their faculties as intellectuals at the service of the latter, and he added: "In the present situation of non-armed conflict we believe it useless to wait to put at the service of the revolution the means that are particularly ours" (quoted in Gascoyne 1935a: 74). With his actions in Spain, Penrose exceeded Breton's assertions, demonstrating that the means of the artist could also aid the revolution in a state of war.

Regarding the Spanish Civil War, even today it remains impossible to find unbiased information. It is no wonder that Penrose and Gascoyne, faced with constant news of burning churches in the Republican zones, had the urge to find out for themselves. The idea of the political lie is present early in Penrose's chapter in Zervos's book: "Three months of uncertainty due to a lack of reliable news –or rather to a press campaign heavily biased in favour of the old order- made it urgent to verify the exact situation of the artistic riches of Catalonia" (in Zervos 1937: 28). In the October 1936 issue of *Left Review*, Ralph Bates contradicted the official version by presenting the burning of the saints in Catalonia, not as an irreligious act, but rather as an iconoclastic gesture and an institutional attack. But, unlike Penrose's, his account lacks the sociological analysis of the relationship between the individual, war and culture which so interested the Surrealists. The role of scholars and art experts like Zervos, Penrose and Gudiol was crucial towards establishing an artistic conscience in the midst of indiscriminate destruction. In the context of the Communist attacks against the Surrealists, Penrose's work in Spain did not only show a solid political commitment as a Surrealist, but also contributed to an idea which the Surrealists were continuously forced to defend against the Communists: he made visible the artist's essential part in the revolution, in fact, as an artist, and not as a propagandist.

His experiences in Catalonia made Penrose address the issue from a sociological, rather than merely political, viewpoint. The questions that he raised at the time were those of the anthropologist and the art historian, not those of the politician, the propagandist or the militiaman: how does society respond to liberation from social conventions and institutional restraint? How does society react when placed in sole responsibility of the preservation of a rich cultural legacy previously defended by the institutions? The influence of Mass-Observation (furthered by his good friend Humphrey Jennings) can be felt, as Penrose observed and analysed the mass reaction to the uplifting of authority. When the burning of churches became a tangible reality, these questions led to one of a very different kind: "to what extent had the admirable work of republican institutions for cultural development been respected and their authority sustained?" (in Zervos 1937: 28).

Penrose acknowledged the redoubled efforts and work of the cultural institutions, such as the Conselleria de Cultura and the board of the Patrimoni de Cultura i d'Art, and of those who, without being instructed to do so, voluntarily rescued from the debris what seemed to them objects of artistic value. The implications of this are clear, for the latter were mainly people who could not know the value of the works that they were saving (and hence did not know the value of those that they had condemned either), and acted merely on

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intuition, or from devotion. As Penrose himself acknowledged, "From the Aragon front the militia men [. . .] had demanded books to instruct them as to the value of the objects that they had been able to save" (in Zervos 1937: 29). However, in one of his texts, he also noted the difficulties that the institutions had to face "to give satisfaction to the anarchists who were [. . .] burning [. . .] the vestiges of the tyrannical religion which had betrayed them" (Penrose 1936b: unpaged), while at the same time preserving the valuable religious works from the flames.[366] In many cases, the Generalitat was forced to place notices on important religious monuments in order to deter the attacks, but sometimes the anger of the people was difficult to stop, and cunning had to be resorted to. Penrose's description of the saving of the convent of Pedralbes is stirring, as the Commissioner of Ancient Art implemented methods of camouflage and deceit which prevented the destruction of the building: "By leaving at night all lamps alight and by placing by day numerous chairs with jackets on them in the gateway it was possible to give the impression of a considerable force of guardians when in reality there were only three" (in Zervos 1937: 31). On many other occasions, it was the action of painters, sculptors, poets and art experts that did it: "a militia man, who had formerly been a museum guide in Barcelona, [. . .] explained to the crowd that had gathered to set fire to [the bishop's palace] that by doing so they would be destroying treasures that now belonged to them and thus avoided this catastrophe" (31). Nevertheless, the lie also became a tactic when all else failed: "It had only to be pointed out that if necessary the works of art could be sold and arms bought to hasten the triumph of the Republic" (31). Although Penrose's research confirmed the admirable contribution of the Catalonian institutions to protect their cultural heritage, his most significant achievement as a Surrealist was to show the crucial role that the artist has to play in the revolution, and that, in a state of war, only the artist responds to the responsibility of the preservation of culture in the absence of authority.

Back in Britain already, a group of British Surrealists, which included Penrose, Paul Nash and Henry Moore, became deeply involved in the organisation of one of the most remarkable events in the defence of Republican Spain. The meeting Spain and Culture took place at the Royal Albert Hall on 24 June 1937 under the auspices of the National Joint Committee for Spanish Relief and in collaboration with the A.I.A. The aim of this meeting was to support the Basque Refugee Children. Picasso, who had worked closely with Penrose towards the organisation of the event, could not attend, but he donated a drawing for auction, which was also used for the design of the publicity. Penrose kept one of the pamphlets, which

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[366] Unpublished manuscript about his visit to Barcelona entitled "Barcelona Nov. 1936". Archive Reference GMA A35/1/1/RPA630.

shows a despairing mother holding a dead child, one of the preparatory sketches of *Guernica* (1937), which had been commissioned for the Spanish Republican Pavilion at the Paris International Exhibition of 1937. Although *Guernica* was coldly received by the Communists and defenders of Socialist Realism, the impact of the great mural in modern art circles (and everywhere else ever since) was unparalleled, and Penrose immediately conceded that it was something that the British public had to see.[367] It was also a good opportunity to raise money for the Spanish Republic, and he soon made arrangements with Picasso for an English tour of the painting and over sixty preparatory sketches and related drawings and paintings. Picasso's violent and tortured vision of the bombing of Guernica provided a fair counterpoint to Chamberlain's dishonest promise of *peace in our time* on his return from Munich. The money raised with the exhibitions would go towards the National Joint Committee for Spanish Relief. *Guernica* was first shown at the New Burlington Galleries, from 4 to 29 October 1938. The Organising Committee was mostly composed of Surrealists: Herbert Read, Roland Penrose and E.L.T. Mesens. Apart from the Surrealists Hugh Sykes Davies and Ruthven Todd, the Patrons also included Fenner Brockway of the Independent Labour Party, Harry Pollitt of the Communist Party, E.M. Forster and Virginia Woolf. The English tour of Guernica proved Surrealism's capacity to bring together the parties of the left; also, the warm welcome that the painting received in London's East End made Penrose happily confirm that "The misgivings of those who imagined that Picasso's work would mean nothing to the working classes have proved false" (Penrose 1939c: 59).

The January 1938 number of the A.I.A. *Newsheet* issued a review of Picasso's etchings *Dream and Lie of Franco* (1937), which attacked Picasso's fantastic denunciation of war as less comprehensible than Goya's *Los desastres de la Guerra* (1810-1820). The British Surrealists issued a reply in which they threatened to stop collaboration with the A.I.A. The declaration was signed by Roland Penrose, Julian Trevelyan and Eileen Agar among others and obtained an immediate reaction, as an apology was issued by the A.I.A. in which the role of the Surrealists in support of peace and democracy was acknowledged, and almost revered. The apology now seems a mere example of insincere and derisory flattery. The A.I.A did not want to risk losing the collaboration of figures as influential as Penrose, with his close and important alliances in

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[367] Anthony Blunt in England and Paul Nizan in France were among the harshest critics of the painting. The Communist attacks focused on Picasso's purported inability to capture the political significance of the bombardment and also on his bourgeois effete expression, in which the experience of the working classes could find no correspondence. Throughout October and November 1937, a dialectical debate on Picasso's works took place in the pages of *The Spectator* (1828-). Under the title "Picasso Unfrocked" Anthony Blunt, Herbert Read and Roland Penrose exchanged publically a series of letters on the question of Picasso's contribution to the revolution. See pages 147-148.

the continent, or Read, an established and respected scholar. The apology issued in the February 1938 number signalled indeed just a brief cease-fire, for on the 16 March the debate between Realists and Surrealists, organised by the A.I.A., took place at the Group Theatre Rooms. The debate contributed to furthering the differences between both sections of the A.I.A.

Picasso's *Dream and Lie of Franco* is a sequence of etchings and a prose poem, composed early in 1937 and designed as a series of postcards to be sold at the Paris World Fair in aid of the Republican cause. Penrose bought a set of original etchings which Picasso dedicated to him. These, together with Picasso's prose poem, influenced the composition of Penrose's 1939 poem "Mentiras" ("Lies").[368] The idea of the political lie is at the core of both Picasso's and Penrose's compositions. Picasso's poem, piercing and pierced, expresses the relentless devastation of war through a grotesque description of Franco in a series of motifs which combine putrid food, repulsive creatures and shrill cries, all of them evoked by the mere presence of the Fascist. The lie, carefully articulated, has bent reality to a state of utter distortion, but Picasso's distorted images are truer to the irrationality of war than the logical representations of Realism. As in Valle-Inclán's *esperpentos*, the artist's curved mirror projects the union of the tragic and the comic in a process of degradation, caricaturisation and animalisation of the figure of authority. Picasso had previously theorised on the relationship of art and the lie: "Art is not truth. Art is a lie that makes us realise truth, at least the truth that is given us to understand. The artist must know the manner whereby to convince others of the truthfulness of his lies" (in Fry 1966: 165).[369] Nevertheless, there is a basic distinction between the artistic lie and the political lie for, whereas the former leads to realisation of truth and liberation, the latter leads to annihilation. During the Spanish Civil War, the political lie became a common strategy of Franco's propaganda, and a crucial instrument for the success of his political programme. The political lies poured over and by Britain during these years (Non-Intervention, rearmament, Appeasement, ideological manipulation) were also instrumental, not only towards the Fascist victory in Spain, but also towards the outbreak of a second international conflict. In a poem of 1939, "Words, Birds and Turds", Penrose denounced with aggressive language the historical lies of British rulers and satirised their imperial and despotic aspirations: "Long live his Imperial travesty / Long live the Bean would echo a thousand silver /

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[368] Unpublished poem kept in the Roland Penrose Archive. Archive reference GMA A35/1/1/RPA630/5.
[369] Statement taken from an interview with Marius de Zayas, "Picasso Speaks" published in translation in *The Arts* 3.5 (May 1923): 315-326.

crumpets and a flutter of handkerchiefs / bearing the imperial worms / brought to an end this happy moment in the / daily life of the great metropolis" (Penrose 1939f: unpaged).

As I have stated, the political lie is central to Penrose's poem "Mentiras", a poem partly inspired by the fall of Barcelona to the Fascists in January 1939. Although explicit in content, "Mentiras" is, with its powerful Surrealist imagery around the motif of the Fascist lie, one of the most effective texts produced by British Surrealism on the Spanish theme. The whole poem revolves around the image of "the mountain of lies", whose height is measured by the bodies of the dead. The equation of the Fascist lie and annihilation, inherited from Picasso, is powerfully evoked in Penrose's transformation of the mountain of lies into a monument of death, an image that seems to anticipate the construction of the Valle de los Caídos, which began in 1940. As the mountain and the monument become colossal, expanding over time and distance, the chaos of destruction and the looming darkness of their shadows acquire universal significance and almost cosmic proportions: "the towering blackness of their blessings burst / their hatred of life poured from the clouds / the walls were painted with flesh" (Penrose 1939b: unpaged). The apocalyptic nature of Penrose's lines is further reinforced by his use of the grotesque vision of the face of the dead, contorted into a grin of agony which is reminiscent of the *muecas* (grimaces) of the Spanish tradition in which Picasso's *Dream and Lie* of Franco is also inserted: "trees hung with liquid offerings from eyes / broken burnt twisted into the smile of the dead". In Penrose's poem, destruction is total and, as in George Barker's *Calamiterror* (1937), the moment of birth becomes simultaneously the moment of death: "Barcelona is dead / Its womb burst open / the crawling horror of men who obey / has hunted its children to their graves". Even if these lines are explicit enough, they are also significant in order to understand Penrose's camouflage politics, for they show that he was still a strong advocate of civil disobedience the year the Second World War broke out: by identifying the Spanish Nationalists with "the men who obey" and by describing their occupation of Barcelona as "the crawling horror", Penrose denounces military rule and authority and indirectly extols the Anarchist Barcelona which he had experienced. Thus, these lines reveal that an underlying pacifist and Anarchist ideology pervaded his own contribution to the Home Guard and his *obedience* (which, as we have seen, was nevertheless only partial) in the early years of the Second World War. In the poem, the rape of Barcelona is, like the rape of Spain in Barker's *Calamiterror*, portrayed through the image of the pierced womb, which is not unambiguous, for it suggests that the womb is also the origin of "the crawling horror", a place in which life and death are contained: both horror ("the men who obey") and innocence (the children) are born out of this same violated womb, an image which brings forward the

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idea of a civil war as a people forced to fight against itself. Death envelops everything as "the mountain spreads and grows", leaving no space for life or love, which are buried by the mass of corpses. Penrose's apocalyptic images clearly transfer the symbolic significance of the fall of Barcelona in the context of European politics, for indeed it was seen by many as the sign that an international conflict would soon break out. Franco's Fascist lie, with its devious sense of religious righteousness ("they make their speeches thank god"), political justice and social order ("sing cry justice reverence order"), was at this point deadlier and more frightening than ever, for it threatened to last, as it did in fact, for a long time. Penrose's visionary image of the mountain of deceptive news, speeches, laws and prayers gradually growing and eventually freezing into "an eternal lie" found its historical correspondence in the almost forty years of totalitarian regime in Spain.

The political events of 1939 (conspicuously the fall of Barcelona and the subsequent defeat of the Spanish Republic, the German invasion of Poland and the onset of the Second World War) had an intense impact on Penrose's work as a poet. In the following section, I discuss the effects that these events had on his poetry and demonstrate that, just as his ideological stance, his writing was significantly shaped by his adoption of camouflage and his concern with the institutional lie. Apparently unengaged and uneventful, Penrose's poetry is in fact full of coded messages which reveal a clear ideological stance. His use of what can be seen as a very personal poetic technique, resulting in a sort of *poetics of camouflage*, is symptomatic of the kind of atmosphere (dominated by the progressive suppression of individual liberties, by ideological manipulation and persecution, by the operation of intelligence services and undercover activities) that prevailed in the years leading up to the Second World War. As will be seen, Penrose resorted to poetry and writing in his search for the poetic truth which, he understood, could counteract the political lies of his time. This, I will argue, is indicative that for him Surrealist writing did not only imply the exploration of the unconscious (a way of *stimulating desire*, as he contended), but also that it responded to a political agenda: the Surrealist project to expand awareness of material reality.

1.4. Coded Messages: Penrose's Search for the Poetic Truth.

Having published *The Road is Wider than Long* in June 1939 with a warm reception in the Surrealist circles, Roland Penrose was no longer only a painter, but a poet in his own right. The political situation of the time significantly affected his attitude to writing and poetry, as he felt an acute and unprecedented need to write which even transferred into his paintings. Notably, three of his paintings of 1939 contain words, as if the visual had to be further reinforced by the graphic quality of the letters. Two of those paintings, *My Windows* and

Portrait, refer directly to two poems of the same year ("Words, Birds and Turds", to which I have referred above, and the eponymous "Portrait"); the third one, *From the Housetops*, was significantly Penrose's reaction to the stultifying atmosphere and absurd morality fostered by art institutions such as the Royal Academy. Earlier on, Penrose had sent his *Portrait* (1939) to the Royal Academy for an exhibition of United Artists, but when it was rejected because it contained certain *unseemly* words (the words in question were "sex" and "arse"), he decided to send *From the Housetops*, which was then accepted by a commission unaware of its *hidden* message: the painting shows a row of hands spelling the word "S-H-I-T" in sign language.[370] This is an example of how Penrose made use of camouflage and code to deliver highly subversive ideological messages: seen by Penrose and Read as the cultural extension of the British Government's inane policies, the Royal Academy was for them yet another institutional body which worked towards the continuity of capitalism, imperialism and their duplicitous bourgeois morality; also, they found that the kind of censorial approach to art implemented by cultural institutions in democratic countries, which was grounded on moral, rather than aesthetic, criteria, in a way recalled that of the Reich Culture Chamber in Germany, responsible for the purge of Modernist and Avant-Garde works, which were considered *degenerate*. Degeneracy, indecency and impropriety were certainly some of the charges that the Surrealists had to face during the 1930s.

Not expressly to avoid such charges, but certainly aware of the increasing measures for the restriction of freedom of speech in Britain and Europe in the late 1930s, Penrose made use of code (a form of camouflage) in his poems. This was part of his search for the poetic truth, which would unveil the gaps (the lies) in the official versions of reality fostered by the dominant ideology. There is a double paradox inherent in this proposition: on the one hand, Penrose made use of deceitful or unfaithful images in order to unveil the lies of others and to seek the truth; on the other, his poetic search implies that there is indeed a truth to be found, something which would naturally contradict the very aims of Surrealism, and the nature of the ideology of British Surrealism. However, this paradox is resolved if the discovery of the truth is considered, not as a *fait accompli*, but rather as the result of a constant process of search. The question of whether truth is or not the object of poetry goes back to Aristotle, on whom William Wordsworth drew for the elaboration of his own theory of poetic truth in his "Preface" to the 1800 edition of *The Lyrical Ballads*:

> Aristotle, I have been told, has said that Poetry is the most philosophic of all writing: it
> is so: its object is truth, not individual and local, but general, and operative; not

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[370] Penrose recorded the uproar that his cavalier act caused in the press in his *Scrapbook* (1981): 126.

standing upon external testimony, but carried alive into the heart by passion; truth which is its own testimony. (Wordsworth 1849: 319)

For Wordsworth, the poetic truth is not to be tested against external reality, but rather it emerges from poetry itself. Richard W. Clancey explains it in the following terms: "Poetry may indeed deal with general truth, but in its own epistemological order, a truth which the text itself as poetic utterance makes possible" (Clancey 2000: 114). The Surrealists nevertheless transcended the Romantics' idealistic propositions and, although they did not advocate Realism as a mode of expression, the truth that they sought was also in connection with material reality: first, because they considered that the unconscious was as important a part of the individual's experience as conscious or external reality itself; and second (and this is particularly so in the case of the British Surrealists), because they shared a materialist conception of poetry, that is, for them poetry had the capacity to act on reality. This collectivising aim was already present in Wordsworth's configuration of the poetic truth, for he defended that, unlike the man of science, "the Poet, singing a song in which all human beings join with him, rejoices in the presence of truth as our visible friend and hourly companion" (Wordsworth 1849: 321). However, an idealistic residue is still perceived in these words.

Already in 1923, the Cambridge scholar and initiator of Practical Criticism, I.A. Richards, rejected the notion of truth in poetry, which he considered to be an *emotive* use of language where the *evocative* function is uppermost, as opposed to the *referential* use of language, in which the *symbolic* function is dominant. This distinction allowed him to affirm that the truth or falsity of an emotive utterance is irrelevant to its ultimate aim, which is to *evoke* certain attitudes in the audience:

> In symbolic speech the essential considerations are the correctness of the symbolization and the truth of the references. In evocative speech the essential consideration is the character of the attitude aroused. Symbolic statements may indeed be used as a means of evoking attitudes, but when this use is occurring it will be noticed that the truth or falsity of the statements is of no consequence provided that they are accepted by the hearer. (Richards and Ogden 1956: 239)

Richards's conclusion is in complete opposition to Wordsworth's, and nevertheless it is based on the same idealistic proposition: that the reality of a poem exists by virtue of the poem itself. In his book *Practical Criticism* (1929), Richards elaborated further on the evocative function of poetic language, stressing that "the statements in poetry are there *as a means* to the manipulation of feelings and attitudes, not as contributions to any body of doctrine of any type whatever" (Richards 1964: 186), and therefore cannot be judged in terms of their veracity or

falsity. Richards's assertion clearly contradicts the very notion of Surrealist writing as it developed in Britain and, considering his influence on the Cambridge Experiment Group (Hugh Sykes Davies, Humphrey Jennings and, especially, William Empson), the way in which the British Surrealists managed to reconcile (if they did at all) their views on poetry with Richards's own is an aspect of Surrealist theory in Britain which still requires analysis. It seems, however, that the British Surrealists soon grew out of Richards's influence for, in their poems and theoretical texts, they insisted on the capacity of the irrational unconscious to provide *truer* images of reality than conscious intellectual process: Roland Penrose defended that "The most *valid* expression is that which is most disinterested and spontaneous" (Penrose 194?: unpaged, emphasis mine). Furthermore, for them, poetry did contribute to a *doctrine* or system of thought, Surrealism being considered a *Weltanschauung*, as Herbert Read claimed (Read 1935d: 191). And this was not only true for the writers analysed in this chapter (Penrose, Roughton, Jennings and Madge), for whom poetry was part of a political agenda, but for those already dealt with, as we have seen.

In a 1933 critique of Richards's theory, the American philosopher and Marxist scholar Louis Harap shed some light on the question of the poetic truth. Harap's distinction between the metaphoric language of poetry and literal language may in no way apply to Surrealist writing, which in many cases is based on literalness; also, his notion of the metaphor is too restrictive to be valid for a theory of the Surrealist image. For example, Penrose's poems are full of images which must be understood literally or denotatively and, when this is not the case, it is *code*, and not metaphor, that he makes use of: it is through code, or rather through a process of decoding, that the ideological *connotation* of his texts is made manifest. However, and in spite of these *flaws* in Harap's theory (no doubt the consequence of his not being a literary critic himself), he suggests that there is in most relevant poetry a *poetic proposition* beyond form and evocation, a proposition therefore susceptible to being true or false. Harap bases his argument on the fact that "each age produces a few great poems which seem to express concisely and completely the mentality of that age in terms of the quality of its valuations" (Harap 1933: 484), and this is precisely the *truth* that is found in a book like Penrose's *The Road is Wider than Long* (1939), for the experience that it transfers revives and renews the experience (the time, the events and the material conditions) which generated it and the state of mind (the ideological and psychological attitudes) created by it. For Harap, the truth of the poetic proposition lies in its capacity to make these available to a contemporary audience and to be renewed by subsequent generations (Harap 1933: 485), an idea which was shared by Penrose:

> The artist, of necessity a mirror of the time in which he lives, is aware of the revolution that is taking place in though even before it happens. If his work is to be of any importance he will not seek to withdraw into a system of abstractions which will have no relation to his surroundings but rather use his art as an influence –subversive when he desires to attack –fascinating when he wishes to excite our imagination. (Penrose 1936c: unpaged)

In this sense, *The Road* is not only *subversive* and *fascinating*, but it may also be said to be *truthful*, for it captures effectively the experience of the modern individual (the fear, the persecution, the sense of loss and the uncertainty) in the years leading the Second World War. However, as Richard W. Clancey recognises in his study of Wordsworth, "Mimetic truth is prized for its clear universality but risks authoritarian remoteness" (Clancey 2000: 115). Certainly, *The Road* recounts the experience of Roland Penrose and Lee Miller's actual journey to the Balkans but, as I have already suggested, the text is much more than the mimetic representation or reproduction of that experience: the narrative of the journey is constantly broken through the juxtaposition of disparate fragments (poetic images, photographs, themes, rhythms). Indeed, the text lacks every condition that would make it a *diary* (linearity, narrativity, causality): it jumps from one place to another for no apparent reason, follows no chronological (or logical for that matter) order and, in some cases, it even seems rather anecdotal and uneventful.[371] It is atemporal, lyrical and mythical. What we encounter as readers is a juxtaposition of episodes which differs substantially from the totality of the actual experience: for example, the whole set of photographs taken during the journey, and which is now part of the Roland Penrose Collection (Farley Farm, Sussex), creates a coherent narrative which is much more faithful to the book's subtitle ("An Image Diary from the Balkans July-August 1938") than the book itself. Significantly, only a few photographs, those which transfer a rather unearthly or uncanny feeling, made it into the book, and the texts that accompany them, not being really descriptive or even illustrative of the pictures in some cases, transcends the very materiality of the actual experience. Certainly, the reality of the events does not preclude the *surreality* of the experience or the text, as Penrose defamiliarises the memories of such real incidents, and presents them as strange and detached from the physical journey.[372] Also, the use of codes, which creates different hermeneutic levels in the process of

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[371] For a detailed account of the places that they actually visited and the chronology of the journey, see Antony Penrose's *Roland Penrose, the Friendly Surrealist* (2001): 88-91.

[372] Apropos this remark, it is worth quoting Ian Walker's understanding of the relationship between the real and the surreal: "When [Lucian] Freud painted *The Painter's Room* in 1943, and [E.L.T.] Mesens

reading (the text read as the description of a journey, as the poetic creation of a myth of the nomad, and the text as a political tract) prevents that "authoritarian remoteness" to which Clancey refers, for it is the role of the reader to decipher those codes and fill the gaps that are left in the otherwise incomplete narrative. Thus, the significance of the text lies in its capacity to stimulate desire and expand consciousness. So, the truth that Penrose sought through writing at a time when painting was not enough, was not a predetermined truth: what the formal arrangement of the book suggests, what its codes and its fragmentary and self-disruptive nature indicate, is that there is never a truth to which the poet arrives, but rather that he finds truth in the very process of seeking. It is in this process of *expanding consciousness* of material reality that Penrose's truth (and the ideological significance of that truth) is found. This is then, as will be seen, a partial or relative truth, embedded in the dialectical process of history, with which Penrose sought to unveil and dismantle the political lies of his time (the false totalities of capitalist, Fascist, imperialist and even democratic discourse), without risking becoming a false *totality* itself. This idea had already been explored by Herbert Read in *Poetry and Anarchism* (1938), when he stated that the poet has two possibilities, which are

> to discover truth, and to create beauty. We make a profound mistake if we confuse these two activities, attempting to discover beauty and to create truth. If we attempt to create truth, we can only do so by imposing on our fellow men an arbitrary and idealistic system which has no relation to reality; and if we attempt to discover beauty we look for it where it cannot be found –in reason, in logic, in experience. Truth is in reality, in the visible and tangible world of sensation; but beauty is in unreality, in the subtle and unconscious world of the imagination. If we confuse these two worlds of reality and imagination, then we breed not only national pride and religious fanaticism, but equally false philosophies and the dead art of the academies. (Read 1947: 60-61)

The analysis of *The Road is Wider than Long* that follows, and which is complemented by references to Penrose's unpublished poems of the 1930s, focuses on the relation that is established between image and ideology in his mythologisation of the nomad.[373] By drawing

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hailed it as Surrealist, Freud replied that it couldn't be since he actually did have a zebra's head (stuffed) in his room. The story is usually told against Mesens, but in fact it betrays Freud's misunderstanding of Surrealism in thinking that because the zebra was real it could not be surreal. The two states are not opposed, but part and parcel of each other" (Walker 1986: 13).

[373] The manuscripts of these poems are kept in the Roland Penrose Archive. Michel Remy has recently published some of them in French translation in his anthology of Surrealist texts *Au treizième coup de minuit* (2008).

attention to a series of motifs (woman, time, magic and sound), used to encode a message that the text both conceals and expresses, this analysis shows the ways in which these served Penrose to denounce the capitalist state, its hierarchical and patriarchal structure, its moral deviousness, its exploitative economic system and its imperialist aspirations. In a way, this journey (both physical and poetic) was the poet's last chance to experience (to capture) a world not corrupted yet by Fascism, a world whose honest sounds opened a path to an ancient truth that opposed the deceitful melodies and the political lies of *civilised* Europe. Finally, it will be argued that there is a distinct Anarchist ideology which underlies Penrose's praise of nomadic life, for both Anarchism and nomadism share a rejection of systemic constructs such as private property, authority, government and rule.

As I have already stated, woman, time, magic and sound are the motifs which Penrose uses in his poetry in order to encode a highly ideological message: his denunciation of patriarchal systems in favour of an authority-less society; his condemnation of religious morality in favour of magic and intuition; and his denunciation of modern civilisation, economic progress, capitalism and imperialism in favour of re-connection with nature and the satisfaction of basic needs. Simultaneously, and paradoxically, these motifs are presented as revelatory entities through which Penrose approaches a truth that is gradually revealed as a less impenetrable and less absolute reality. Woman is probably the most important element in Penrose's poetry, and the most complex of all, for it evolves substantially from his first poems of 1936 to its climactic appearance in *The Road is Wider than Long*. It is central to most of his poems of the thirties, where woman develops from being merely a sort of *communicating vessel* through which the poet accesses another reality (an irrational and supernatural world), to being a driving agent, a creator of beauty and a source of truth. In *The Road*, woman transcends the merely inspirational and compositional for, although the female figure is a radical and central force at once, she is not the muse or the object of composition: she becomes an autonomous, active, creative and inspired being.[374]

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[374] This image of woman as autonomous but accessible, surrealistic but real, powerful but human, is, in spite of being a male-constructed image, closer to the self-images that the women Surrealists projected of themselves than to Breton's instrumental stereotype, condemned by Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* (1949). For an analysis of woman in male Surrealism, not as an autonomous subject, but as a constructed mechanism of compensation see Robert James Belton's *The Beribboned Bomb* (1995). Although in his conclusions Belton states that the Surrealists "did not elevate and revere Woman in order to emancipate her" (Belton 1995: 272), it is clear that by the end of the thirties decade, Surrealist women did not need to be granted emancipation.

Much has been debated about the treatment of woman in the works of the Surrealists and the aggressive phallocentrism of Surrealist aesthetics and the ways in which these have been subverted by the women Surrealists.[375] In works by Surrealist men, there are plenty of examples, visual and poetic, of objectified women, depicted either as alluring and simultaneously threatening or even demonic creatures (reinforcing the myth of the *vagina dentata*), or as the objects of man's violent actions. Women are fetishised, entrapped, battered, disfigured, raped and killed in Surrealist works as a form of sublimation of a collective (masculine) desire: Breton turns Nadja into his own *femme-enfant*, Man Ray entices observers to smash Lee Miller's eye in *Object to Be Destroyed* (1923) and Hugh Sykes Davies murders a woman pregnant with evil in *Petron* (1935).[376] In his article "Surrealism and Misogyny", Rudolf Kuenzli understands the Surrealist appropriation of the female body as part of an aesthetics that perpetuates the patriarchal traditions of female representation, and includes images of women presented in a variety of forms, from the more positve or collaborative image of servant, helper or muse, to the almost ethereal virgin, *femme-enfant*, angel or celestial creature, including the eroticised sexual object, model or doll, and the negative and threatening image of the devouring and castrating female (Kuenzli 1990: 19). In Penrose's poetry, woman cannot be said to belong to any of the categories mentioned by Kuenzli. Although at some points she does become a helper and a companion, or an astral entity in connection with the universe, or even a sexual partner, the concept of woman becomes a much more complex notion than one would at first grant. Whereas other Surrealists manipulate the female body as a personal commodity, woman is autonomous in Penrose's poems and in fact it is the male body that is manipulated and fragmented in poems like "Portrait" (1939), a poetic rendering of a 1939 eponymous *painting with words*:

His nails postage stamps his cheeks a sewer

His carves a cabaret turn his thyroid a suitor

His arms canary cages his teeth a lurcher

His skin smoke his tongue a walk in the dark

His thighs windmills his sex wax

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[375] See, for example, Whitney Chadwick's *Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement* (1985) and Mary Ann Caws, Rudolf Kuenzli and Gwen Raaberg's *Surrealism and Women* (1990). A more recent study is Natalya Lusty's *Surrealism, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (2007). Katharine Conley's *Automatic Woman: the Representation of Woman in Surrealism* (1996) offers a feminist analysis of the representation and role of woman in Surrealism which challenges the negative perspectives of Xavière Gauthier's seminal *Surréalisme et sexualité* (1971) and of Caws, Kuenzli and Raaberg's volume.

[376] Curiously enough, a group of students did destroy Man Ray's object in a Paris 1957 exhibition, after which it was reconstructed and renamed as *Indestructible Object*.

His arse its arse his ear anything

His brain nothing. (Penrose 1939d: unpaged)

In these lines we see that that man is associated with dirt ("a sewer"), lewdness and hybridity ("a lurcher"), with the poetic exploration of the unconscious ("a walk in the dark"), with flaccidity ("his sex wax") and with the irrational ("his brain nothing").[377] On the other hand, in poems like "Half Born" or "Ballet métallique" (both 1936), woman's autonomy and independence from the poet's will are made patent in her connection with the material and natural world, as well as with the immaterial and the spiritual, to which the poet does not have access, and in her creative and artistic abilities, of which the poet is not capable. It must be noted at this point that the two key women in Penrose's life and poetry, Valentine Boué and Lee Miller, were already established artists when he met them, and both excelled in two disciplines (poetry and photography respectively) in which Roland was never particularly at ease. Also, the association of woman with the irrational and the so-called *primitive* are common in Surrealism. The rapport between woman and the beast was best exemplified by Man Ray's photograph *Minotaur* (1934) in which the nude torso of a woman becomes the horned head of the minotaur, her arms being the horns and her breasts becoming the eyes of the beast and suggesting castration anxiety. Penrose presents a much more benevolent vision of woman, delineating positive qualities, but always resisting objectification of the female body. For instance, in *The Road is Wider than Long*, although at points a connection is established between woman and the much more instinctive modes of nomadic existence, this is never done in a way that would suggest irrationality or bestiality (of the woman *or* the nomads). On the contrary, it is the male element that is more closely associated with barbaric and irrational modern civilisation through its connections with capitalism's phallocratic system, as will be seen.

In "Half Born" (1936), a poem about love, irreconcilability and absence which Penrose wrote in February 1936, the first description of woman would suggest that she does in fact resemble the traditional representation of entrapped/imprisoned/swathed female bodies to which the mythical siren or the veiled Muslim belong.[378] This view is further enhanced by the

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[377] Penrose was in fact labelled a "sewer-realist" in a review of his combined exhibition with Ithell Colquhoun at the Mayor Gallery in June 1939. The review, written by J. B. Manson and entitled "This Modern Art Misses So Much", shows that the term "sewer-realism" was already commonly associated with Surrealism (in Penrose 2008: 46). For a Surrealist like Penrose, this epithet was in fact a compliment, for he was directly inserted within the already long literary tradition of Spanish Surrealists, known as the *inspectors* of the *sewers* of the human psyche, an appellative derived from the title of Ernesto Giménez Caballero's Surrealist text *Yo, inspector de alcantarillas* (1928).

[378] Archive Reference GMA A35/1/1/RPA464/01.

fact that it is the speaker who undertakes the agency of the verb: "Clothed in flowers I took her from the summer bank" (Penrose 1936d: unpaged). A similar idea appears in *The Road is Wider than Long*, where the image of young girls lying "clothed in crops" is used to depict female fertility. However, this idea is soon undermined in "Half Born" by the sudden irruption of woman's free and wild spirit as "a flight of pigeons lifted from her eyes" (Penrose 1936d: unpaged).[379] In *The Road*, the image of the confined woman is also neutralised by the fact that it is both the poet and the lover that are "folded in peasant cloth / embalmed in the green memories of desire" (Penrose 2003: unpaged), and therefore it becomes a process of mutual immobilisation. The representation of woman in "Half Born" is nevertheless ambiguous at points, which is indicative of the early date of composition of the text. The unattached, self-contained and almost mystic female figure that appears in Penrose's poems of 1936 clearly contrasts with the earthy and uninhibited woman of *The Road*. This contrast is further reinforced if biographical fact is considered, for the woman depicted in the early poems is reminiscent of Boué and Penrose's perception of her in those years: their marriage had come to a definite end late in 1935, and it is likely that she stood as an archetypal abstract figure in Penrose's poetic imagination.

In "Half Born" she masters the arcane language of the ocean as her lips become "whispering shells", and her close connection with nature is shown in her rapport with trees, animals and the moon. Her understanding of nature's language leads to the revelation of a timeless truth, very much in connection with the idealistic propositions of the Romantics, as the "green windows of a new world open to the eternal" an image which also anticipates the redeeming and protective power of the lovers' "green memories of desire" in *The Road*. However, in "Half Born", the speaker is soon deprived of that revelation, and barred from the relation that is established between woman and nature, as the window is only "open until the red hand of winter closes the door / against the fainthearted lover". Throughout the poem, the female figure is guided almost in a state of trance and, although she seems divested of her own will, her unconscious actions actually respond to the exact progress of the cycles of the earth, to which the speaker becomes a mere spectator: "My love was hidden among the branches / the badger took her by the hand leading her / barefoot through the Woods / and meadows kissed her feet / with sugared lips". Thus, the badger announces the coming of the vernal season and the sacrifice of a newborn calf is a celebratory ritual of regeneration and

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[379] The bird as a constitutive part of the female body would also appear later in Penrose's pictorial depiction of Miller, *Night and Day* (1937), where a pigeon and a swallow occupy the space of her hands as a symbol of her free spirit.

rebirth.[380] Like the natural world, woman is also affected by this regenerative process as she is called by the moon. When the poet ambiguously describes the moon's call as "a lunatic lie", he is not only presenting himself as an outsider with no access to the cosmic language of the moon (he misinterprets its call), but he is also praising woman's deep connection with the unconscious and nature as the new path to an unknown truth.

However, as the title of the poem suggests, the process of regeneration is not complete, for she remains "half born". In the original manuscript, the poem is followed by a drawing of a woman wrapped up inside a leaf as if she were still in a larval state, her hair falling down on a moon that points downwards. The implications of this drawing, the remoteness of the woman, placed above even the moon and hatched inside a leaf, suggest that the search for truth has become futile as her own withdrawal from the material world prevents any sort of connection with reality and therefore with the poet. As the poem changes from the third-person reference ("she", "her") to a more direct dialogic mode ("I", "you", "your", "mine"), which nevertheless does not allow interaction, it abandons its abstract allusion and becomes more personal: "Who can make two hearts one / devouring love the mountains for the stars / has crowned with ashes, snow and storms / their futile search". Here, the echoes of Penrose's failed relationship with Boué are felt; also, these are felt in recriminatory remarks on her self-destructive and self-obliterating dedication to spirituality: the meadows' kiss scars her feet, and the natural elements have now forgotten her. Her flight into the cosmic regions, her absence, only leaves emptiness in the poet ("My arms hold nothing / my hands clap each others shoulder / empty as the coucou's argument") and barrenness on the earth ("Earthworms, a labyrinth of insect passages / a nest of blind rats infest the unborn grass / [. . .] / A bitter shrivelled seed held prisoner in her void"). Penrose's painting *Portrait of a Leaf* (1934) shows Boué immersed in her own thoughts, surrounded by innumerable stars, and as detached and impenetrable as ever. "Half Born" is, in many ways, the poetic complement to the painting.

A much less ethereal image of woman appears in a poem of the same period, "Ballet Métallique or The Blind Man's Stick" (Penrose 1936a: unpaged), which partly takes its title from Fernand Léger's film *Ballet Mécanique* (1924).[381] Penrose probably knew about the film, which had been shown in Paris in 1926, and in which Man Ray and Ezra Pound among others

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[380] In *The Golden Bough* (1890), Frazer describes several animal offerings to Dionysus as a god of vegetation, to celebrate the coming of the fertile season. One of them includes the sacrifice of a newborn calf while "the mother cow was tended like a woman in child-bed" (Frazer 2009: 403), a ritual which resembles the image in Penrose's poem.
[381] Archive Reference GMA A35/1/1/RPA464/01.

had collaborated.[382] The film's futuristic obsession with the machine and movement finds a parallel in the poem's mechanical rigidity expressed through references to antennae, metal dresses, chains, armed ships, wheels, outstretched hands and the blind man's stick. Woman becomes again a central motif in the poem, where, as in a later painting (*Good Shooting*, of 1939), she wears a metal dress, which deters physical contact and suggests detachment and even frigidity. Nevertheless, the fact that she is "hot in her metal dress" counteracts this idea and depicts her, not only as a fetishised object of desire, but also as a highly sexualised agent. Woman is again associated with the irrational and the unconscious ("Dream women chained to clouds") and with the astral ("the foot / caught in the revolving map of constellations"); but also with the more earthly pain of labour and maternity ("hating themselves give birth / their unweaned child will have / their hearts in his teeth) and with transition, a state in which the poet is also caught ("well armed ships passing by day / the fishes beneath their wheels are entangled in my hair"). Penrose's association of woman with the ship is also present in two of his *trompe l'oeil* paintings. In *Boat Bath* (1937), an ethereal woman made of vapour or clouds bathes inside a boat. In *Untitled Painting (Hair Boat)* (1938), two huge breasts-mountains witness a boat being engulfed by the hair-like waves of the sea. The image of woman as ship has strong sexual nuances, but it is also a positive image, indicating power, freedom and autonomy. However, the poem, full ambivalent images (women's hair sweeping "the downs from Paris to New Zealand / with hands outstretched to catch them"), and ambiguous references (a "watery séance" whose protagonist is woman; her "false alchemy"), presents woman as an indecipherable (menacing at points) entity.

As I have already anticipated, with *The Road is Wider than Long*, Penrose achieved a new poetic maturity. It is, in many ways, a poem of reconciliation: self-reconciliation and reconciliation with poetry as a form of aural-visual expression; reconciliation with woman in relation to the material world and the poetic universe of the writer; reconciliation with time, which is conceived, not linearly, but geologically, contributing to a better understanding of truth as a relative concept; finally, reconciliation with magic as a driving force in the development of civilisation. Effectively, woman is presented under a new and more comprehensive light. No longer confined to the irrational world, to an instinctive connection with nature, or affected by an excessive mysticism, she becomes, as in one of Penrose's early collages inspired by Miller, "the real woman". She is associated with the revelation of an

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[382] For an account of the debates over the collaborators in the film, see Judie Freeman's "Bridging Purism and Surrealism. The Origins and Production of Fernand Léger's *Ballet Mécanique*" in Rudolph Kuenzli's *Dada and Surrealist Film* (1989): 28-45.

ancient truth, not through irrationality, but rather through myth. Thus, woman becomes mythical, but not unreal, powerful, but not menacing, and fundamental, but not bound by extraneous necessity.

In July 1938, on the eve of the Second World War, Roland Penrose and Lee Miller set off on a journey to the Balkans through Greece and Romania. From this experience Penrose created *The Road is Wider than Long*, a unique object-poem which he produced for Miller, published in 1939 in a 500-copy limited edition by the London Gallery.[383] In the book, Penrose combines poems, photographs, little drawings, collage, a variety of typographical features and an unconventional layout: "It [the book] relied largely for its effect on photographs I had taken while travelling with Lee. These were interspersed with jottings, thoughts inspired by her and the events and landscapes through which we had passed. *The Road is Wider than Long* was essentially a visual diary" (Penrose 1981: 206). Although Penrose always tended to minimise the significance of his poetry ("jottings" he called it), the experience transcribed and the realities encountered in *The Road* show that it is much more than "a visual diary", and indeed it is the *thoughts* or ideas behind those apparently trivial jottings that I will be focusing on. In the book, image and poetry combine, creating new associations and meanings which are not evident when either is considered in isolation, and producing a text rich in both visual and aural nuances, an unequalled piece of Surrealist creation. Its oneiric quality is conveyed through the poetic spontaneous associations established between image and word, in a way similar to Jung's psychoanalytical word association test, in which the patient has to utter the word that is immediately and unconsciously prompted upon hearing a list of terms prepared by the psychoanalyst. *The Road is Wider than Long* effectuates a similar associative process on a poetic-visual level, which implies that, even if prompted by pictures of actually lived experience, the text is automatic. The combination of the different elements (not only image and verse, but colour, typography, layout) creates a poematically visual *totum*, forming an extended object-poem which transcends the boundaries of visual poetry (Apollinaire's 1918 *Calligrammes*), the illustrated book (Breton's 1928 *Nadja*) and even those of the Surrealist object, while simultaneously drawing from all of them. The Surrealists' taste for genre subversion and the blurring of boundaries between word and image responded to a necessity to short circuit the channels of physical perception, forcing the viewer to adopt simultaneous focuses, in order to attain a sense of truth that transcends the merely sensorial. In

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[383] The original manuscript, handwritten and bound in leather as a veritable *livre d'artiste*, is now part of the Roland Penrose Collection.

"Exuberance is Beauty" (1936), Penrose described the dividing lines between the arts as an arbitrary construction laid down by the critics for convenience which had remained unquestioned until the twentieth century, when

> the plastic arts have kicked over the traces and begun to lay their hands on everything within reach. Discussion for instance as to whether Blake did not ruin his painting by poetry or his poetry by painting becomes superfluous. Man Ray in the first instance a very able painter has used his sense of vision to exploit photography. Picasso writes poems and even sticks them on to his paintings. Even the familiar household objects are transformed so as to take on new and mysterious significance. André Breton suggests that by wilfully putting everything completely out of place by the fortuitous encounters thus brought about, the mating of two realities, in appearance ummateable, on a plane which in appearance does not suit them, will cause these realities to lose their former identity and to take on new poetic meaning. This breaking loose from the law of identity so freely used by children thus becomes a practical step in the process of creation. Surprise, mystery, delight and fear can be aroused by employing the simplest means. The poetry of childhood has been reinstated and with it the profound unanswerable logic of the dream. (Penrose 1936c: unpaged)

Thus, paintings became full of words (like Miró's, Magritte's and Penrose's) and books were crowded with images (like Breton's, Éluard's and Ernst's).[384] Somewhere in between, Breton created several poem-objects, which were shown at the Surrealist Objects and Poems Exhibitions of Paris (Ratton Gallery 1936) and London (London Gallery, 1937). Breton's 1935 *Poème-Objet* was bought by Penrose in July 1936. It is composed of an egg with the words "JE VOIS / J'IMAGINE" painted on it, a reversed image of which appears in *The Road*, where it is eggs that are painted on ice, and given to the peasants by some figure of authority. In the former, the egg becomes a source of spiritual inspiration and the origin of imagination; in the latter, Penrose's image, which appears early in the book, suggests that the peasants are starving and are only given lies. This is a very clear example of how image and ideology are brought together in *The Road*. One of Vicente Huidobro's *poèmes peints*, "Paysage" (1917) also takes part in the compositional process of *The Road*.[385] The resemblances between both texts

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[384] Renée Riese Hubert has studied the visual element in Surrealist books in *Surrealism and the Book* (1988). On the other hand, Judi Freeman has analysed the use of words in paintings in *The Dada and Surrealist Word-Image* (1989).

[385] The poem is included in *Horizon Carré* (1917) and dedicated to Picasso. In spite of Huidobro's open hostility to the Surrealists, it is likely that Penrose knew the text.

are reinforced by powerful aural echoes: "Le arbre était plus haut que la montagne / Mais la montagne était si large qu'elle dépassait les extrémités de la terre / Le fleuve qui coule ne porte pas de poissons / Attention à ne pas jouer sur l'herbe fraîchement peinte" (Huidobro 1999 : 118).[386] In Penrose's text, these images acquire a mythical aura as they refer to the uncorrupted landscape of the nomads: "The road is wider than long / trees are thicker than tall / wells reach to the clouds / their blood is more solid than their bones" (Penrose 2003: unpaged). Nevertheless, *The Road* is about this subjective landscape (to which I refer later) as much as it is about Miller, through whom Penrose's physical, emotional and poetic reconciliation with woman takes place. Miller's centrality in the composition may be seen as parallel to Nusch's focal position in Paul Éluard's *Facile* (1935, with photographs by Man Ray), another text which, as Ian Walker rightly points out, is another influence on *The Road*.[387]

Strictly focusing on the visual element in both works, Walker analyses the role of woman in terms of absence. Certainly, Penrose deliberately excluded Miller from the images: in the many pictures that Penrose took during their journey, some of which are reproduced in his *Scrapbook* (1981) and the rest kept in the Roland Penrose Collection, Miller appears interacting with Transylvanian villagers, gypsies, a priest, a colonel, mounting a mule on their way to the Meteora monasteries, or with their guide, the musicologist Harry Brauner, and other Romanian friends. In *The Road*, she is conspicuously absent, only appearing explicitly on three occasions: the dedication and two pictures from which she is either deliberately decentred, her face being almost undistinguishable underneath a hat, or simply cut off, her white arm kindly approaching one of the gypsy women. Nevertheless, a closer look at the poetry reveals Miller at the very centre of the composition. For example, she is present in (or at least not expressly excluded from) most of the personal references in the book: the first person plural reference includes Miller in passages that describe the process of the physical journey ("let us through", "they show us the way", "we can only talk in whispers in the hotel", "the day we stole the corn"). And there are also unmistakable direct references to Miller in the text, of which the following are only a few examples: "at Delphi the mountain / translated her voice", "the blue eye / which opens in the clouds before sunset", "the smile that drops from her lips". So, Miller is far from absent in the text, and it may be said that at points, she becomes the text. Her body is fragmented and interspersed throughout the text so that she becomes ubiquitous while at the same time almost imperceptible to the unsuspecting reader.

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[386] "The tree was taller than the mountain / But the mountain was so wide it surpassed the edges of the earth / The river that flows carries no fish / Do not play on the grass. Wet paint" (my translation).
[387] See Ian Walker's "The Road is Wider than Long. Penrose and Miller in the Balkans" in *So Exotic, So Homemade. Surrealism, Englishness and Documentary Photography* (2007): 73-92.

Although this process of fragmentation may be viewed as a form of possession and manipulation of the female body, Penrose's way of articulating Miller's centrality in the text responds to a desire to encode their experience, and this rendering invisible becomes in fact a form of camouflage. This is a journey of revelation and the text becomes their accomplice in their discovery of truth: it is a sort of cryptogram that requires deciphering for those who do not share their complicity.[388] Their codes, for instance, are superstitious practices used to defy the passing of time and the threat of war, like tying her hair "round the branches" and leaving her tongue "stuck to the bark". This, the speaker confirms, "will avoid all danger / of not meeting next year". The use of colour is also encoded in the book, creating unconscious associations between the visual and the aural. As in Penrose's postcard collages, "there is a functional dependence of the colour and the form. There is a dependence of the structure and the matter which is submitted to this structure" (Magritte & Nougé: 12). Thus, green is the colour of desire, encoded in the lovers' memories ("the green memories of desire") and in the "pigeon voice" of the gypsy woman Maritza, and has a cathartic and healing effect through its association with love (understood, not as romanticised love, but in the Surrealist sense of stimulating desire and expanding consciousness) and music. The muteness of woman in the works of other Surrealists (conspicuously in Éluard's *Facile*, but also in many other instances in which woman is gagged or prevented from speech) contrasts with the audible voice of the peasant singer and the discernible sounds of her guitar.[389] Nevertheless, she is not an "idealized Other" either, but a real self that connects, not with evil or good, but with the human element which the advance of the irrational (masculine) forces of capitalism has erased.[390]

The figure of Maritza, the gypsy singer, opposes those rather traditional images of woman. Maritza is a powerful creative force, in which everything is contained and from which everything springs, and her music is a demiurgic principle that not only creates, but preserves. Miller and Maritza become identified through their artistic power which, in Penrose's mythical imagination, becomes the only source of preservation of a world that is about to disappear on the eve of the Second World War. It is precisely this concept of woman as a creative entity and

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[388] The fact that the book was initially produced as a unique and personal piece that Penrose gave to Miller as a present together with a pair of gold manacles accounts for the intimacy and secrecy of this experience. This is nevertheless transcended as the text is gradually decoded.

[389] In *The Beribboned Bomb* (1995), Robert Belton presents an exhaustive analysis of gagged women in Surrealist aesthetics.

[390] The term "idealized Other" is used by Gwen Raaberg in "The Problematics of Women and Surrealism" as one of the two places (the other is the "object for the projection of unresolved anxieties") assigned to women in the male Surrealist imagination (Raaberg 1990: 8).

her inclusion as a generative and active force in the process of mythologisation of the ancient that accounts for the distinctness of the depiction of woman in *The Road*. As opposed to Éluard's *Facile*, which is the result of collaboration between two male artist friends (Paul Éluard and Man Ray), *The Road* is the work of a single artist and, in any case, the result of an experience shared exclusively and intimately by Penrose and Miller. In many ways, *Facile* seems to respond to both Éluard's and Ray's conception of woman as a muse, a source of inspiration and, essentially, a beautiful object, which differs greatly from the idea of woman that is derived from Penrose's text. In Éluard's book, despite her ubiquitous visual presence, Nusch (the model and Éluard's wife) seems to be outside the work and, above all, outside the relationship between both artists: through substitution, displacement and disintegration, she becomes the decentred object of the composition, unable to access (both sensorially and intellectually) the reality from which the photographer and the poet observe. Through constant references to fertility, flowering and expansion, Éluard's poems reinforce Ray's depiction of the female body as a passage for male desire into the unconscious. In *The Road*, as will be seen, although there are associations of the feminine with wideness and fertility, these are soon transcended in favour of the ulterior truth revealed by woman's active (not reproductive) creativity.

In spite of the book's implicitly sexual overture, with a reproduction of his Surrealist object *Le Paradis des Alouettes* (1936) in which two pince-nez are involved in a passionate embrace on a boat and with the reference to Miller's genitalia as "her cup of gold" in the dedication, the book is virtually devoid of sexual content. The aggressive phallocentrism of Surrealist aesthetics is subverted by the image of the phallic rocks on which the monasteries of Meteora rest. As in Miller's *Cock Rock* (1939), where the heavy and powerful nature of the patriarchal rock is counteracted by its decrepit and derelict state as if it were about to crumble, Penrose also plays with the significance of this image.[391] The rocks which, in their imposing verticality and eremitic remoteness, seem to be in contact with a transcendental spirituality, are in fact "dry gardens where a drunken pope / his face consumed by frost / sits alone with religion" (Penrose 2003: unpaged). The alliterative pairs ("dry-drunken" and "face-frost") enhance Penrose's powerful denunciation of religion as a patriarchal and repressive institution. Although he is fascinated by the act of faith of those monks who decided to found their monasteries on top of floating rocks, religion proves as ineffectual here as in modern

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[391] The photograph, which is subtitled *The Native*, was taken during their trip to Egypt in 1939 and reproduced in *London Bulletin* 18-20 (June 1940): 27.

Europe, as it becomes an individualistic and self-enlarging enterprise. Antony Penrose provides a different reading of this section, connecting it with the legend of St. Athanasius, who founded the first of these monasteries after being carried aloft by an eagle (Penrose 2001: 89). However I would relate the image of the solitary pope to that of the archbishops praying till death on top of a cliff in Luis Buñuel's *L'Age D'or* (1930), a film in which Penrose had appeared. The desacrilising element certainly pervades both works, and is not absent from other poems by Penrose, as in "Pay Your Money" (1937), in which the image of "three holy priests are eating children" (Penrose 1937b: unpaged) is explicit enough.

Throughout the book, a dramatic tension between verticality and horizontality, height and depth, is created. Images of wideness and roundness (associated with nomadism) are favoured over those of verticality and erectness (associated with capitalism), which contribute to the demystification of the phallus in Penrose's imagery. Thus, the fields become "carpets [. . .] covered with olives"; the road and the trees expand horizontally in an eternal widening; the valleys become a symbol of fertility and the plains can only be broken by the roundness of a woman's breasts. Although the verticality of another image of erectness ("the wells reach to the clouds") seems to contradict this idea, the association of subterranean water with the exploration of the unconscious is made patent throughout the book in references to water running under streets, to a prehistoric sea and to the fantastic pools in the rocks where a sturgeon takes the visitors on a Surrealistic journey to the depths of the ocean. Also, in Penrose's 1937 poem "Pay Your Money", the image of the elongated well is reversed, as a three-thousand-feet tower collapses underneath the earth and is used as a well (Penrose 1937b: unpaged), which is also suggestive of unconscious exploration. In all these images, the journey is then presented, not as a succession of events, but rather as an ever-widening experience, an idea which is very much in connection with Penrose's concept of truth as a constant search. Also, as space dilates and expands, these images of a surreal landscape serve to expose the aggressiveness of the modern urban landscape.

The road is the dominant image throughout the book, whose title becomes an incantatory sentence which transforms it into a sort of communal litany. As the poem progresses, "the road" becomes "our road": the use of the possessive reinforces the identification of the poet, the nomads and the reader and, although the road points eminently to a physical reality, it acquires a mythical dimension in this associative process. When it is blocked by a cart, not allowing further progression for the travellers, they are caught in a time warp in which time is suspended and eternity is condensed: "This cart that blocks the road has

been / at work for six hundred years" (Penrose 2003: unpaged). This image not only encodes Penrose's criticism of linear time, but also of the obsession with time which characterises capitalist societies. Also, as the road becomes "wider than long", forward linear progression is no longer feasible. The road expands horizontally in two different dimensions, space and time, subverting the traditional bourgeois conception of the journey as spatial and temporal progression. By making the road wider than long the concepts of time and space become subjective, an idea derived from Henri Bergson's notion of subjective *duration* in his essay *Time and Free Will* (1889). The process of condensation of time and space transgresses the rational assumption that a road is longer than wide: making it wider emphasises the psychological aspect of the trip and the ideological significance of the experience, because it unveils the notions of time and space as bourgeois constructions. The road becomes an infinitely wide space in which a series of experiences coalesce in a single moment. Thus, the journey is presented as a synchronised superposition of experiences, rather than as a succession of events. Time becomes geological, for the present is understood as an overlapping of past eras, like the gypsy's patchwork dress made of fragments of the past ("She tore her dress / a dress covered with a dress / and covered with a dress / she tore her dress to mend it"), or the rings of the trees which "are thicker than tall". The distortedly wide landscape that is part of Penrose's mythical imagery is reminiscent of Salvador Dalí's dilated universe in *The Persistence of Memory* (1931), whose deserted Port Lligat landscape is subtly emulated by Penrose's photograph of a desolate plain presiding over unreal, ill-defined hills. The landscape in both the painting and the photograph remains impassive and unaffected by the passing of time. The journey does not imply development but permanence, in time as well as in space: the initial expectations created by it are thus thwarted, for its significance does not lie in physical progress, but rather in the speaker's constant attempt to retain a sense of continuity, and which is nevertheless continuously disrupted in the text, for the threat of the rapid advance of modernity (also of Fascism) threatens the permanence of the world which the book intends to capture.

The concept of time in *The Road* responds to two distinct configurations. The European bourgeois conception of time is a capitalist construction which nears its end. It opposes nomadic time, which is circular and therefore mythical. Through paradox, the speaker explains the contrast: "they who have time have no time". Time does not exist in timelessness. The mythical time of the nomad is a spiralling concept: it has no beginning and no end, it is not a precious possession, it cannot be owned and hence it does not exist. Also, as will be seen,

because time is circular and events repeat themselves eternally, the recollection of data (the recording of those events in written form) is not important, so that orality is privileged. Every day is a replica of the previous one, and prefigures the day that follows, an idea which is reinforced by the parallel structure of the following lines: "it is the same today as last Friday / as the day we stole the corn / as the day she washed her hair". The anaphoric repetition is only interrupted by the rain which, in its extraordinary rareness, seems to alter the monotonous sameness of the days: "and it rained from the blue". The association of the colour blue, the washing of the hair and the rain is reminiscent of one of Penrose's objects, *The Dew Machine* (1937), in which a blonde long-haired mannequin's head is suspended upside down from cocktail glasses and ducts used to capture and filter the rain through the mannequin's head and onto its hair, which is dyed bright blue at its ends.[392] As in *The Dew Machine*, funnels serve to filter and ration rain in the painting *Night and Day* (1937), where water is the only natural element that is not depicted. Water, or rather the lack of it, is also central to *The Road*, for only rain can alter the eternal spiralling of time. Water stands for purification and rebirth and, as in *The Dew Machine*, it sweeps the dry earth in need of regeneration. The search for water becomes alchemical in *The Dew Machine*, where science and magic combine in the production of a natural element. In *The Road*, the search for water is associated with the prehistoric formation of the landscape ("whose gardens begin under the sea"), with the exploration of the unconscious ("wells reach to the clouds") and with rituals of ancient paganism ("waiting endlessly / for a candle to be put out by the rain"). Thus, the references to water move along the lines of the natural and the material on the one hand (the need to quench thirst) and the supernatural and the spiritual on the other. For example, a well makes it possible for humans to satisfy the basic need to drink water; however, a well that rises above the earth transgresses the limits of its own physicality. Also, through their association with the dancing and singing rituals for rain of the natives, the wells become magic sources of moral and spiritual rebirth. Regeneration through water is a constant in the book, where images of decay and corruption (the references to the damaged soil, exploited by landowners and seized away from the peasants) are powerfully counteracted by the healing and cathartic powers of the rain. But the soil (covered with olives, worked by the nomads) is also associated with regeneration and truth, as the rock becomes a sacred entity with oracular attributes. It is in connection with the ancient past, revealing to the travellers its unknown truth: "Magic lived in

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[392] This object was exhibited in 1937 in the Surrealist Objects and Poems Exhibition at the London Gallery. Although it was destroyed during the war, a pictorial version exists, entitled *Seeing is Believing (L'Ile Invisible)* (1937).

this rock". However, the use of the past tense suggests that whatever truth this was, it is no longer accessible, and that the process of search must therefore continue. Similarly, in Penrose's "How to Know What is True" (1939), a piece of poetic prose which he wrote during his stay with Picasso in Antibes in August 1939 and which is precisely in connection with Picasso's painting *Night Fishing in Antibes*, a timeless rock stands, this time between a chestnut-eating man and a wondering fish.[393] The fish, in search of an impenetrable truth about its own piscatorial condition, seeks answers from the rock where, in its eternal existence, all knowledge and all truth are supposedly contained. The answer that the rock eventually provides, "not", remains inconclusive and ambiguous, for it is uncertain whether it addresses the fish or the man. These two examples serve to illustrate further the self-disruptive nature of Penrose's poetic search.

Following Georges Bataille's definition of Surrealism as "the quest for primitive culture" (2006: 71), *The Road* can be seen as the archetypal Surrealist object, because it presents a search for an ancient truth which is only made available through atavistic regression. Antony Penrose has rightly called it a "Surrealist odyssey" (Penrose 2001: 88), because it is a journey to a distant place, both physically and culturally, but it is in a way, also a journey home, to the ancient origins of humankind, to the primal purity and innocence of a pre-industrial, pre-capitalist world. In the second chapter of the present study, we saw the links that Wilhelm Worringer had established between primitive (i.e. prehistoric) and modern art, and then we also saw how these theories crystallised in Hugh Sykes Davies's recovery of patterns of the oral tradition in his Surrealist texts, and how the element was central to his concept of form and natural poetry. Although, as will be seen, in *The Road* Penrose also recovers the rhythms of the chanting rituals which he witnessed during his trip, we observe a different treatment of this *primitive* element as myth. Penrose's preoccupation was then, unlike Sykes Davies's, not formal, but ideological, for he created a myth of nomadism in order to challenge typically Western (i.e. bourgeois, capitalist) cultural constructs: concepts such as "civilisation", "order", "progress", "cultural development" and "technological advancement", all of which codified an ethnocentric configuration of Western culture as *superior*. In her chapter "Off the Map: Surrealism's Uncharted Territories", Elza Adamowicz explains the revolutionary potential that the Surrealists found in non-Western systems of thought:

> the surrealists turned to non-western art works and philosophies for their disruptive,
> explosive potential, their power to infiltrate and transform the spaces of the familiar,

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[393] Archive Reference GMA A35/1/1/RPA464/07.

in a process both destabilizing and liberating. In this sense, the otherness they evoked shifts from an oppositional topos, which replicated the binary structure of colonialist discourse while inverting it, to a form of 'communicating vessels,' where the *ailleurs* invades and transforms the *ici* –'Que l'Orient du rêve, du rêve de chaque nuit, passé de plus en plus dans l'Occident du jour' (Let the Orient of dream, of the dream of nighttime, penetrate more and more the Occident of daytime), exhorts Breton –or emerges from within familiar space.[394] (Adamowicz 2006: 201-202)

In Penrose's book we find that the *ailleurs* to which Adamowicz refers (a sort of metaphorical transposition of the Freudian *uncanny*) is used to reconstruct the *ici*, because the Balkan experience reveals a truth about the European condition. As will be seen, in Humphrey Jennings's and Charles Madge's texts, a reversed movement occurs, through which the uncanny emerges from known and familiar realities.

But Penrose's interest in the exotic was, in a way, also fetishistic, something to which his impressive collection of ethnographic objects (which he acquired during his numerous trips or through friends) attests.[395] This interest responded to a Surrealist fascination with non-Western cultures which had been present since the early stages of the movement.[396] Amanda Stansell has recently pointed to the dangers of the Surrealists' fetishistic engagement with *the primitive* (a term which in many cases they used indiscriminately to refer to prehistoric paintings and to different forms of contemporary African, Oceanic and native American art) because it "linked them to dominant discourses that uncritically celebrated the 'primitive', an ideology used to justify colonialism" (Stansell 2003: 112).[397] However, as I have stressed, *The Road* resists such assimilation: in it, Penrose deconstructs the socially fabricated notion of race by identifying, through the use of code, nomadism and Anarchism, two *philosophies* of life which, in spite of their apparent differences, have several elements in common: rejection of private property in favour of collective property; disregard for capitalist demands on

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[394] Breton's quote is from *Cahiers du mois* 9-10 (March/April 1925): 250-251.

[395] Much of his collection is kept in Farley Farm in Sussex.

[396] Bataille, for whom modern existence was essentially a myth of the *absence of myth*, understood that the Surrealist quest for the primitive implied the possibility "of exploring all that can be explored by man, it is a question of reconstituting all that was fundamental to man before human nature had been enslaved by the necessity for technical work" (Bataille 2006: 75). For an analysis of the term primitivism in art, see Rubin's *Primitivism in 20th Century Art* (1984): 1-6; for a psychoanalytic perspective, see Hal Foster's "The 'Primitive' Unconscious of Modern Art" (1985): 45-70. Recent studies have focused on the relationship between Surrealist primitivism, race and colonialism. These include Amanda Stansell's "Surrealist Racial Politics at the Borders of 'Reason': Whiteness, Primitivism and Négritude" in Raymond Spiteri and Donald LaCoss's *Surrealism, Politics and Culture* (2003): 111-126; and David Bate's *Photography and Surrealism: Sexuality, Colonialism and Social Dissent* (2004).

[397] For a comparative analysis of Surrealism's Orientalist interests and the general popularisation of the Orient in the 1920s and 1930s in France, see Martine Antle's article "Surrealism and the Orient" (2006).

production; defence of an egalitarian society; rejection of authority, the state and other hierarchical structures in favour of decentralisation of power, free association and self-rule; and rejection of institutionalised religion in favour of spirituality.[398] The nomads are thus presented, not as an idealised other, but rather as a model for European Anarchism, an idea which radically opposes the ideologies of Fascism and imperialism, intricately connected with notions of racial superiority and genetic purity. Furthermore, the sincerity, simplicity and lucidity of Penrose's language, together with the inapprehensible nature of the text within rational parameters (to which I have referred above), prevents appropriation by the totalising discourse of the dominant ideology. Indeed, what Penrose defends in *The Road* is a sort of *ideological nomadism*, which is also characteristic of the ideology of British Surrealism: a system of thought which is not static, but constantly evolving according to historical change and incorporating diversity and contradiction as part of its own configuration. But before we focus on the ideological significance of *The Road*, let us discuss now how this myth of the nomad is created in the text.

Reading *The Road* is an encounter with magic and ritual which has a healing and cathartic effect.[399] Catharsis is achieved through a series of ritualistic circles which the travellers complete. The journey (physical *and* psychological) begins with an initiation rite as the travellers are let through a barrier of "four striped arms", a frontier that allows them into a world where children sing and dance in ancient rituals for bringing rain to the dry land. Thus, sound, music and song, which have become commodities in modern civilised societies, are equally cathartic as they acquire mythical significance in the text. The nomads' songs respond to customary practices of a more fundamental form of existence, and their ritualistic character favours connection with the supernatural. In the book, the abyss between the rational and the irrational is bridged by orality, a pre-literacy form of communication, whose spontaneous and automatic nature is praised. Orality contrasts with the more mediated (and therefore corrupted) systems of written communication. Thus, the gypsy children join in ritualistic chants "auf tzac", but their bellies yell of hunger, full of "wood pulp / [. . .] and government

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[398] Although, of course, the philosophy of Anarchism is much more complex than this schematic representation, these are principles which are generally accepted as central to Anarchist thought. See Paul McLaughlin's *Anarchism and Authority: a Philosophical Introduction to Classical Anarchism* (2007).

[399] Regarding the use of myth and magic in Surrealism, Michael Löwy has stated: "The importance of myth to the Surrealists lies also in the fact that it constitutes (along with the esoteric traditions) a profane alternative to the irrational grip of religion. It is in this sense that we must interpret Breton's remark (often taken as a provocative and iconoclastic statement) in the dedication of a [new page] copy of Mad Love sent to his friend Armand Hoog: 'Let's demolish the churches, starting with the most beautiful, so that no stone remains unturned. Then the New Myth will live!'" (Löwy 2009: 15-16).

regulations" (Penrose 2003: unpaged). Indeed, "government regulations" and "wood pulp" refer to forms of written language which are stigmatised in *The Road*. The former implies the codification and implementation of socially restrictive norms. The latter alludes to the production of mass press in the thirties. In "The Press and Social Consciousness" (1937), Charles Madge analysed the implications for mass consciousness of the introduction, in the late 19th century, of wood pulp for the production of paper. His understanding of the newspaper as a sort of daily disposable "bible" (Madge 1937f: 279) contradicts the traditional perception of the written word as stable and perdurable, as opposed to the purported ephemeral and changeable nature of oral language. In *The Road*, Penrose also destabilises the polarity of these two categories, and orality becomes a synonym of permanence and truth. Also, the workers' "throats are too dry to sing" (Penrose 2003: unpaged), because they have been made silent through labour exploitation by landowners, and the imposition of external regulations by civil governors and the military: "NOMADS may not move their Tents. / The Markets are closed to them". Their language has been muted by the incontestable authority of the written word, an authority which, like the colonel in the photograph, ostracises the native peoples through the imposition of modern ethnocentric parameters onto their ancient mode of life. Even the oracle, a symbol of the connection between the nomads and certain divinatory and supernatural entities, is corrupted by the ominous nature of the scripture, and prophesies doom by "writing tomorrow's news in the sky". Again, we see here Penrose's use of code, because, through extrapolation, the oracle is thus made to fulfil the role of the modern newspaper, foretelling the cataclysm of the Second World War: "tomorrow's news is bad news". The modern newspaper epitomises the transient and unstable nature of the written word, and history, which is basically a scriptural discipline, becomes an unreliable source of historical truth.[400] This is related to Penrose's concern with the institutional lie (spread by the mass media), so central to his Anarchist ideology: certainly, in a state-less society, there are no institutional lies. Furthermore, the fact that the news of the past are soon forgotten (they are "vapours [that] escape from the rocks") implies that historical knowledge does not ensure historical wisdom ("we have forgotten yesterday"), and that more is to be learned from the oral tradition than from the written expression. In *The Road*, the graphic symbol is not only presented as a capitalist disposable commodity and the vehicle through which doom is announced, but also an instrument of physical restriction: nomads, not being allowed to move their tents, are forced to a sedentary life which contradicts their very nature; the travellers are

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[400] This, as will be seen, is in connection with Humphrey Jennings's and Charles Madge's conception of the written word and its unreliability.

asked for "papers" (i.e. visas and permits) without which their journey cannot proceed.[401] Also, the condemnation of those who lie is encoded through a prophetic inscription found on a tomb: "If you are lying your finger will be trapped / If you tell the truth it will lead you / out to the other side". By telling the truth, the travellers are then taken to a magical Surrealistic island where bourgeois customs are satirised, war is condemned and sexual desire is celebrated:

> an island
>
> where they dance in the hangman's
>
> bedroom where the guns are used as
>
> saxophones and the powder magazine is
>
> to let for love. In the rocks are pools
>
> where the sturgeon can take 40 passen-
>
> gers a time to visit the wreck of a Turkish
>
> battleship. Tea is served on board and the
>
> fish have become so tame that they are
>
> willing to show visitors over their genital
>
> organs.[402] (Penrose 2003: unpaged)

Here, socially sanctioned codes of bourgeois behaviour (which include death penalty, war and teatime) are satirised in a very Carrollian manner and the new world advocated by the Surrealist revolution is presented: this is a world of music and dance, love and sex, which can only be accessed "if you *tell* the *truth*" (emphasis mine). Finally, it is significant that *The Road*, a written text itself, combines verse and prose, different typographical features and presents colourful lettering, strong aural echoes and visual imagery. The *text* is certainly not just a text.

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[401] Visas and permits will also be needed to escape when war breaks out, and the anxiety over documents, written impositions and regulations is already felt intensely in *The Road*, which is reminiscent of Penrose's fixation with conscription in his political writings and in connection his Anarchist rejection of bureaucracy.

[402] One of Miller's war photographs for *Grim Glory* (1941) is reminiscent of these lines, and shows her Surrealist eye for merging desire, humour and tragedy. It is a photograph of a board that reads: "LONDONS NO NIGHT RAID – ONE NIGHT OF LOVE".

By making use of these diversifying mechanisms, Penrose realised that the boundaries of writing could be expanded in order to prevent the assimilation of his text into the monolithic discourse of power and those forms of written language which are stigmatised in the book.[403]

All these are codes which Penrose uses in his denunciation of a corrupted society whose social relations are based on written contracts which oppose the kind of oral relations that Penrose and Miller established with the natives during their journey: the deficiencies of verbal communication imposed by the language barrier are always counteracted by the intimate rapport that is created between the interlocutors. Thus, in the pictures that Penrose did not include in *The Road*, Miller and the natives interact spontaneously and communication is miraculously made possible, an image which finds its way into the text: "they didn't understand a word / but they laughed". Verbosity becomes a symbol of purity and freedom ("the little girls talk endlessly / holding hands across the road"), although this, as before, is soon crashed by external political impositions, which again transfer the atmosphere of 1930s Europe: "we can only talk in whispers in the hotel". Only the female voice with its echoes of an ancient truth can transcend the physical and the political, and resist the constraints imposed by those two dimensions.

Throughout the book, the echoes of the female voice also acquire a mythical dimension. For example, Miller's voice becomes prophetic as it is translated by the oracle on the slopes of Mount Parnassus: "At Delphi the mountain / translated her voice". Also, through a synesthetic process, her smile becomes audible as it is echoed on the stage of the theatre at Epidaurus: "the stage of a greek theatre echoing / the smile that drops from her lips". The physical phenomenon thus merges with the supernatural, and the human with the divine, as the echo of Miller's smile simultaneously invokes the presence of the ancient Greek goddesses who have taken the stage before her. The association of the female voice with ancient divinities is further reinforced by the echoes of Maritza's purifying and regenerating songs. Maritza, a Romanian folk singer and a friend of Harry Brauner whose voice and songs captivated Penrose and Miller, becomes a key figure in the process of mythologisation of the nomad. She represents the power of the ancient aural and defies not only the impositions of written regulations but also the black magic of the sounds of the coming war. The curative powers of her voice, ancient and redemptive at once, is made patent in the following lines where, although speech is forbidden, her voice emerges free and unrestricted, singing of a

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[403] Certainly, quoting from the text without reproducing all its visual features seems rather futile, for there is so much that is lost in the transition.

collective pain and healing the wounds as she sings: "the town is sick but no one dare say so / Maritza up behind the North Station / could cure it / her green leaves / the strength of her pigeon voice / heal where other music wounds /each note wounds the last heals". This "other music" is the commodified music of bourgeois modernity, of technological societies and of approaching war: "the new military road is approaching". The music and rhythms (litanies, chants, Maritza's songs) of the ancient world reproduced in *The Road* opposes the "world of dead music" to which the travellers will be directed as "rubber seated pilgrims" in Miller's new Packard. Also, it is part of a *freak show* where a dwarf "can play the flute / with his foot" and the tamed bears which can cure rheumatism "forget the dust for a little music". Although the Macedonian flute "kills" them, the taming of the bears acquires a mythical dimension, transcending the physical reality of animal exploitation: it is an ancient ritual of sacrifice in which, through music, a reconciliation between the rational and the irrational, the individual and nature, is achieved, as human and beast become reunited in the flute.[404]

A continuous process of regeneration takes place in Penrose's reconstruction of the mythical figure of the nomad: as we have seen, water is the element for physical and spiritual cleansing and Maritza's voice has spiritual healing properties. Also, the nomad's blood, pure and solid, is sanctified through manual labour, whereas. Both water and blood are present in the old-time ritual ceremonies of humankind as sacred elements and symbols of purification (baptism) and redemption (sacrifice). In *The Road*, the blood of the nomads is "more solid than their bones", an image which corroborates the truth behind the (orally transmitted) proverb "blood is thicker than water". Through parallel structures and asyndeton the hardship of the nomads' life is vividly depicted, and the cumulative effect is further strengthened by the dynamism of the verbs, which refer to activities associated with pre-industrial agricultural communities, and the reiterative use of the pronoun: "they have filtered it churned it kneaded it / refined it driven over it in the open fields / thrown it to the wind beaten it with flails / ground it dried it baked it in kilns". On a merely denotative level, the verbs refer either to manual production of edible goods or to the agricultural work in the fields. Nevertheless, the ubiquitous presence of the unnamed object ("it" refers to "blood") confers the passage the liturgical rhythm of ritualistic sacrifices. Thus, through their work, they offer their blood in exchange for redemption, freedom and truth, because, although "leeches eat their bones", their blood colours the "forms of antiquity". As I have already suggested, this treatment of

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[404] The flute is in fact a magical element in the folk tradition, from the Pied Piper of Hamelin to snake charming.

race (a photograph of powerful racing horses is suggestive of the nomads' thoroughbred, strong race) encodes an ideological message: this is a form of denunciation of the exploitation of the natives by so-called civilised societies. Penrose's praise of pre-industrialism materialises in the mythical figure of the nomad, capable of surviving the adverse conditions of his itinerant life. Furthermore, since the nomads have worked the land, it may rightly be said that the lad belongs to them, as much as they belong to the land. Nevertheless, they reject such inferential proposition, embracing a rootless existence and their freedom. It is likely that these people reminded Penrose of the Anarchists he had met in Barcelona back in 1936, and it is not far-fetched to affirm that his experiences in Spain partly informed his journey to the Balkans. In *The Road*, nomadic societies become the epitome of purity and innocence, endurance and freedom, as they are not corrupted by capitalism and the artificially created needs of bourgeois society. Paradoxically, it is the more *civilised* European society that is about to start a world war.

Penrose's awareness of the imminence of war had become acute before his journey to the Balkans: "There was at that time in the air the menace of approaching doom which stimulated my desire to travel and see something of Europe in remote parts where the pre-internal-combustion-engine era was not entirely extinct" (Penrose 2003: unpaged). This feeling was aggravated on his return, which he described in the following terms:

> Sadly for me all these roads came to an abrupt end when I was obliged to leave Lee in Bucharest and take the Orient Express back home. On the way a sudden reminder of political reality awaited me in Munich. The vault of the main station was decorated along its entire length with thousands of Nazi flags in honour of [Neville] Chamberlain's appeasement visit to Hitler. (ibid)

Significantly, the ever-widening roads of his journey, suggestive of the ever-expanding truth that he had discovered, were abruptly interrupted by what was probably one of the best-orchestrated lies of the twentieth century: Chamberlain's promise of "peace for our time" (quoted in Self 2006: 1). Thus, when Penrose started work on *The Road*, the political element, the ideological dimension of the experience, was very clearly there already. Early in the book, explicit political references, which are later abandoned, creep into the text: Dragomir Stanescu, a potentate or military officer, is shown as a despicable figure as he gives fake food to the peasants ("He has got the ice with eggs painted / on it, made specially for the peasants"), imposes strict rules on them ("NOMADS may not move their Tents / The Markets

are closed to them / The Prefect has not time to waste) and despises them ("Though I am obliged to listen to you / I am not obliged to give you satisfaction / Do not disturb me / Let me get on with my Work"). But soon, the speaker warns, none of this would matter, because it will all disappear with the outbreak of war: "It will be dark. / We shall not know which is the inn / and which the church –that is the / prison for the Fascists, that the grave- / yard for the Communists-". As we already know, the identification of Fascists and Communists also appeared in Penrose's political speeches of the late 1930s. But, in *The Road*, Penrose's anticipatory vision of the conflict is suddenly disrupted by the directive "NO POLITICS HERE", an expression which may refer as much to the impossibility of discussing the conditions of the nomads with the prefect as to Penrose's own willingness to leave European politics aside (because the purity of the ancient truth could not be corrupted by the political lie of the present). Ironically, the formula used is an authoritative prohibition which reproduces the tone and tenor of Fascist discourse, and a political statement *per se*, for it encodes a denunciation of the restriction of freedom of speech. Thus, it becomes evident that an ideological content pervades the whole book, and that politics is acutely present as a historical frame to the journey.

It is precisely through music that a link is established between politics and desire in the book: sexual complicity leads to political conspiracy in coded plots to destroy the oligarchic state which attempts to suppress the gypsies. Thus, erotically charged images tend to mask a political content: "Maritza is strong / the porter puts his sou / into the belly of her guitar / her understanding is his security". The sexual implications of the porter's gesture and the sensual description of Maritza's guitar seem to provide a fairly traditional depiction of woman in terms of passivity and hollowness. Nevertheless, these are coded signals through which her agency is soon made patent. It is Maritza who grants him (and, by extension, his people) security and protection, through her powerful role within this complex net of coded relations, not only as protector of the vulnerable peasants, but also as annihilator of the ruling oppressors: "she gave power to the last dictator / and then killed him with a needle / the gold magnate / whose image is already painted / among the saints / will also die suddenly". The relationship between camouflage and code is clearly seen in *The Road*, where Penrose transforms his poetics of nomadism into a sort of camouflaged ideology, and the whole text, seemingly naïve and anecdotically uneventful, is actually a coded message which encrypts the violent denunciation of the European institutions that allow the destruction of a world which he fights to preserve: we may refer here, not only to the Fascist apparatus, but to the British Government too and

how, through Non-Intervention first and Appeasement later, it contributed to the annihilation of honest (also Anarchist) communities in Spain and Eastern Europe.

At the end of *The Road*, which acts as an overture to the dark paintings that Penrose was to produce in 1940, the grandiloquent, orchestrated lies of Europe and the rumbling, chaotic sound of war contrasts with the humble, almost inaudible music of the peasant's guitar. The line "The band concert will begin now", beautiful and terrible at once, is a preamble to the chaotic concert performed by the distorted instruments of paintings such as *Black Music*, *Night Orchestra* and *The Dance*, all of them of 1940, which transfer the dark noise of the Blitz and the ominous threat of the macabre concert of air raid. Penrose's resort to music as a strategy to domineer and conquer the demons of war connects with the idea of prehistoric art as an attempt to control external reality, which he had explored in his lecture "Why I am a Painter" (1938):

> Those who have studied the cave drawings are struck by the inaccessible places in which they were painted and the lack of light. They seem often to have been hidden away like treasures in a safe and it seems highly likely they were done chiefly with the motive of obtaining power over the wild beasts that they feared and also needed for food, it was a kind of magic, a substitution of the image for the thing itself so as to have a sense of possession over the object of their desire. (Penrose 2001: 31)

In *The Road*, the musical spectacle becomes the decadent cultivated symbol of a corrupted society (a "world of dead music"), which is undermined by the less refined but honest sounds of the primitive: the sound of the prehistoric sea, the music of the enchanting flute, the children's chants for rain and Maritza's healing songs. Penrose's becalmed evocation of war is impressive as the focus is shifted from the Meteora Monasteries to images of Modernity: "The cockpit the bull ring the open air / cinema the dance hall the committee / room and the black exchange / are at work / turning their bloodshot melodies".[405] The use of synaesthesia and strong enjambment reinforce the aural impact of the whole passage, where music takes again a pre-eminent position, as the sense of security and permanence transmitted by Maritza's music is threatened by the complex mechanisms that are at work in the preparation for war and the intricate melodies of military music. The destabilising nature of these final lines is

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[405] Although in this series of elements associated with Modernity the "cockpit" seems to refer to the pilot's cubicle in an aircraft, there is also an implicit reference to Spain in this term which is further reinforced by the image of the bull ring. In 1937, Franz Borkenau's book *The Spanish Cockpit* was published, a first-person account of the Spanish conflict.

further reinforced by the last photograph of the book, in which an equestrian statue is wrapped up and tied up with ropes, cut off from reality and unable to hear the noise of approaching war or Maritza's restoring notes. The image is disquieting and tempting at once. Its significance remains ambiguous, for it is simultaneously a form of obliteration of symbols of power and also indicative of the self-absorption of the figures of authority. Another wrapped-up object had appeared in the preface to the December 1924 issue of *La Révolution Surréaliste* (1924-1929). This was Man Ray's *The Enigma of Isidore Ducasse* (1920), which announced the inauguration of a time to close one's eyes, a time of revelation, and advocated the dream as a state of removal from conscious reality. Penrose's painting *Enemy the Sun* (1938), whose title echoes one of the lines in *The Road*, also reproduced the image of the wrapped-up equestrian statue. In both cases, the image of the blinding of the eyes reinforces this idea of inner revelation through darkness.[406] In this sense, the last reference to Maritza's music ("turning their bloodshot melodies / while Maritza / tunes the two cords of her guitar"), which is part of that world of dream, myth and revelation, serves to restore hope, even if only two strings are left on her guitar.

As we have seen, Penrose resorted to writing and poetry in his search for a truth which he only found in the very process of seeking or, indeed, of writing. This concept of truth and the capacity of new truths to surprise and startle (and it must be noted that Penrose liked to quote Apollinaire's expression that "Truth will always be new") was captured in his 1937 poem "Pay Your Money", where the search for a specific object is always frustrated, but each new finding is enlightening:

> the architect travelled over the desert
>
> no one doubted his ability to find sand
>
> he came back with water lilies –
>
> they went to Pekin for dogs
>
> they came back with a telescope –
>
> [. . .]

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[406] Penrose's painting also shows a head-tree covered by hair-leaves which is reminiscent of Sheila Legg's mask of roses in the 1936 London International Surrealist Exhibition. In both instances, the eyes are shut off from external reality, and turned inwards.

looking for gold I found vermin

looking for a toad I found a star. (Penrose 1937b: unpaged)

Here, the poet demystifies the search for the philosopher's stone, a futile and obstinate search which, being focused on a single objective, prevents appreciation of the discoveries made in the process. Certainly, only through the process of writing could the poetic truth be reached and in this poem it is the alchemy of the poetic word that transforms reality into the marvellous creations of the unconscious. In his *Scrapbook* (1981), Penrose recalled a similar revelatory experience during his stay at a Basque farm near Saint-Jean-de-Luz in the summer of 1933:

> The contradiction that troubled me increasingly as I grew to realise the incompatibility that exists between happiness and misery, between beauty and ugliness, between life and death, found an unexpected elucidation when on returning from India I spent a summer with Valentine in an old Basque farm near St. Jean-de-Luz. In bold Roman lettering on the keystone of the arch that led into the stables under the house was carved a motto containing two complementary statements that appealed to me at once because of their directness and finality – NUL BIEN SANS MAL – NUL MAL SANS BIEN (No good without evil – No evil without good). In this indissoluble union of opposites I discovered a pagan truth which liberated me at last from the Christian doctrine that good could and would and must triumph by totally obliterating evil. (Penrose 1981: 49)

This concept of truth, not as a predetermined entity, but as self-contradictory and constantly evolving had important poetic and ideological implications for Penrose, as we have seen. In *The Road*, the search is performed through a process of mythologisation of nomadic life and the use of code, which served Penrose to counteract the lies of his time: to unveil the gaps in the monolithic versions of reality fostered by the dominant ideology, and to resist appropriation by such totalising discourses. What Penrose eventually sought in writing was also the ultimate aim of Surrealism: to stimulate desire and to expand consciousness of reality, something which, as Marcel Jean suggests, is in the very configuration of the naïve:

> The naïve is someone who, after reaching adulthood, retains intact the childish feeling of absolute power, the conviction that desire and reality are synonymous. Naïvety is based on wish fulfilment and includes a very important conscious element; not just the realisation of desire in the manner of the dream but the 'realisation of the real,' the real embodying in this sense dream and the waking state. (Jean 1960: 40)

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This broadening of consciousness, both in the Freudian and the Marxist understanding of the concept, was the truth which Penrose sought in his works.

2. The Aesthetics of Resistance: Roger Roughton.

> Belief in mortality and disbelief in the supernatural
>
> came to me side by side, as they will to most.
>
> But this meant no sorrow at all:
>
> the supernatural has an overwhelming rival in the natural;
>
> better than the superhuman is the human.
>
> Roger Roughton, "The Human House" (1941): 51.

Roger Roughton devoted his efforts, like no other British Surrealist, to work towards a genuine conjunction between Surrealism and Communism, not giving up either in his aesthetic concerns or in his political commitment. He engaged in a form of poeticised politics and made of Communist activism a poetic activity, something which, as it had happened with René Crevel in France, culminated in suicide. The failure of the effort is not so much determined by the incompatibility of aesthetic and political creeds, as by the historical context which marked it and by Roughton's own incapacity to transcend Stalinism and embrace a more progressive, also more revolutionary, form of Marxism, as his fellow Surrealists had done in their adoption of Anarchist positions. He was deceived by Stalinist Communism and did not confront Stalin's dictatorial and imperialist regime or the lie of the happy Soviet life, as André Gide and Stephen Spender did. His poems and prose texts show a conscious conjunction of what he understood to be a truly revolutionary politics and experimental aesthetics. Nevertheless, this deliberateness does not make his Surrealism instrumental. Rather, the poetic penetrates and permeates the political and this conjunction responds to Roughton's all-encompassing understanding of the revolution as liberation and awareness. The criticism has tended to impose a dissociation between Surrealism and Communism in Roughton's ideological stance in order to explain his suicide as the outcome of this incompatible allegiance. Even if partially true, this view also offers a reductionist vision of Surrealism's commitment to poetic and political experimentation. Roughton's theoretical texts demonstrate that he did not see Surrealism and Communism as two divergent tendencies which required reconciliation, but rather as part and parcel of the same and unitary revolutionary ideology. In the following pages I present a detailed analysis of Roughton's political writings and Surrealist texts within the frame of the ideological unity which he defended, that of poetic and political experimentation as part of a total revolution. In his texts, he developed what is called here a form of *Socialist Surrealism* which, by borrowing elements from both Socialist Realism and

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Surrealism, created an aesthetics of resistance which differs greatly from that of other British Surrealists: his texts are poeticised political tracts and calls for revolutionary action in which he denounces the conditions of the working classes under capitalism and announces the coming of the revolution. However, and in spite of these unequivocal political messages, his texts also transfer the doubts and uncertainties inherent in the ideology of the British Surrealist Group during the 1930s. This shows yet another distinct way in which image and ideology were brought together under the common sign of Surrealism by Britain's most committed Surrealist poet.

2.1. The Last Surrealist Communist.

Roger Roughton was the most politically engaged member of the British Surrealist Group, an earnest Communist and a defender of Party doctrine in the face of the increasing disbelief in British intellectual circles, especially the Surrealist Group. Roughton Edmund Heude Roughton was born on 17 September 1916 in Lancashire, left school at sixteen and, like David Gascoyne and George Barker, did not go to university.[407] Like his fellow Surrealists who had not received university education, Roughton was primarily self-taught, a well-read intellectual of, as Julian Symons suggests, "literary tact and taste" (Symons 1972: 55). In London he soon became acquainted with David Archer at the Parton Street Bookshop, where he was also introduced to David Gascoyne during the winter of 1933-1934; Roughton and Gascoyne would eventually share a flat in Southwark. David Gascoyne's early interest in Surrealism played a central role in the development of Roughton's Surrealist sensibility, and in his championing of Surrealist aesthetics and politics in Britain. In this attempt to reconcile experimental poetics, revolutionary ideology and political activism he was, however, ill-fated and no more successful than Gascoyne. In spite of this, it must be conceded that this moment of collision of Surrealism and revolutionary politics in Britain, albeit brief, also opened new possibilities for poetic and political experimentation after the war.

Roughton's loyal commitment to the Communist programme was a natural consequence of his taking part in the leftist intellectual atmosphere of Parton Street, the centre of radical politics and experimental art in London at the time, where he took rooms and edited his literary journal *Contemporary Poetry and Prose* (1936-1937). There he came under

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[407] The very scant information that is available on Roger Roughton's biography is scattered in personal texts by different authors and in books on Modernism and Surrealism in Britain: *Selected Letters of Dylan Thomas* (1966), David Gascoyne's *Collected Journals 1936-1942* (1991), Paul C. Ray's *The Surrealist Movement in England* (1971), Francis Scarfe's *Auden and After: the Liberation of Poetry* 1930-1941 (1942), Alan Young's *Dada and After: Extremist Modernism and English Literature* (1981) and Michel Remy's *Surrealism in Britain* (1999). I have been able to trace further information on Roughton's biography from his niece, the British writer Deborah Moggach, whom I thank for her contribution.

the ideological influence of Communist folklorist A.L. Lloyd, whose friendship decisively shaped Roughton's firm political views. He also befriended other Communist activists such as Jessica Mitford, who hid there while running away with Esmond Romilly to Spain. Roughton became a member of the Communist Party of Great Britain in 1935 and was the only British Surrealist to visit the Soviet Union during the 1930s. His interest in Soviet politics, arts and literature would come closer to that of another satellite of Surrealism and translator of French Surrealist poetry, George Reavey. Like other members of the Surrealist Group, Roger Roughton also became engaged in support of the Spanish Republic, for which his editorial labour in *Contemporary Poetry and Prose* was crucial. Nevertheless, he seemed more drawn to the already successful signs of proletarian revolution in the Soviet Union, although that would eventually disappoint him too, and was appalled at the prospect that the revolution, in Spain and elsewhere, might be crushed. He rejected the idea of private property and everything he owned, including manuscripts and paintings, was used to support the revolutionary cause and invested in the Communist Party.

During the thirties, Roughton's poetic and prose texts appeared in the journals *The Bookman* (1891-1934), *The Listener* (1929-1991), *The Programme* (1935-1937), *The Criterion* (1922-1939) and *Poetry (Chicago)* (1912-).[408] In January 1936 he started reviewing for the Communist and workers' periodical *Daily Worker* (1930-1966) and, in May 1936, he published the first issue of his *Contemporary Poetry and Prose* (1936-1937), a literary magazine which contributed to furthering Surrealist activity in Britain, just as much as it helped direct and organise Surrealist action within the official Party line which he supported. He contributed objects to the 1936 London Surrealist Exhibition as a member of the British Surrealist Group and to the 1937 Surrealist Objects and Poems Exhibition. Unfortunately, neither titles nor descriptions of these objects seem to have remained, something which is nevertheless to be expected from an artist who disregards both authorship and private property. Roughton also edited the Exhibition catalogue of the former and was a signatory to the fourth issue of the *International Surrealist Bulletin* (1936). He regularly attended the meetings of the Surrealist Group at Penrose's house in Hampstead; the meeting that took place on 8 April 1937, which was described by Gascoyne as "gloriously funny", represented a crucial moment in the development of the British Surrealist Group:

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[408] Roughton's texts remain uncollected and, with the exception of those published in his magazine *Contemporary Poetry and Prose* and in various exhibition catalogues, they are difficult to trace. The two poems published in *The Listener*, "Song Forgotten" and "Wall", were anthologised by Janet Adam Smith in *Poems of Tomorrow* (1935). See bibliography for further details.

R.[oughton] and J.[ennings] suggested that for various reasons the group should disband itself, which the group, presided over by a surprisingly astringent Read, indignantly refused to do. Abuse flew from corner to corner of Roland's polite, sumptuously decorated drawing room. 'I'm sorry, but all that you've been saying is *absolute balls*!'" (Gascoyne 1980: 74)

Jennings had recently converted to the Party line, and Roughton was critical of Breton's lately developed strong opposition to any sort of collaboration with the Communist Party. Jennings read some lines from Lenin with which he suggested that the kind of activities in which the Surrealist Group was engaged "were of the kind that fly off at a tangent and are of no service to the 'toiling masses of humanity'" (Gascoyne 1980: 74), and Roughton spoke of how much he had been affected during a visit to Lenin's tomb (Trevelyan 1957: 73). Both resigned that evening and, contrary to what Gascoyne wrote under his journal entry, neither Jennings nor Roughton signed the manifesto *We Ask Your Attention* (1937), issued by the Group shortly after that meeting.

At the prospect of a second international conflict, Roughton left for Ireland in July 1939. He was greatly affected by the Nazi-Soviet Pact of August 1939, and the concessions which the Soviet Union granted Germany as offshoots of the agreement, which eventually precipitated the outbreak of the Second World War. The German occupation of France was followed by Hitler's strategic move to invade the Soviet Union in June 1941, the plans for which had started during the spring of that year. Before the culmination of these plans, Roger Roughton had gassed himself at his home in Dublin on 22 April 1941. News of his death appeared in the *Daily Express*, as the secret service had trailed him to Ireland. It was only because of this that his mother, with whom relations had been strained since his father died in the First World War, learned of his suicide. She had to pawn her last ring to go to Ireland to identify him. Roughton's suicide was a political and a personal response to the Second World War: as an international imperialist conflict to which the Soviet Union was contributing, it crushed the Communist ideology as he understood it. On the other hand, the conflict also revived the personal trauma of his father's death, of the strained relationship with his mother and, it has been suggested, of what he felt as a traumatic sexual ambiguity. Roughton followed the path that other British Surrealists had taken in the development of their political stance from pacifism (regarding rearmament), to the support of institutional armed intervention (in the context of the Spanish Civil War) and, finally, to a form of symbolic camouflage (his suicide). The act of suicide can be seen as a form of camouflage for, although it seemed to silence or hide the voice of revolution, repressed by destruction, it also served to vociferously

expose and denounce the imperialistic motives of the war. To commit suicide in a neutral country is not an act of personal desperation, but a public statement of political denunciation. In July 1941, Cyril Connolly published posthumously Roughton's essay "The Human House", a troubled text which served as a preamble to his own death:

> There can be no dispute about it, the thought of death is the most poignant thought on earth. And the first to realize the mortality of man must have felt an icy and almost intolerable loneliness close to madness. Yet in a sense that first doubter sowed a tiny seed of doubt in the mind of every living person. Was there ever a time when there was no doubter? (Roughton 1941: 51)

It was maybe a symptomatic coincidence that, in the same issue, Mass-Observation published "June 23rd" on the Nazi invasion of Russia, the cynical outcome of the Nazi-Soviet Pact which shook European democracies and which Roughton had dreaded.

2.2. Poetic Militancy in *Contemporary Poetry and Prose* (1936-1937).

Contemporary Poetry and Prose, Britain's most influential politico-literary journal of the 1930s, was edited by Roger Roughton from the Arts Café on 1, Parton Street (opposite David Archer's bookshop) from May 1936 to Autumn 1937. Ten numbers were issued in all on a monthly basis, except for the last two numbers, which were quarterly issues. In spite of the critics' insistence on describing the journal as the official organ of the Surrealist Group, it is more accurately described as Avant-Garde, rather than Surrealist. Its contributors belong to the younger generation of British Avant-Garde poets (Gascoyne and Roughton were only nineteen at the time), whose texts are often characterised by a radically modern, deliberately irreverent and anti-Establishment discourse. These included texts and translations by the British Surrealists, with Roughton's role in promoting the work of young talented poets having been only recently duly acknowledged.[409] There was also a Contemporary Poetry and Prose Editions series which published an anthology of Benjamin Péret's poems, *A Bunch of Carrots* (1936) which, after undergoing censorship, was retitled as *Remove your Hat* (1936). It included translations by David Gascoyne and Humphrey Jennings, and a note by Paul Éluard.[410] The second number was the first British anthology of poems by e.e. cummings, whom Roughton had met during a trip to the United States.

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[409] See Rod Mengham's "'National Papers Please Reprint': Surrealist Magazines in Britain" in *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines* (2009): 688-703.

[410] *Contemporary Poetry and Prose* had, like other literary journals of the time, a history of censorial experiences with its printers. Roughton devoted his editorial "Censored" (Roughton 1937b: 2-3) to denounce the ideology and methods behind such practices.

However, the merits of *Contemporary Poetry and Prose* were not only poetic, but political too: it provided a forum for the support of and an ideological point of encounter for poets of the lefts, as well as being an aesthetic counterpoint to other leftist publications. A Surrealist in his social and economic politics, Roughton published his political writings there, as well as a deeply felt letter by John B. Trend on the occasion of the death of Spanish poet Federico García Lorca, and a sharp and sound declaration against Britain's Non-Intervention policy to support the Spanish People after the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War.[411] *Contemporary Poetry and Prose* is where the Surrealist Group can be seen, not as an isolated and elitist coterie, but rather as belonging within the context of a coherent ideological circle, which included Dylan Thomas, George Reavey (the eminent translator of Soviet literature), Ruthven Tood, Kenneth Allott, William Empson, and Francis Scarfe, among others. Although some of these have been seen as satellites of the Surrealist Group, they ought to be considered as fellow poetic and political experimenters.[412] In this context, the study of *Contemporary Poetry and Prose* contributes towards a more coherent understanding of the Surrealist Group in relation to the British Avant-Garde which retrospective analysis has not favoured so far. In an editorial in the December 1936 issue, Roughton declared that the journal was "in no way an official Surrealist magazine", disclaiming the Surrealist Group's responsibility "for the political or other opinions expressed in the paper (Roughton 1936: 143). Indeed, the British Surrealist Group would not have an official organ until April 1938, when the first issue of the *London Bulletin* (1938-1940) appeared, a magazine in which Roughton never collaborated. Until then, Roughton's journal was the journal which most contributed to furthering Surrealist experimentation in Britain.

Contemporary Poetry and Prose and its young editor did indeed profess, to use Sykes Davies's own term, public "sympathies" for Surrealism and it welcomed in each issue a vast number of Surrealist texts (by George Barker, David Gascoyne, Humphrey Jennings, André Breton and Paul Éluard, among others), or works by poets generally credited as predecessors of Surrealism, such as Lautréamont and Rimbaud. It also published translations by the Communist folklorist A.L. Lloyd, a fact that kept collaborative liaisons between Surrealism and Communism open at the time, and modern versions of traditional folk ballads, which stressed

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[411] The relationship between aesthetics and ideology in Roughton's editorials in *Contemporary Poetry and Prose* is considered in B. Toth's article "Guerrilla Aesthetics: the Editorial Aims of Roger Roughton and *Contemporary Poetry and Prose*" (1992).

[412] Indeed, texts by Todd and Allot were labelled as Surrealist in the magazine. Although the influence of Surrealism in these authors must be acknowledged, their role in the development of the movement in Britain was only peripheral. A much longer study would be required to analyse the Surrealist elements in these minor poets' works.

Surrealism's interest in the persistence of the primitive in the modern.[413] Roughton published there his own Surrealist texts too, as well as a personal defence of Surrealism against Ezra Pound's attacks. When the first issue of *Contemporary Poetry and Prose* appeared, it came as a preamble for the London Surrealist Exhibition, whose opening was accompanied by a special double issue devoted to Surrealism. In spite of these early Surrealist leanings, Roughton kept his more *political* readership watchful by also announcing the collaboration of authors who were generally considered more *engagé* than the Surrealists (especially, W.H. Auden, Cecil Day-Lewis and Stephen Spender). Surrealism was nevertheless central to the jounral, which devoted a double issue to the movement.

The double Surrealist number included texts by Paul Éluard, Benjamin Péret, André Breton, the then Belgian Surrealist E.L.T. Mesens, Salvador Dalí, Georges Hugnet, Luis Buñuel and other international and national Surrealist figures. Paul Éluard's "Statement" (1936), translated by Gascoyne, was a brief introduction to the Surrealist theory of the imagination in which imagination and spontaneity are placed at the centre of the creative process, while all traces of individualism are effaced so that a collective unconscious may be reached. The initiatory character of this double issue is made patent in the revelatory nature of Éluard's text:

> Poetry is not necessarily limited by the secret ideas you have about it. But like the dreams one does not tell, it is apt to cause lapses of memory and to prevent the regular formation of a world superior to that in which forgetfulness is used for the self-preservation of the individual. That inspiration may leap freely from the mirror, all reflections of the personality must be effaced. Give influences free play, invent what has already been invented, what is beyond doubt, what is unbelievable, give spontaneity its pure value. (Éluard 1936a: 18)

Given these collaborations and the international situation of the time, political and aesthetic links with Spain were soon established: a Spanish folk song was published in translation by Lloyd in the June 1936 number, and this was followed by texts by Buñuel, Dalí, Lorca and Alberti. With the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in July 1936, the journal engaged in a campaign for the defence of the Spanish democratic government. The August-September 1936 number published several poems by Picasso in translation by Reavey, Gascoyne's

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[413] Connections between A.L. Lloyd and the Surrealists were established through a shared ideological stance and their common reverence of Federico García Lorca. The Surrealists were attracted by his Avant-Gardism and the Surrealist quality of his poetry; Lloyd, on the other hand, was interested in the folk elements of Lorca's neo-populist writing. It would not be until 1937 that Lloyd became critical of Surrealist activity in Britain in the pages of *Left Review* (1934-1938).

translation of a text on "The Art of Picasso" by Dalí, and George Barker's "X Stanzas" which, although not originally concerned with the Spanish Civil War, were later incorporated into his impressive *Calamiterror* (1937). This issue was also the first one to include political statements in support of the Spanish people: "Support the SPANISH PEOPLE against Fascism" read the back cover of numbers 4-5 and 6. This statement does not only evidence Roughton's ideological stance, but also reveals the general, and mistaken, it would be learned, assumption that the conflict was merely an insurgent uprising which could be quelled ideologically. Of course, as the conflict intensified and grew into a full-scale civil war, a shift from ideology to action was required; thus, the November and December 1936 issues of *Contemporary Poetry and Prose* included pleas to send arms to Republican Spain: "ARMS FOR THE PEOPLE OF SPAIN. Support all meetings and demonstrations to end the farce of 'non-intervention'" was the statement which, on the back cover, indicated a fuller awareness of the extent of the conflict, and the decisive step taken towards action.

As news of events arrived in Britain, in October 1936 Roughton published his editorial "Fascism murders art", where he expressed his indignation for the murder of Federico García Lorca. In this editorial, Roughton evaluated the extent of the damage that Fascist rule was bringing on European culture by denouncing the murder of the Spanish poet, which had shocked intellectuals throughout Europe:

> When I hear the word Culture I reach for my Browning," says the Nazi Stormtrooper in the Nazi play amidst the Nazi applause – and when a fascist reaches for a revolver he pulls the trigger. In Granada early in September the fascists murdered Federico Garcia Lorca, Spain's greatest modern poet. Lorca was not a communist or a socialist and took no active part in politics, but he was admired throughout democratic Spain, so fascism reached for its Browning.[414] (Roughton 1936e: 106)

Thus Roughton restated his commitment to the Spanish cause and his support of Republican Spain, and urged British intellectuals to take sides on the matter, to abandon their idealised ivory tower and regain contact with reality. Roughton's exposition of the dichotomy between aesthetics and ideology which British intellectuals needed to confront served as a preamble to the influential survey carried out by Left Review in 1937, *Authors Take Sides on the Spanish War*, as he defended a reconciliation between the poetic and the ideological under a common cause:

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[414] The opening sentence, which originally appears in Hanns Johst's philo-Nazi play *Schlageter* (1933), was popularised by Nazi sympathisers.

There is no longer a fence for intellectuals to sit on: they must choose between fascism and anti-fascism; and magazines of modern poetry can no longer pretend they are Something Apart. The Spanish people are fighting against fascism; they need money, food, arms; 'non-intervention,' when the fascists are being armed by other fascist countries, is criminal; 'non-intervention' means active help to fascism. And fascism means torturing of liberals, socialists, communists, pacifists, intellectuals, the burning of books and pictures, the negation of art and liberty. The communist Minister of Education in the democratic Spanish government appoints Picasso director of the great Art Museum of the Prado; the Spanish fascists murder Lorca. Fascist or anti-fascist: which is it to be? (Roughton 1936e: 106)

With these words, Roughton emphasises the role of modern poetry and poets as crucial participants in the fight against Fascism. Poets must engage in this common cause against the censorial and persecutory rule of Fascism. Britain's politics of Non-Intervention in Spain, hidden behind the fallacy of institutional pacifism, far from adopting a neutral position, was facilitating Fascism's advance and enhancing its power. Thus, Non-Intervention provided an active aid to the Nationalist faction parallel to that given by Fascist countries. In this short editorial, Roughton develops an inductive argument which emphasises the gradual escalation of repressive measures in Fascist regimes: from the persecution of specific ideological creeds ("liberals, socialists, communists"), to medieval cultural havoc ("burning of books and pictures") and eventual annihilation of basic human rights ("art and liberty"). Finally, in an attempt to stir British intellectuals into action, the author verbalises the very duality of the situation, deliberately avoiding the purportedly third option, the one adopted by countries like Britain and France, and establishing an ethical ultimatum, since choosing not to choose is also a choice: "Fascist or anti-fascist: which is it to be?" (Roughton 1936e: 106). Withe the same intent, Roughton reproduced a letter that the Cambridge Hispanist and author of *The Origins of Modern Spain* (1934), Professor John B. Trend had sent to the *Times Literary Supplement*, and which was published on 17 October 1936. Trend, who had met Lorca in Granada in 1919, made public in Britain the circumstances surrounding his death. Trend's letter, appallingly grave and sincere, functioned as an ideological eye-opener in Britain, where Trend was the first person to provide such an insight into the murder:

He (Federico Garcia [sic.] Lorca) was at Granada at the time of the revolt, and had taken refuge with a friendly shopkeeper called Gonsalez [sic.]. But the man had two sons who were fascists. Federico was denounced, dragged away with ignominy, and condemned to death for having in his possession a letter from Don Fernando de los

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Rios –from a university professor well known and greatly respected in England and America, and one who had been the honoured guest of Heads of Houses both at Oxford and Cambridge. The murder took place between August 10 and 15. It was useless to intercede with the rebel 'authorities,' and the people of Granada had the privilege of seeing a poet's books publicly burnt in the Plaza del Carmen as a new auto da fé. The circumstances of the arrest, the trumped-up charge and the barbarous detail of the burning of books of verse show what the attitude of military-clerical reaction in Spain is likely to be towards literature and art. The least an English friend can do is to make these things public. (Trend 1936: 138)

These expressions of indignation were followed up and, in the November 1936 issue, Lloyd's translations of poems by Lorca and Alberti were accompanied by a political tract entitled "Declaration on Spain". The declaration was issued by "The Surrealist Group in England", and signed by Hugh Sykes Davies, David Gascoyne, Humphrey Jennings, Roland Penrose and Roger Roughton, among others. Establishing a rhetorical dialectics between truth and lie, knowledge and ignorance, awareness and pretence, the declaration exposed the deceit behind the British government's policy of Non-Intervention in Spain. At the centre of the declaration was not only a pragmatic demand to send arms to Spain, but also a theoretical argumentation for wider ideological consciousness in the face of official rhetoric and institutional discourse, an idea that especially informs the work of Roland Penrose and Charles Madge:

1. No one can continue to believe that, if a People's Government is elected constitutionally, Capitalism will be content to oppose it only by constitutional means.

2. No one can continue to believe that violence is the special weapon of the proletariat, while Capitalism is invariably peaceful in its methods.

3. No one can continue to believe that Fascism is a merely national phenomenon. [. . .]

5. No one can continue to believe that our National Government has any right to speak in the name of democracy. It has assisted in the crime of non-intervention; it has refused to allow the export of arms to a Government democratically constituted, and has regarded with equanimity the assistance given by Fascist powers to the rebels.

(The Surrealist Group in England 1936a: n.p.)

Here, we find that the British Surrealists shared a common belief in the need to oppose the false rhetoric of the dominant discourse, and Roughton also took advantage of the pages of *Contemporary Poetry and Prose* to clarify Surrealism's position regarding political commitment and, especially, its relations with the Communist Party. In his article "Surrealism

and Communism" (1936), published in the Picasso poems number, Roughton emphasised the revolutionary role of Surrealism:

> Surrealist work, while not calling directly for revolutionary intervention, can be classed as revolutionary in so far as it can break down irrational bourgeois-taught prejudices, thus preparing the mental ground for positive revolutionary thought and action. (Roughton 1936i: 74)

Thus Roughton defended the autonomy of Surrealist practice in the face of the propagandistic requirements imposed by the Communist Party on Socialist Realism and revolutionary literature in general. Paradoxically, however, Roughton's own poetry partially contradicts this statement, for it reconciles image and ideology by bringing together revolutionary aesthetics and action: in his poems, he makes use of automatic techniques and Surrealist imagery to present actual calls for revolutionary intervention, calls to arms and even political propaganda for the Communist Party. Despite his peculiar poetic approach to the political aesthetics of Surrealism, which notably differs in content and intent from those of other Surrealists, Roughton understands that the revolutionary claims of the movement are justified: Surrealism is revolutionary insofar as its systematic exploration of the unconscious contributes to breaking down the ideological fabric which supports material conditions and the capitalist class structure. For Roughton, Surrealism's contribution implies a dialectic movement, as it encompasses both the destruction of the prevailing order, and the construction of a new system of thought, a new myth, on which the new material structure of a classless society may be based.

The article is, for the most part, a critical analysis of British Surrealism's commitment to the revolutionary cause, and a critique of Herbert Read's political statements in the *International Surrealist Bulletin*, an itinerant international Surrealist publication whose fourth issue appeared in September 1936, following the closure of the London Surrealist Exhibition. In this bulletin, the theoretical bases from which Surrealism would develop in Britain were laid. In his article, Roughton shows his agreement with Read regarding art's not only necessary but unavoidable commitment to "the general process of social development", and this will be echoed in Roughton's later declaration that "magazines of modern poetry can no longer pretend they are something apart" (Roughton 1936e: 106). For him, the union of poetics and politics, of image and ideology, was necessarily an indissoluble one, as he defended the central role that artistic creation was to play in the revolution. However, he regrets that "the Bulletin should also contain less responsible statements" and insists that the essentially revolutionary nature of the movement should not be obfuscated by conflicting individual positions.

Roughton rejects Read's interpretation of the Marxist Unity of Theory and Practice and warns of the separatist threat posed by his Trotskyist position.[415] In his text, Read had questioned the validity of aesthetic and moral impositions on the work of art, evidencing his opposition to Stalinist Communism. Roughton deprecates this "dangerous tendency among certain surrealists . . . this Trotskyist 'more communist than the communists' attitude" (1936i: 74), which he sees as politically irresponsible. Roughton's earnest defence of the democratic structure operating within the Communist Party, while still justifiable in 1936 Britain, already places him in a distinct position within British Surrealism:

> The Communist Party, with its policy of instant recall and maximum discussion of all issues before decisions are taken, is the most democratic organisation to-day, and those who, claiming to be communists, remain outside the party and criticise it, show not their independence but their irresponsibility. (Roughton 1936i: 74)

For Roughton, political militancy within the Party was necessary in order to fight Fascism. But his injunctions to join the Communist Party also encouraged affiliation among British intellectuals, and many of the Surrealist artists who became members in the following months were partly influenced by his writings: there are, for instance, clear political influences in the poems of those Surrealists who contributed to *Contemporary Poetry and Prose*, such as David Gascoyne, George Barker and Humphrey Jennings, as well as in his own poems too.

In this text Roughton also provides the main line of action for the Surrealist Group in Britain: his main concern is with union within the ideological left and the formation of a United Front, which he, following Communist mandates, deemed indispensable in order to secure a democratic alliance against Fascism.[416] Thus he states that "as long as the surrealist will help to establish a broad United Front [. . .] there is no reason why there should be any quarrel between surrealism and communism" (Roughton 1936i: 75). His emphasis on association and "compromise with all progressive parties and people" nevertheless may seem naïve for, although in Britain it was the Labour Party that frequently hindered association, the Communist Party itself would soon censor other political options which opposed its own concept of the revolution and how it should be carried out. Roughton's main concern is thus for co-operation and united forces to suppress the Fascist and capitalist state, an idea which

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[415] Whereas Read understood the Unity of Theory and Practice as a test of the validity of theory *against* action, in Marxist doctrine it is a test of theory *within* action, a unity of consciousness and reality, of subject and object, which also pervades Surrealist thought.

[416] An article on "Building the People's Front" by Harry Pollitt was in fact published in the December 1936 issue of *Left Review*. In it he addressed the Labour Party, like Roughton had addressed the Surrealists, to make them aware of the need to unite in the creation of a People's Front (Pollitt 1936: 797).

recurs in his poems, and he concludes with an express desire for a Surrealist contribution towards the establishment of a United Front, outside of which, he stresses, no revolutionary part can be played. It will be seen how this preoccupation with the possible fissures and scissions within the ideological left, which is so central to his political writing, is also a main concern in his poetic texts.

Similar concerns about the ideological position of the British Surrealist Group had already been articulated by Roughton in a review of David Gascoyne's *A Short Survey of Surrealism* (1935) which had appeared in the *Daily Worker* in April 1936. In "Barber's Bust with Loaf on Head" (Roughton 1936b: 7), Roughton's criticism of Gascoyne's book is limited to a few lexical and orthographical questions, and his focus soon shifts to a harsh criticism of the development of Breton's political stance since the indictment of Louis Aragon for "Red Front" (1933) and, more particularly, of the *Contre-Attaque Manifesto* (1935), a collaboration between the French Surrealists, already Trotskyist in orientation, and a group of non-Stalinist left-wing intellectuals led by Bataille. The *Contre-Attaque Manifesto* had condemned Stalinist policy and proclaimed the death of the "slaves" of capitalism, and Roughton was enraged by these inflammatory declarations, which seemed to criminalise the proletariat. On the other hand, Gascoyne's *Survey* was not only a sympathetic analysis of Surrealism, but also a declaration of faith in the poetic and ideological precepts dictated by Breton. Since Breton had already moved away from Communism and was gradually approaching an Anarchist position, Roughton became concerned that a similar move may also occur in Britain, where Surrealism, still incipient, did not have a history of clashes and disputes with the Communist Party, as it did in France, and where the possibility of a United Front, not yet realised, harboured hopes for the left. Quoting from Gascoyne's text, Roughton blamed him for being

> the aspiring organiser of a 'Left group of intellectuals refusing to accept the standard set by the existing organisations of the Left' and wishing to 'defend their particular standards of expression against the vulgar-marxismus and sectarianism which have up till now distinguished the Artists' and Writers' International (British section)' (incidentally no body of that name exists). (Roughton 1936b: 7)

Roughton thus condemns Gascoyne, not only for lack of lack of accuracy, but most importantly for adopting Breton's unorthodox leftism and attempting to organise Surrealist practice in Britain outside the field of influence of the Communist Party. However, in spite of these seemingly virulent attacks, Gascoyne's poems were regularly published in Roughton's periodical, which is indicative, not only of their friendly relationship, but also of the fact that political differences did not manage to open a breach within the Group during its formative

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years. Rather, it is the criticism that has tended to magnify political discrepancies, obliterating the Surrealists' ideological commitment to the cause of revolution and to further poetic experimentation in Britain, and their personal alliances. It is in the light of these discrepancies that Roughton's article can be seen as aimed at clarifying the position of Surrealism towards Communism, or the relationship between the two. His vindication of fidelity to the Communist Party and the establishment of a United Front, bridging differences between the offshoots of Marxist thought in Britain, is also a defence of a more tolerant and open stance, so as to make possible an ideological and aesthetic alliance of British intellectuals at a time characterised by an upsurge of ideological radicalisation and censorship in the international political arena. It has to be emphasised that *Contemporary Poetry and Prose* made visible, and also possible, such an alliance. It advocated a revolutionary poetics which was not only an alternative to Socialist Realism: it also opened up the creative possibilities of a truer and all-embracing revolutionary art.

In spite of apparent contradictions, Roughton's position must not be misunderstood, and his support of Surrealism as both an aesthetic and ideological position must not be questioned. We need only look at how, in November 1936, a twenty-year-old poetic neophyte, he responded firmly and articulately to an attack on Surrealism which Ezra Pound, twenty years his senior and an established poet, had sent to *Contemporary Poetry and Prose*. Both Pound's text and Roughton's reply were published. On the page, an asterisk besides Pound's name refers the reader to an editorial footnote by Roughton which is explicit enough:

> Ezra Pound. Great uncle of modern English poetry, essayist, art critic, amateur economist, anthology king, poet, admirer of Mussolini . . .; author of the famous Cantos, one of which he kindly offered to CONTEMPORARY POETRY AND PROSE... payment demanded: forty pounds; "il miglor fabbro" according to over modest Mr. Eliot; recent pseudonym: Alfred Venison; no enemy of surrealism at its start, but no friend of some surrealists . . .; lives in Rapallo, heads his letters with the fascist year. (Roughton 1936d: 136)

Pound's attack on the Surrealists focuses mainly on two aspects. On the one hand, he criticises the Surrealists' "sustained ignorance of [their] predecessors [. . .] The XIIth century had surrealism in plenty" (Pound 1936: 136), probably unaware of the claims already made by Herbert Read and Hugh Sykes Davies on the primitive origins of Surrealism. Note also how Roughton's choice of popular ballads and folk songs of the oral tradition in his journal also stressed the connections between Surrealism and older poetic forms. On the other hand, Pound accuses the Surrealists of using revolutionary discourse as an advertising strategy, while

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in fact eluding actual socio-political engagement, and of hiding themselves behind a set of delusional Freudian principles:

> When it comes to 'breaking down irrational' (or rational for that matter) 'bourgeois prejudices' [. . .] the simple practice of using WORDS with clear and unequivocal meaning will blast all the London Schools of economics; history or other bourgeois dribble; without any –isms being needed as hyperdermic. (Pound 1936: 136)

If they are truly revolutionists, Pound insists, the Surrealists should engage in direct political action, instead of obfuscating their revolutionary stance with ideological quests to discredit the unconscious myths of the bourgeoisie. Revolution can only be achieved by the "unequivocal" word, and not the obscure word of the unconscious, which is for Pound an embellished form of poetic evasion and political cowardice: "The mere flight from and evasion of defined words and historic fact is NOT *sur-* but SUB-realism" (Pound 1936: 136).

In his reply to Pound, "Eyewash, Do You?: a reply To Mr. Pound", Roughton clarifies the main points expressed in his article "Surrealism and Communism" and blames Pound for misunderstanding his position and deducing from it "that the surrealists are Art-for-Art's-sakers who hide their fear of revolution under a mass of Freudian obscurity" (Roughton 1936d: 137). Whereas he stresses the existence of an unconscious element in art since prehistory, he also acknowledges that Freud's discoveries have enabled a systematised approach to this element in literature. Still, Roughton insists that "while surrealism is intrinsically a revolutionary element of limited but certain importance, an overdose of Freudianism may lead, and has led, some surrealist to an individualistic, anarchic Trotskyism" (Roughton 1936d: 137). Returning to political questions, Roughton is also critical of Breton, whom he nevertheless calls "maestro", for his irresponsible attacks on Soviet policy at a time when democracy and socialism should join in a common effort against international Fascism. However, he also asserts that, while retaining independence from Breton's stance, "I can speak for those surrealists [. . .] who realise that the Communist Party is the only party fighting for the creation of a society where for the first time they and everyone will be able to work under the most favourable possible conditions" (Roughton 1936d: 137). At the time, that was indeed the case of most British Surrealists, as Roughton states: "Mr. Pound charges the surrealist with evading historic fact; this is true of some, a minority, but to call it a fundamentally surrealist crime is to libel the majority of the surrealists" (Roughton 1936d: 138). Thus Roughton vehemently defends Surrealism's materialist concept of history, and its active engagement in political action:

A group, most of whose members accept the Marxist interpretation of history and the programme of the Communist International, can hardly be charged with ignoring what Mr. Pound, in his picturesque economic phraseology, calls 'Communization of product' and 'Socialization of the means of exchange' [. . .] the part it [Surrealism] has to play in helping to bring over a small section of that small section of the bourgeoisie which in times of capitalist crisis joins the class-conscious militant workers, that part in comparison with the direct impact of economic circumstances is very very minute; but the rôle exists and the revolutionary sincerity of its players is usually genuine. No, the 'pseudolutionists' are rather to be found among the ex-patriate admirers of fascism and capitalist quackery. (Roughton 1936d: 138)

Against Pound's charge that they should use "WORDS with clear and unequivocal meaning" instead of hiding themselves behind the obscure Freudian babbling of the unconscious, Roughton resorts to *The Communist Manifesto* as "a brilliant pamphlet using WORDS with clear and unequivocal meaning, containing nothing but true statements based on a rational and correct analysis of capitalism" (Roughton 1936d: 137). Thus Roughton defends Communism as the ideological substratum of the Surrealist aesthetics, implying that a reconciliation of aesthetics and ideology was possible.

Pound's attacks are symptomatic of a general attitude towards Surrealism which discredited its efforts to reconcile aesthetics and ethics, failing to acknowledge the ideological import of the Surrealist image. This general assumption that engaged art was necessarily realistic in form was continuously fought by all the members of the British Surrealist Group. In his poems, Roughton does not only bridge the distance between poetic experimentation, ideological engagement and revolutionary action: the performative nature of his Surrealist texts reveals ways in which the exploration of the unconscious becomes in itself an act of conscious propaganda, underscoring the significant role that Surrealism is to play in the revolution. Roughton's poetry responds to a unique formulation of a sort of Socialist Surrealism which brings together theory and practice with a common area of influence which includes both Marx and Freud: by exploring the unconscious, Roughton's poetry *acts* on the conscious, and this is most clearly seen in his poetic calls to arms and injunctions to join in the revolution. It is this performative poetics, this peculiar Socialist Surrealism, that places Roughton both at the centre and the periphery of Surrealist writing in Britain.

Pound's attack on the Surrealists was supported by extremist left- and right-wing organs alike, which agreed on the frivolous nature of the movement, and failed to see Surrealism's earnest attempt at reconciling the real and the ideal. However, for Roughton, the

Surrealist image contributes to breaking down the unconscious bourgeois-taught prejudices which support society's class structure and its unequal distribution of wealth. Surrealism's visions of the collapse of this ideological system and the questioning of its commodity structure stir the collective unconscious, thus establishing a new ideological framework which enables revolutionary action. The purported *frivolity* which may be observed in Roughton's humorous style, nonsensical wit and satirical portraits, is countered by his earnest commitment to revolution both in poetry and action, in word and deed. In this direction, Rod Mengham has recently seen in Roughton's work "a desire for wider understanding of the political scope of Surrealism and its potential social impact. There is in fact a serious ambition hidden behind the apparently jocular instruction that rounds off one of his more successful poems: 'National papers please reprint'" (Mengham 2009: 691). As will be seen, this combination of aesthetic humour and political propaganda is one of the defining features of Roughton's Socialist Surrealism.

After so much activity, in the Autumn of 1937, *Contemporary Poetry and Prose* ceased publication after its tenth issue, for which Henry Moore designed the front cover. Roughton left briefly for America, but he still published political articles and book reviews in left-wing periodicals such as *The Labour Monthly*, where, as a Marxist critic, he continued to oppose fiercely the British government's appeasement campaign, which he had also denounced in his Surrealist poems.

2.3. Roger Roughton's Socialist Surrealism.

Coinciding with the publication of Roughton's "Fascism Murders Art" in October 1936, Cecil Day-Lewis's article "English Writers and a People's Front" appeared in *Left Review*, where he blamed the latest revival of the Romantic spirit in English letters for furthering "the tradition of individualism and political indifference" to which contemporary English writers were heirs (Day-Lewis 1936a: 671). In the case of British Surrealism it must be said that, even if it epitomised in many ways the spirit behind such a Romantic revival, it did not share in the political indifference which Day-Lewis presents as the main impediment for the formation of a People's Front in Britain. Roger Roughton was in fact a strong supporter of the People's Front and, as has been seen, he played a central role in the organisation of Surrealist activity in this direction. In fact, the Surrealists in general and Roughton in particular was, like Day-Lewis, abhorrent of the British individualism which hindered organised action in aesthetic and political spheres. This abhorrence was voiced by Day-Lewis in his article:

> English writers do not inherit the habit of organisation. We have literary cliques, of
> course: but 'schools' of literary thought, in the sense of bodies of writers closely

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organised for discussion and criticism and the interchange of ideas, have been unknown in recent years. The English writer really likes to think of himself as a sort of inspired amateur; he does not, as a general rule, look upon himself as a craftsman [. . .] our writers have been slow to organise professionally, let alone politically. Organisation –there is no use denying it- is still repugnant to them, because it seems to conflict with their 'amateur status' and their idea of artistic liberty. (Day-Lewis 1936a: 671)

In spite of these comments, the Surrealist Group was the only organised group in 1930s Britain to reconcile, without concessions, artistic liberty and political commitment, their Romantic condition as inspired and amateur creators of images, and their materialistic belief in poetry as craftsmanship and as an ideological agent. Roger Roughton is, in this sense, paradigmatic: his Surrealist images are poetic experiments aimed at linguistic, ideological and social freedom. They bear the stamp of proletarian literature, extolling the working classes and denouncing their oppression under capitalist control. They are also images which, through the conjunction of the real and the ideal which the Soviet Union epitomised for Roughton, subvert the very notions of authority and ownership on which such a control is based. Roughton's Surrealist texts contribute effectively to break down the indifference which Day-Lewis condemned in non-realist British writers. The similarities between Day-Lewis's statements and Roughton's assertions in "Fascism Murders Art" are striking. Acknowledging that in the 1930s few English authors were reactionary, the former insisted on the need to impress upon those writers who are politically indifferent on principle

the anti-cultural trend of Fascism ('whenever I hear the word culture, I reach for my gun'), the burning of the books, the persecution of liberal writers. But it is far more important (and difficult) to convince the neutral English intellectual that this anti-cultural trend is not a mere isolated national phenomenon –not 'something that could never happen in *this* country.' [. . .] Democracy is everywhere threatened. (Lewis 1936a: 672)

In relation to Roughton's increasing awareness of this threat, a progression of his commitment to what would become his characteristic form of Socialist Surrealism can be traced from his first proto-Surrealist poems to his last Socialist-Surrealist pieces. In this section, Roughton's poetic development is traced, paying special attention to those elements that distinguish his Surrealist production from that of other members of the British Surrealist Group. Roughton's singular poetics in the context of British Surrealist practice can be best described as a sort of Socialist Surrealism, which he developed during 1936 and 1937.

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Roughton's Socialist Surrealism draws on Surrealist automatism and revolutionary Socialism, while simultaneously subverting them: his poetry is, on the one hand, consciously propagandistic and socio-political in subject matter; on the other hand, it does not attempt to be a truthful reflection of reality, but a reflection of its revolutionary potentialities, and rejects external impositions on modes of representation.[417] Roughton's poetry is also extremely subjective as an image-making mechanism: automatic images, slips of the tongue or Carrollian puns, unconscious associations and prophetic visions are at the core of his Surrealist poetics. But the message transcribed by these is objective and ideologically conscious, engaged in the materiality of things. Being a fervent defender of both the Communist and the Surrealist creed, Roughton manages to bring together image and ideology in his poems, which are highly aestheticised calls to arms, poetic denunciations of the social conditions of the working classes and witty satires on capitalist society. In this, his images are closer to George Grosz's caustic, politically-charged Dadaist collages and drawings of the 1920s. Like Grosz, Roughton presents, with mordant humour and piercing sincerity, a society split by economic forces which separate individuals into two distinct groups: the owners of capital (authority figures: politicians, bankers, army officers) and the dispossessed (workers, war victims, the poor); at the same time, the basic difference between Grosz and Roughton is temporal: whereas Grosz depicts the appalling aftermath of the First World War, Roughton anticipates the dreadful legacy of the second. Also, Surrealism and the expectations raised by the triumph of the revolution in the Soviet Union and, so it was thought, in Spain, allowed Roughton to develop a more positive outlook in some of his poems: the dream of revolution was for Roughton both a Communist and a Surrealist dream.

Published in T.S. Eliot's *Criterion* in April 1936, Roughton's first proto-Surrealist poems, "The Sand in the Bone", "The Skin of the Stone" and "The Stick of Blood" (Roughton 1936k: 455-457), already anticipate elements and images of his later Surrealist compositions. The three poems form a stylistic and thematic whole and are intended to provide a poetic account of psychological and physical states developing from a feeling of seclusion and immobility to delusive freedom and, finally, inertness. The poems make use of a regular anapestic rhythm

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[417] The bases for the new aesthetics of the revolution were laid at the 1934 Soviet Writers' Congress, where Andrei Zhdanov stated that Socialist Realism was the "truthful representation of life in its revolutionary development" (in Dobrenko 2011: 109). Evgeny Dobrenko has seen the inherent contradiction in the term and defends that the term "Romanticism" would suit better the needs of Socialism: "Life can be depicted either 'truthfully' (then this would be realism) or 'in its revolutionary development' (i.e. not entirely truthfully, romantically)" (Dobrenko 2011: 109). In this sense, Roughton's Socialist Surrealism may be said to respond more satisfactorily to the demands made by the new revolutionary aesthetics.

throughout, with formal echoes of the verse of Edward Lear and Lewis Carroll, and very short lines (dimeters and trimesters) grouped in four-line stanzas, reminiscent of the ballad structure, of which Roughton was fond.[418] The use of regular rhyme accentuates the apparently light tone of the poems, which counters the atmosphere of oppression and uncertainty reproduced in them. Although these poems cannot be described as Surrealist in either form or content, they may be considered as proto-Surrealist in the context of Roughton's own poetic development, and it must be remembered that his first Surrealist text appeared only one month after the publication of this series. Here, there are elements and images which already anticipate a purely Surrealist idiom. Such is the case, for instance, of the incipient tension already perceived between the organic and the inert, and also between the human and the animal, in Roughton's images:

> Fishes like swimmers
>
> Are breaking their scales
>
> Where legs have determined
>
> And covered the tails.
>
>
> A woman is crossing
>
> And crushing the eyes,
>
> And trees from the marshes
>
> Will follow the cries,
>
>
> Till grass like a swelling
>
> Will rise on the hand
>
> That feels for the marrow
>
> And only knows sand. (Roughton 1936k: 456)

These processes of personification, dehumanisation, animalisation and anthropomorphism, present in the very titles of the pieces, are used to question and subvert imposed or inherited conditions of life: thus, windows "shiver to gape" (455); fishes grow legs instead of scales, grass rises on the hand, fingers wither and splinter, stones have skin and veins (456); and blood

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[418] Roughton developed a strong predilection for the folk and oral tradition and published modern versions of several English ballads in *Contemporary Poetry and Prose*. As Rod Mengham has suggested, Roughton's choice of versions is not coincidental, and his interest in cross-cultural encounters in orality is confirmed by this fact: "Instead of re-publishing a medieval version that would suggest the desire for authentication, the imagining of an origin, he opts for an Appalachian version [of 'Little Musgrave'] taken down in the twentieth century, effectively celebrating tradition as a focus for continuous transformation" (Mengham 2009: 692).

climbs into a tree (457). Sand, standing for barrenness and inertness, invades the sphere of the animate, covering the bed (455) and penetrating the bone and marrow (455, 456). Finally, there are also elements reminiscent of proletarian literature, used to emphasise the excessive control exercised by the authoritative figure:

> Grows taller the figure
>
> And naked lights fail;
>
> The distance with ringing
>
> Rebukes by a shout
>
> But sounds of a muscle
>
> Can silence a doubt. (Roughton 1936k: 455)

All these elements already anticipated the kind of images that would appear in Roughton's Surrealist poems, and the ideological message conveyed by those images.

Roughton's first Surrealist poem appeared in the first issue of *Contemporary Poetry and Prose* in May 1936. Although the lines of "Watch This Space" (Roughton 1936m: 7) are longer and the rhythm has been progressively relaxed, it makes use of elaborate rhyme and a fixed stanzaic structure. Nevertheless, the idiom has become more concrete and iconoclastic: the title is intended as a parody of journalistic and advertising jargon, one of Roughton's distinctive poetic ensigns; however, with the phrase "Watch This Space" Roughton is not only parodying and subverting the language of capitalist advertising, but he is also announcing and publicising the new and exciting reality of the revolution. As opposed to the changeable and capricious nature of capitalist markets and advertised fashions, the new reality is stable and reliable, announced in a lasting format (the written poem), not subject to the shifting conditions of the economy. The irony of the title lies in the fact that it does not matter for how long one watches *this* space, for its message will permanently remain unaltered. Iconoclastic, humorous, irreligious and profoundly defamiliarising, this poem signals the beginning of Roughton's Socialist Surrealism. The different stanzas represent the progress of a religious service which is made strange in order to break down unconscious associations which have turned such occasions into a familiar and traditional occurrence throughout history. Thus, the baptismal water (symbolised by the river) does not provide security, but rather "fondles indecision / Stagnant in a pastoral estate"; the mosaics are *worn* meeting places for *imperfect* and corrupted lovers, "the weevil and the necrophil"; ascension is celebrated "In the plaster temple of the moon"; and the words of the priest and the songs of the congregation are silenced by the new revolutionary message which forever changes the historical course set up

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for the common people by religion: "For a message has removed the sun / And signal changed the season, / While the land expectant for a reason / Alters the anomalous design" (7).

Along similar lines, the criticism of religion as the opium of the people and of the church as the institution which subjects the physically-afflicted individual with the promise of spiritual redemption is also central to Roughton's most influential poem, "Animal Crackers in your Croup" (Roughton 1936a: 36).[419] The poem makes conspicuous use of an apparently playful and light tone, counteracted by the poet's propagandist aims. The explicit political and religious references are not avoided, and these help reproduce a propagandistic effect in a see-through guise of *fun and games*. The title of the poem comes from a popular song, "Animal Crackers in My Soup". It was sung in the 1935 film *Curly Top* by Shirley Temple, for whom Roughton and other Surrealists felt both attraction and repulsion on equal terms.[420] The song is about a little girl whose mother tries to teach her the alphabet by putting letter-shaped crisp biscuits in her soup. Then the mother puts animal-shaped crackers (presumably so the little girl learns the names of the animals), but as the little girl eats the animals, these remind her of neighbours she dislikes. In the poem, "croup" is a children's disease common at the time. The startling juxtaposition of terms in the title is symptomatic of the whole poem, rich in contradictory and paradoxical statements, and full of violent juxtapositions and unlikely linguistic unions. The title's paronomastic effect, a pun on Temple's song that substitutes "my soup" for "your croup", is significant, for it anticipates the very spontaneous feel of the poem and its spasmodic character. The regurgitating effect of the cough in the alliterative coupling "crackers-croup" anticipates the automatic *vomiting* of unexpected collocations throughout the poem. Originally derived from a political radicalisation of Dada, Surrealism inherits from its most direct continental ancestor its deliberate iconoclasm, ludicrousness and bold sense of humour. Ian Walker argues that "laughter has always had an honourable place alongside dream, love, violence as a 'Surrealist state' in which the stranglehold of logic is broken" (Walker et al. 1986: 10) and, more recently, Oliver C. Speck sustains that it is through humour that "Dada achieved what constitutes a commonly-held expectation for modern art: a subversion of the prevalent ideology" (Speck 2009: 371). Roughton's text also places laughter and playful mockery at the centre of its subversion. It is in humour and parody that his

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[419] Karl Marx's already familiar statement that "*Die Religion ist das Opium des Volkes*" first appeared in a text which criticised Hegel's idealistic system of thought, *Critique of Hegel's* Philosophy of Right (1843).
[420] Dalí created a collage in which Temple's face was superimposed on the sexualised body of a lioness, which he entitled *Shirley Temple, the Youngest, Most Sacred Monster of Contemporary Cinema* (1939), also known as the *Barcelona Sphinx. Animal Crackers* is also the title of a 1930 Marx Brothers film.

aesthetics of resistance rests in this poem.[421] Even if continental Dada exhausted itself in a message-less message which implied an almost gratuitous subversion for subversion's sake, Surrealism made use of the Dada attitude to achieve its aim of social revolution, and it is not insignificant that Roughton resorts to a form of Dadaistic and nonsense humour to advertise the new world of revolution. The nature and role of humour in literature and society raised much interest at this time. In a still acclaimed article entitled "Why the English Have no Taste" (1935), Herbert Read addressed the social psychology of the English through a critique of the notions "common sense" and "sense of humour", used to define a "certain ideal of normality" to the which the average Englishman aspires:

> Psychologists are beginning to suspect that this normality we value so much is no more than the most common neurosis; that normality is itself a neurosis, a retreat from the reality of life, a nervous mask. Everything in English life supports this view; the normal man *is* nervous –his laughter is an expression of nervousness. For English laughter (or, as I should more accurately call it, capitalist laughter) is not bodily laughter –not *belly laughter*, like the laughter of Chaucer and Rabelais; it is mental laughter, caused by an unconscious disturbance of suppressed instincts. (Read 1935e: 68)

Roughton's poem animates this sort of mental laughter, but it is the suppression and subsequent liberation of the instincts that eventually engages the reader in a truer form of laughter or parodic relief.[422] In order to achieve this, Roughton's verse is formally liberated in this poem: fixed rhyme and rhythm have been abandoned and line length is irregular. There is, nevertheless, a general tendency to use longer lines (especially tetrameters, pentameters and hexameters), and anapaestic rhythm, and the poem is rich in prosodic elements typically used in continental Surrealist poetry, with instances of assonant rhyme ("stone-bow-home", "womb-balloon", "well-dialect-attend"), internal rhyme ("rope-bow"), alliteration ("revolt-written", "human-hair-hangman", "lovers-palace") and, above all, consonance ("pay-bills-buy-pipe", "palmist-crystal", "creeper-strangle", "witness-will-tickle", "clergy-judge", "will-fall-well", "broadcast-dialect"). All these serve to highlight the propagandistic and bombastic tone

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[421] The emphasis placed, by the Surrealists and the critics alike, on straight political matters probably hindered an in-depth analysis of humour and laughter in Surrealism. This was so in spite of Freud's interest in humour in its relation to the unconscious and with the exception of Breton's *Anthology of Black Humour* (1939), with texts about Jonathan Swift, Thomas de Quincey, Lewis Carroll and Leonora Carrington, among others. Recent studies on Dada and Surrealist humour are Susan Rubin Suleiman's "Surrealist Black Humour: Masculine/Feminine" (2003) and Oliver C. Speck's "The Joy of Anti-Art: Subversion through Humour in Dada" (2009).

[422] It is, nevertheless, a very different form of humour from the one developed by Hugh Sykes Davies in *Petron* (1935), much more in the line of Rabelais's and Swift's grotesque tradition.

of the poem and create internal echoes, which contribute, together with the recurrent use of parallel structures, to the oral effectiveness of the proclamation.

The first stanza is a kind of introduction where the poet uses the second person singular to address the reader directly: "I have told you that there is a laugh in every corner / And a pocket-book stuffed with rolls of skin / To pay off the bills of the costive / To buy a new pipe for the dog / To send a committee to bury a stone" (Roughton 1936a: 36). Based on an initial metaphor, that of the "pocket-book stuffed with rolls of skin", this first stanza has a comic effect and is intended to ridicule the habits of bourgeois society. The present perfect tense ("I have told you" is repeated twice) when addressing the reader, an intended ideal reader who sympathises with the poem's ideology, is used as a rhetorical device to emphasise that the content he is going to deliver is already common knowledge. Through hyperbolic images, the poet warns the reader about that well-known careless attitude of the bourgeoisie (those nasty neighbours in Shirley Temple's song), whose wallets are full of money earned from the work of others (the reference to the "rolls of skin") and used towards petty and exaggeratedly absurd ends. These exaggeratedly absurd aims are presented through a series of unexpected images in which dissonant elements are juxtaposed: "To pay off the bills of the costive / To buy a new pipe for the dog / To send a committee to bury a stone". This kind of recreational attitude on the part of the bourgeois class, depicted in hyperbolic terms for ridicule, is lampooned by the poet in this climactic succession of bourgeois expenditure, which goes from the simply satirical to the utterly useless.

The use of parallel structures is, as in the poems of Hugh Sykes Davies, a rhetorical device which enables the accumulation of Surrealist images following one another in a free play of associations. In the first stanza, parallelism is used to add to the gradual process of caricature of the bourgeoisie. In the main section of the poem, a net of intratextual references is carefully built in which apparently unrelated realities are connected through a variety of formal, semantic and phonic relationships. Each line seems to be isolated and disconnected from the others. However, on closer consideration, the organic flux of the unconscious is felt, and each line sends the reader to other lines within the poem, forming an internally coherent text, which becomes the aesthetic formulation of an ideological content. Thus, the poem becomes essentially a vertical text, in which the apparently discordant elements are linked together through vertical relationships of substitution within the main frame structure:

To-morrow the palmist will lunch on his crystal

To-morrow REVOLT will be written in human hair

To-morrow the hangman's rope will tie itself in a bow

To-morrow virginia creeper will strangle the clergy

To-morrow the witness will tickle the judge

To-morrow this page will be found in a womb

To-morrow the lovers will answer the palace

To-morrow Karl Marx will descend in a fire-balloon

To-morrow the word that you lost will ask you home

To-morrow the virgin will fall down a magnified well

To-morrow the news will be broadcast in dialect

To-morrow the beautiful girl will attend

To-morrow a cloud will follow the bankers

To-morrow a child will rechristen our London as LONDON

To-morrow a tree will grow into a hand

Yes listen

To-morrow the clocks will chime like voices

To-morrow a train will set out for the sky

National papers please reprint. (Roughton 1936a: 36)

This stanza, the most clearly propagandistic, presents a series of anaphoric repetitions to enact the poem's political message, further stressed by the parallel constructions and only interrupted by the exhortative line "Yes listen". A similar structure would be later echoed, with a different tone and perspective, in W. H. Auden's poem "Spain" (1937), which inquires into the nature of the Spanish Civil War by demanding responsibilities of an unsympathetic past: "Yesterday the assessment of insurance by cards / [. . .] / Yesterday the installation of dynamos and turbines, / The construction of railways in the colonial desert; Yesterday the classic lecture / On the origin of Mankind. But to-day the struggle" (Auden 1977: 210); and by projecting the possibility of a future: "To-morrow, perhaps, the future; [. . .] / To-morrow the enlarging of consciousness by diet and breathing. / [. . .] / To-morrow for the young poets exploding like bombs, / [. . .] / But to-day the struggle" (Auden 1977: 212).[423] As opposed to Auden's poem, Roughton's bears the mark of optimism, for it grandiloquently announces rather than simply advocating the world of revolution. Also, whereas for Auden the "enlarging of consciousness" is simply a possible future consequence of today's struggle, for the Surrealists it is a present reality, the natural outcome of the liberation of repressed psychic

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[423] A poem which does inherit Roughton's advertising optimism and parallelistic style is sixties' poet Adrian Henri's "Tonight at Noon" (1968). For a complete account of the influence of Surrealism on Henri's poetry see Rob Jackaman's *The Course of English Surrealist Poetry since the 1930s* (1989): 242-252.

content achieved through automatic writing. Thus, exploration of the unconscious and political propaganda are combined in Roughton's poem. Michel Remy has stated that each line in the poem "sounds as if uttered from the proletariat's pulpit" (Remy 1999: 107), and the poem does indeed pay homage to the kind of inflammatory rhetoric used in revolutionary speeches. As Remy rightly points out, the poem stigmatises forms of power which will be brought to an end with the coming revolution. The hangman, the judge, the clergy and the banker are authoritative icons of the capitalist society whose collapse Communism seeks. The state, the church and the capitalist system, epitomised by these figures in the poem, and the restrictive power they exert over people, resulting in the deprivation of freedom, are not only stigmatised but parodied. Implicitly, the state will be replaced by the republic, the Christian church by atheism and capitalism by Communism. The highly visual and parodic images used to discredit these figures of authority transcend the mimetic denunciation of Socialist realism, responding to a Surrealist mode which encompasses both form and content. Thus, the hangman's rope becomes a merely decorative bow, the judge is tickled by a witness and a cloud follows the bankers wherever they go. This idea would later appear in a series of Magritte's paintings which depict a middle-aged average man (once or incessantly replicated) in a bowler hat, resembling a banker. In Magritte's *Golconda* (1953), the men in bowler hats seem to be falling like rain, a reversal of the image that appears in the poem. In the painting *The Son of Man* (1964), on the other hand, the man in the bowler hat, his face hidden by an apple, is standing in front of a cloudy sky. Roughton's images function as comic vignettes which contribute to the overall ludicrous nature of the poem. The cruellest part is probably that assigned to the clergy, strangled by an ivy plant which ironically bears the name of a virgin. This anti-religious element is a typically Surrealist device of which both Gascoyne and Roughton were fond.

The figure of the palmist, on the other hand, is not so much ridiculed as it is rendered impractical in the new society: the fact that he lunches on his crystal seems to imply that he has lost his ability to predict the future, or that the crystal has lost its utilitarian features as a vaticinating tool. Since the role of the palmist is being subverted, it is the poet who occupies his place as seer, becoming the prophet that announces this grand revolution, the ultimate revelation after which there is only freedom as advocated by both Surrealism and Communism. Roughton anticipates an idea which would appear later in one of Charles Madge's programmatic texts, "Magic and Materialism" (1937), in which he announced that, in the epoch of human materialism, magic would not be necessary for materialist science would provide an answer to that which magic could only explain in terms of idealistic thought (Madge 1937b: 32). An ironic drawback to this idea is that no alternative role is given to the palmist, or

the poet for that matter, in a post-revolutionary society.[424] Nevertheless, in Roughton's poem, the poet does not only become the palmist, but he also harangues the reader to take part in the revolution that he is foreseeing. In this sense, Roughton's use of the term "REVOLT" is interesting, considering that the word "revolution" is more accurate both in the context of political writing and of Surrealist writing. However, the choice is not random, for "revolt", unlike "revolution", can either function as a noun or as a verbal imperative form, which fits the haranguing tone of the poem.

Another kind of image that is found in this *enumeratio* is classifiable as a subversion of the "dimensions of situational constraint" (Crystal and Davy 1969: 64), that is, the violation of the conventional rules of decorum. This has a clear comic effect: "the witness will tickle the judge" and "the news will be broadcast in dialect" satirise English justice, propriety, manners and education. The latter is also an attack on Received Pronunciation and the king's English. In both cases there is a transgression of institutional conventions, such as the respectful attitude towards the judge, and the conventional use of RP English in broadcast news.

The idea of birth and rebirth is also present in the poem: the image of the tree growing into a hand had already appeared in Roughton's proto-Surrealist poem "The Skin of the Stone" (1936); here, the rechristening of London, nicely and paradoxically performed by a child, and the capitalisation of the city's name does not only suggest the city's rebirth, but also establishes a visual link between the capitalised LONDON and REVOLT. The message is clear, especially, as the line "Karl Marx will descend in a fire-balloon" is found exactly halfway between those two. The effect is visual and typographical as much as it is ideological. The poet prophesies Marx descending from heaven as a Christ-like figure, his/our saviour, while the image of the fire-balloon adds to the colourful, playful and bombastic advertising tone of the poem. This sort of *deus ex machina* device is not only highly theatrical, but also comic, as it exposes that element of sarcasm which is inherent in most of Roughton's texts, revealing the fissures of his revolutionary discourse, and his own doubts about the triumph of the revolution. Although London is not necessarily the setting of this poem, this reference is interesting for only a couple of months after the publication of Roughton's poem, Maxim Gorky's article "London" was published in the September 1936 issue of *Left Review*. This text, although written in 1907 and not published until 1936, seems to inform Roughton's view of London as the site of revolution, both political and aesthetic; his thoughts about the revolutionary role of poetry and of collective myths of society find their way into his poetry:

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[424] David Gascoyne did theorise on the role of poetry and the poet after the revolution as substitutes for religion, but of course he was an idealist much more than a materialist. See pages 281-282.

It seems to me as though this monstrously large city, wrapped in its cloak of mist, is always dreaming, obstinately, night and day, of the great dramas of its past, the drab days of its present, and as though it were waiting, with anguish but with assurance, for its future of clear sunny days full of joy, waiting for the coming of new men, full of creative power. The city dreams of those who have made the name of England famous throughout the whole world, and awaits the birth of children as great as these immortals. London, I feel, looks forward with passion to a new Shakespeare, Byron, or Shelley, a new Gibbon, Macaulay, or Walter Scott, founders of the glory of England. And what is the glory of England? Above all, its unquenchable thirst for the freedom of the spirit. At the moment this thirst is dying, unappeased. It is time to bring it to life again in the soul of the masses. This great people, I feel, wonders: 'Will the time soon come when the loud bells and fanfares of our genius will be heard again among the peoples of the world, spreading on all sides the ideals and hopes of England?'. (Gorky 1936: 604)

Gorky's essay was written one year before the publication of his novel *A Confession* (1907), in which he developed the controversial ideology of *god-building*, a new system of thought which he designed with Anatoly Lunacharsky in the early years of Bolshevism. The new system was intended to replace religion by placing the individual, and not god, at the centre of its theory and its practice. Gorky's formulation of *god-building* anticipated concepts that would later appear in Surrealism: Tova Yedlin has pointed out that for Gorky religious feeling was "an awareness of a harmonious link that joins man to the universe and [. . .] an aspiration for synthesis, inherent in every individual" (Yedlin 1999: 86), an idea that is central to the Surrealist dialectical reconciliation of the ideal and the material, of dream and reality. Although Gorky's secular religion was ill received by Marxist theoreticians, including Lenin himself, writers and other intellectuals such as Leo Tolstoy were attracted to Gorky's theses on culture: he saw culture as an assemblage of collective myths impressed in art and religion, and he was convinced of the central role of culture, myth and ideology in the revolutionary process.[425] His own configuration of Socialist Realism is based on a paradoxical synthesis of Realism and Romanticism, of revolutionary propaganda and mythological imagination. In his speech on Soviet literature at the 1934 Soviet Writers' Congress, he stated that

myth is invention. To invent something means to extract from the sum total of reality its principal meaning and embody it in an image –that is how we arrived at realism. But if we add to the meaning extracted from reality, if we think ourselves through to –

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[425] On Gorky's god-building theory, see Tova Yedlin's *Maxim Gorky: a Political Biography* (1999): 83-102.

according to the logic of hypothesizing- that which is desired and possible, and supplement the image with this, then we arrive at that romanticism which lies at the base and which is highly useful in that it helps stimulate a revolutionary attitude to reality, a relationship which practically changes the world. (in Günther 2011: 103).

Echoes of Gorky's ideas are thus found in Surrealist tenets concerning collective consciousness, the revolutionary role of poetry, the dialectical synthesis of contradictory states, mythological imagination and revolutionary action, especially as developed in Britain in the 1930s. Although his promotion of Socialist Realism prevented further influence, the article that appeared in *Left Review* soon after his death, with its emphasis on dream, creative freedom and the Romantic spirit, demonstrates the links between Gorky's theories and Roughton's Socialist Surrealism.[426] Paradoxically, whereas Cecil Day-Lewis found in Shelley's Romantic attitude a negation of materialism and a prototype of the artistic detachment of British modern writers, Gorky sees in the Romantic spirit the roots of the artistic creativity which will make the revolution prosper, an idea that was shared by the British Surrealists, especially Hugh Sykes Davies and Herbert Read. Day-Lewis was critical of the Romantic conception of the prophet as "the real legislator, the prophet of the holy spirit of man" (Day-Lewis 1937: 671), and deprecated the quasi-religious view of the poet in Romanticism. Gorky, on the other hand, and not unlike Roughton and the other British Surrealists, has faith in reviving the unquenchable spiritual thirst in the soul of man, placing the poet at the centre of his theological system.

But the revolution proclaimed by Roughton is not only spiritual/ideological and political, but also linguistic. There are several images in the poem that point to language, linguistic signifiers, semantics and oral and written communication: "To-morrow REVOLT will be written in human hair / [. . .] / To-morrow this page will be found in a womb / [. . .] / To-morrow the word that you lost will ask you home / [. . .] To-morrow the news will be broadcast in dialect / [. . .] / To-morrow the clocks will chime like voices" (Roughton 1936a: 36). All these images point to a process of linguistic and ideological regeneration: through the revolution of the word advocated by Breton in his 1924 *Manifesto*, language's original meaning is recovered. The use of automatic writing restores the word's authentic and primitive meaning, lost through ages of suppression of the unconscious. This primitive meaning is common to all individuals, and thus true and deep understanding among them will be

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[426] Gorky, credited as the founder of Socialist Realism and main representative of the Soviet literary élite, became a defender of linguistic purism in Soviet literature: he advocated the precision and simplicity of the 19th-century classics, the placing of literature at the service of, and under the control of, ideology and attacked the popular language of the proletarian writers for being ideologically obscure (Günther 2011: 93-97).

achieved, and this will render possible the social revolution that Surrealism and Communism urge alike. The recovery of the primitive meaning of words is the first step in this dialectical liberating process that goes from the ideological and the linguistic to the material and economic. Syntactic parallelism, phonic echoes, anaphoras and other forms of repetition both at the formal and the semantic level, are elements of the oral tradition which contribute to restoring language's ancient form and meaning. The repetitive use of the future tense "will" has so far been interpreted as the verbalisation of a prophecy delivered by the poet-visionary, and/or as a piece of political propagandistic discourse delivered by the poet-haranguer. Nevertheless, a third reading of this future tense may suggest that, as opposed to the alternative construction with "to be going to", "will" may indicate that the future is not so clear, or perhaps that it is not seen as an immediate future. This is indeed the case in the poem, whose message, due to ambiguity and irony, remains a possibility, a wish to be fulfilled or an intention, rather than future actuality. The Freudian element here is clear, for Freud establishes a parallelism between dreams and poetry. In his *Interpretation of* Dreams (1900), he argues that the products of both oneiric and poetic processes are analogous in many cases, and that both the dreamer and the poet fulfil their desires in them. The poem is used to fulfil a desire, the poet's hope for revolution, but the very use of the future tense hinders it, and shows that the poem is just a brilliant example of wishful thinking. Even in the poet's own "dream", revolution does not seem attainable, or at least imminent. The directive with which the poem comes to an end is anticlimactic after the long inventory of Surrealist images. The line "National papers please reprint" highlights the poem's propagandistic aims: an announcement is made, even if it is just the announcement of a personal wish or a call to revolutionary action, rather than of actual impending revolution. Moreover, the role of the mass media in shaping modern consciousness, an idea which is central to Charles Madge's anthropological Surrealism, is made explicit in the poem.

Roughton's iconoclastic Socialist Surrealism, initiated in "Animal Crackers", was further explored and developed in a series of poems published in *Contemporary Poetry and Prose.* "Soluble Noughts and Crosses, or California, Here I come" (Roughton 1936h: 55), published in July 1936, was dedicated to the British Surrealist painter and collagist Eileen Agar. Although not explicitly political in intent, the poem does introduce the theme of love and, by extension, elements such as sexual union, birth and growth, which do imply political content, as we will see. The poem recounts in Surrealistic fashion the encounters of two lovers. The girl is described as a typically Surrealist mannequin: beautiful ("The most beautiful young girl of all"), dismembered (visible eyelash, fingers hanging like pictures and breasts pointing to the North)

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and wrapped up and immobile (dressed in cellophane and placed inside a handbag). Nevertheless, just as the scaled tail of the fish/siren breaks leaving room for legs in "The Skin of the Stone" (1936), in this poem woman is also given the power of speech. She is not only the one who arranges the encounters, but also the one with a truly Surrealist voice and idiom:

> Yes take this down, for purple trees will sing the answer,
>
> For rhyming trains are meeting at a foxtrot,
>
> For string is floating on the water,
>
> For we are opening a parcel meant for both;
>
> Yes please take this down, for living words are played together,
>
> For love has grown up like a hair. (Roughton 1936h: 55)

Thus, in spite of the seemingly misogynist representation of the female body (wrapped up, put in a parcel and sent off to the Pole) it is the woman who gives the directions and instructions on how all the arrangements must be made: "Look out for the red and written triangle, / And enclose a penny-halfpenny stamp; / For I must go at ten to one" (55). In a way, the poem re-enacts the seductive-seduced dialectic between dominating governess and dominated vassal present in Meret Oppenheim's Surrealist object *My Governess* (1936), in which a pair of women's wedding shoes are tied up and served on a plate like two chicken legs with paper frills. The message is equally ambiguous in Roughton's poem and Oppenheim's object, for the woman's role is both active and passive in the act of bondage. Nevertheless, in both cases it is the woman that speaks: Oppenheim as creator and the female speaker (Eileen Agar?) as poet. In Roughton's poem, it is the woman that delivers the final message of linguistic and spiritual liberation: "for living words are played together, / For love has grown up like a hair". Rouhgton's materialism is superseded by an idealistic belief in love as the ultimate liberating force, and it is this idea that is connected to the theme of birth and growth which in Roughton's poetics is related to political regeneration in the new world of revolution. In spite of his stern materialist position, a Romanticised and poeticised vision of the revolution pervades Rouhgton's political thought.

More explicitly political than "Soluble Noughts and Crosses" is his poem "Lady Windermere's Fan-Dance" (Roughton 1936g: 117), published in *Contemporary Poetry and Prose* in October 1936. The poem recovers Roughton's earlier four-line stanza, with fixed alternate rhyme and shorter lines (anapestic trimesters). Its title parodies that of Oscar Wilde's play *Lady Windermere's Fan* (1892). In Wilde's play, a typically Wildean satire on Victorian society, the notion of Victorian morality and social propriety is encoded in Lady Windermere's fan, which is discovered in the home of her would-be lover. Lady Windermere's imperilled

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social reputation and status is saved by her mother, Mrs. Erlynne, who covers up for her so she can go back to her husband. Roughton turns this symbol of Victorian decorum (the fan) into a symbol of oriental eroticism (the fan-dance), and it is again through humour that this transgression of moral codes is performed. Roughton's mere lexical addition to the title of his poem suggests a new resolution for Wilde's play in which Lady Windermere, instead of complying with social codes of behaviour, entices the men who discover her at her lover's, challenging the passive role traditionally assigned to women.

It has recently been argued that the absurdist element in Wilde's play further stresses his devaluation of Victorian society and his indictment of the repression and hollowness of the *fin de siècle* mentality:

> *Lady Windermere's Fan* is existential in theme and epigrammatic in style, conventions more in keeping with absurdist theatre than the comedy of manners. Wilde's meaningless society is populated with shallow people made more absurd through absurd inconsistencies of character. [. . .] *Lady Windermere's Fan* ends in a vacancy of resolution among characters, an absurdist convention in itself. Deceptions continue. No meaningful communication has occurred between the mother and the daughter or between husbands and wives, because the characters benefit from, and prefer, illusion, a theme central to the absurdist manifesto. (Costanzo Cahir 2006: 153)

It is certainly not casual that Roughton chose Wilde as a main referent in this poem, which has a strong political element, in spite of its apparent ludicrousness. Widely reputed for the frivolous and unsympathetic wit of his plays, and traditionally considered the epitome of an aestheticised individualistic attitude to life and art, it is only recently that Wilde's critical works and political discourse have received due recognition.[427] The British Surrealists were in many ways inheritors of Wilde's dandyism and his satirical wit: in attitude and taste, David Gascoyne was probably the one that came closer to the *fin-de-siècle* aesthetes, something which is made patent in some of his poems; Roger Roughton, on the other hand, develops a similar sense of wit and a predilection for parody and satire, which his poems reveals. Nevertheless, it was also Wilde's ideological stance as expressed in his celebrated essay *The Soul of Man Under Socialism* (1891) that would influence the British Surrealists, including Roughton. In this essay, Wilde formulates an anarchist conception of society, politics and art which postulates, in terms

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[427] David Goodway offers a summary of the recent critical corpus focused on these aspects of Wilde's production in *Anarchist Seeds Beneath the Snow* (2006): 62. For an exhaustive account of the development of Wilde's anarchist position in relation to his aesthetic and sexual politics, see Goodway's chapter "Oscar Wilde" in *Anarchist Seeds Beneath the Snow* (2006): 62-92.

which may have been seen as paradoxical but which were certainly familiar to the Surrealists, a sort of individualistic Socialism:

> Socialism, Communism, or whatever one chooses to call it, by converting private property into public wealth, and substituting cooperation for competition, will restore society to its proper condition of a thoroughly healthy organism, and ensure the material well-being of each member of the community. It will, in fact, give Life its proper basis and its proper environment. But for the full development of Life to its highest mode of perfection something more is needed. What is needed is Individualism. (Wilde 2001: 128)

Even if coldly received initially in Britain, Wilde's essay was widely distributed in Europe and was welcome in French literary circles. By the 1930s it was already an influential text, also through the mediation of figures like George Bernard Shaw, whose life-long support of Socialism is traditionally considered the germ of Wilde's political stance. Increasingly interested in Socialist construction in the Soviet Union, Shaw visited the USSR in 1931, where he met Stalin and Gorky. During the 1930s, Shaw became one of the chief supporters of Stalinist Communism in Britain and, together with Herbert Read, was a member of the British section attending the 1935 Congress of Writers for the Defence of Culture.[428] Wilde's essay is, in spite of its misleading title, pre-eminently an Anarchist text: his advocacy of self-government as the only possible form of government and his defence of artistic freedom from the authority and control of the state, morality or the public unquestionably reveal Wilde's anarchist position. Disobedience, he argues, "in the eyes of any one who has read history, is man's original virtue. It is through disobedience that progress has been made, through disobedience and through rebellion" (Wilde 2001: 130) and, finally, "The form of government that is most suitable to the artist is no government at all" (Wilde 2001:153). From the 1890s and up to the 1930s, the new political trends of certain British literary and intellectual circles tended to merge, to different degrees, the new developments of Socialism with Communism and incipient forms of Anarchism, at a time when in continental Europe and elsewhere these offshoots of Marxist thought seemed unlikely fellows. Despite differing methods, these positions had common aims in Britain: to subvert the inanity, passivity and hypocrisy of the national government and to work towards the liberation of the working classes from the abuses of the capitalist state. In the 1930s, the need to establish a common front against

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[428] For a study of Shaw's reactions to and support of Stalinism, see Richard Nickson's "The Lure of Stalinism: Bernard Shaw and Company" (1984): 416-433. On Shaw's visit and the expectations that it raised regarding Soviet publicity in Britain, see Ludmila Stern's *Western Intellectuals and the Soviet Union* (2007): 134-135.

Fascism saw efforts to bring together different ideologies of the left in Britain.[429] It is in this context of ideological conciliation between Socialism, Communism and Anarchism which preceded the January 1937 accords to establish a United Front that Roughton's Communist stance is to be regarded. Earlier in 1936, his insistence on the need to work within the Party line was also a demand for union, rather than division, within the British left: his injunction not to carry out political action outside the official programme of the Communist Party was necessarily an exhortation not to deviate from the common endeavour to establish a United Front. Roughton, who would support Soviet policy even beyond the time when support was hardly sensible, genuinely believed that Stalin's formula for Communism was far more tolerant and encompassing than it actually was.

In a typically Wildean manner which Soviet literary policy would not have condoned, Roughton's poem "Lady Windermere's Fan-Dance" projects political content under a highly aestheticised form. Moreover, the poem initially does not even suggest the presence of such content: the title is, at least initially, misleading and there are early references to errors, to alarming reports at night time and to "the fall" which the reader immediately and unmistakably places in the context of Wilde's play. Nevertheless, the third stanza already introduces the term that, apparently conflicting with the previous information, establishes the correct context in which the poem is to be interpreted. The reference to the "barricades", which thematically prompts and recovers the theme of guerrilla warfare, provides new interpretive clues to interpret the previous stanzas. Thus, the sophisticated Victorian setting of the street is transformed into a scene of street fighting; the *double-entendre* inherent in the term "arms" is made patent; and "the fall", previously associated with the figure of the fallen woman in Wilde's play, acquires a fully political intent as a reference to a *coup d'état*:

> Figures and tress in the street
>
> Are stretching and waving their arms,
>
> Reaching the time to repeat
>
> The error: result of alarms
>
> Earlier heard in the night,
>
> Reports they once read on a wall.

[429] For an account of the development of these tendencies in Britain at the turn of the century, see Noel W. Thompson's "Marxism, State Socialism and Anarcho-Communism" in *Political Economy and the Labour Party* (2006): 9-21. The ups and downs of the Unity Campaign and the attempts to establish a People's Front in Britain are discussed at length by David Blaazer in *The Popular Front and the Progressive Tradition* (2002): 147-192.

Fingers still feeling the light

Remember the hour of the fall. (Roughton 1936g: 117)

Although there is no explicit reference to the Spanish Civil War, several factors suggest that the Spanish conflict is the implicit referent in the poem. Firstly, the date of publication, October 1936, which indicates that the poem was probably written in late September or early October 1936. During this period, the early months of the Civil War, vast amounts of news from the Spanish front crowded the pages of British periodicals after a two-month period of uncertainty and institutional misinformation. By the end of October 1936, the first British volunteers had already reached Spain, Roland Penrose and David Gascoyne among them. It was also around this time that a noticeable shift in the depiction of the Spanish conflict took place in the pages of leftist periodicals. The Communist *Daily Worker*, for instance, performed a symptomatic shift from enthusiastic accounts of the early Republican victories in July 1936 (with headlines such as "Spain Shows the Way" on 21 July, and "Red Militia Crushes Spanish Fascists" and "Triumph in Barcelona" on 22 July) to increasing informative confusion as the prospect of a short struggle faded and the certainty of a long war settled in. With the London meeting of the Non-Intervention Committee on 9 September 1936, the focus was gradually placed on Britain's foreign policy and the international obstacles to Spanish democracy. On 29 October 1936 the *Daily Worker* published Clement Attlee's address to the Prime Minister in the House of Commons, in which he petitioned the lift of the ban on arms and volunteer action enforced by Non-Intervention. Roughton voiced these Communist demands on the end of Non-Intervention on the back cover of *Contemporary Poetry and Prose* for five consecutive months from August to December 1936. As the conflict intensified, reports in the leftist press became more chaotic and numerous, with news of British casualties on the front and of the early bombings of Madrid.[430]

Roughton's poem, full of references to arms and guns, is infused with the same spirit which led to the exhortations to send arms to the Spanish people on the back covers of *Contemporary Poetry and Prose*. Samuel Hynes has wrongly argued that poetry and politics only co-exist in Roughton's journal, without there being actual engagement between the two: "The Surrealism is in the verse, and the politics [. . .] on the back cover" (Hynes 1976: 222). Nevertheless, this poem contradicts Hynes's stance, and shows the complex ways in which image and ideology are reconciled in the journal, being a paradigmatic example of the

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[430] A recent and exhaustive analysis of press coverage of the Spanish Civil War in Britain is offered by David Deacon in his chapter "Ominous and Indifferent? British Press Coverage of the Spanish Civil War" in *British News Media and the Spanish Civil War* (2008): 114-151.

aestheticisation of politics in Roughton's work. Thus, the poem describes the terrifying description of a naval attack. This is probably the Battle of Cape Espartel, fought on 29 September 1936 off the coast of Morocco, in which a Nationalist attack on a unit of Republican gunboats was strategic towards breaking the Republican blockade of the Strait of Gibraltar. The apparently unsurrealistic description of the assault becomes a poetic portrayal of the consequences of Non-Intervention: "Sulphurous clouds from the bank / Are killing the quick in the stream, / Bodies from gunboats that sank / Are menacing guns with a dream" (Roughton 1936g: 117). The final line transforms the whole stanza, and the Surrealist element is made explicit in the reference to the dream: in the absence of military support on the part of democratic countries, the only menace that the Republicans can pose to counter the Nationalist attacks is that of a revolutionary dream that would crush the Fascist aspirations. The focus is shifted to Britain as the people implore the monarch for armament: they still greet the king with their arms and hold out their hands asking for guns, but their petition remains unanswered. The waving of arms and hands is, like the recurrent petitions for arms on the back cover of Roughton's journal, a motif in the poem: in the first stanza, the stretching and waving of arms takes place on the street; in the third stanza, hands wave from the barricades; in the fifth stanza, arms greet the king and hands are held out awaiting the arrival of guns; in the final stanza, the arms and hands belong to the militiamen (the "fighters of tin") who fight for democratic ideals ("brave of a thought"). This recurrent waving of arms in the poem is nevertheless doubly ambiguous: the ambiguity of the term "arms" as both body parts and weaponry is further stressed by the fact that, in the latter case, the waving of arms may simultaneously refer to the display of armament and to the lack of it. In either case, Roughton's ideological position is made patent as he sides with those who are "brave of a thought". The waving-of-arms motif, to which the very title of the poem ironically alludes (a fan-dance also implies a movement of the arms), is a satirical, but also harrowing, comment on the farcical nature of Non-Intervention, and a denunciation of its central role in the crushing of democracy in Spain: the back cover of the November and December 1936 issue of *Contemporary Poetry and Prose* urged readers to "Support all meetings and demonstrations to end the farce of 'non-intervention'". The final line is, as it is generally the case in Roughton's poems, ambiguous, for it remains unclear whether the Republican fighters are the agent or the object of the action of the verb "dividing by nought". As in Roughton's political writings, which combine "appeal with condemnation" (Mengham 2009: 289), this poem is intended both as a denunciation of the tragic annihilation of the Spanish people to which the British government consents, and a call to action behind the banner of the dream of revolution. The imposture of

the national government's claimed pacifist stance equals the moral hypocrisy of British society exposed in Wilde's play.

Along similar lines but from a different frame of reference, Roughton's poem "Building Society Blues" (Roughton 1937a: 45), published in *Contemporary Poetry and Prose* in March 1937, is a rhetorical exhortation intended, not only as a call to revolutionary action, but also as a call for ideological awareness. Its title is a humorous pun on a 1930 Fox musical film entitled *High Society Blues.*[431] In the poem, the light-hearted subject-matter of the film, which recounts the rifts between a well-to-do girl and her aristocratic family over an unsophisticated young man in New York, is transformed into a harsh denunciation of the housing conditions of the working classes in Britain. The 1930s saw the proliferation of speculative building societies in Britain which, although crucial in enabling house-buying among the suburban middle classes, from the ideological left it may have been seen as indirectly contributing to aggravating the conditions of the working classes, confined in rental properties operated by employers in industrial areas, by furthering the speculative nature of capitalist activities.[432] The *blues* to which Roughton refers in his title envisages the collapse of the capitalist system under the reign of the speculative building and financial profit of owners of capital, building societies and other financial institutions: "The vultures are being spring-cleaned, / That anonymous letter came from you-know-who; / The hawker who sold you the dangerous toy: / He meant business too". Roughton's depiction is reminiscent of George Grosz's drawing *Toads of Property* (1920), in which the caricature image of the ugly and corrupted capitalists in the foreground contrasts that of the poor, oppressed and crippled in the background.

Through a series of rhetorical questions, the poem exposes the difficulties and dangers entailed in revolutionary action, which counteract the apparent ease and material comfort of house-ownership: "Do you want to become an Insoluble Crime, / A lynching held in one of the parks?"; "Will you cross your desires and your heart, / Finding reprieve in a suitable mass?"; "Dare you ask for a rifle and sign on the line?; "Could you bear the damp air in the grave, / Or going to bed unkissed?" (Roughton 1937a: 45). The natural answer to these questions would seem to be a negative one, as the implications of emotional distress ("You would certainly cry") and physical pain ("Remember the pain when you fractured your wrist") are made patent. The prospect of revolution does not offer a very encouraging vision of revolutionary action, and not even ideological conviction can lessen the extent of the sacrifice: "You would

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[431] The film, a musical comedy directed by David Butler, was adapted by Howard J. Green from Dana Burnet's *Saturday Evening Post* story "Those High Society Blues" (1925).

[432] See "Building Suburbia" in Richard Dennis's *Cities in Modernity: Representations and Productions of Metropolitan Space 1840-1930* (2008): 179-205.

certainly cry, though your hand were held tight / by Man Mountain Marx" (45). Nevertheless, and in spite of all these drawbacks, the final stanza sets Communism as the only possible economic system that can put an end to these atrocious circumstances and prevent the corruption inherent in the devouring capitalist system: "Maneating plants have grown out of the bath, / The pipes are about to burst through; / Can you call for the plumber to help, with his soviet / Grammar and tickle too?" (45). This last rhetorical question is not only humorous, with the pun on the Communist emblem, but also defiant: the poem thus becomes an attack on those who prefer the transient material comfort of capitalist commodities to the self-sacrificing process of the revolution, those who would, the poem envisages, embrace Communism instrumentally when capitalism collapses. As we see, through grotesque imagery and striking juxtaposition typical of Surrealism, the poem bears a clear ideological message.

A more serious reflection on the situation is Roughton's poem "Tomorrow will be Difficult", which was published in *Poetry (Chicago)* in October 1936, coinciding with the publication in Britain of "Lady Windermere's Fan-Dance" and of "Fascism Murders Art". "Tomorrow will be Difficult" earned Roughton the 1937 Harriet Monroe Lyric Prize of one hundred dollars for a lyric poem published in *Poetry*.[433] More universal in its aspirations than "Lady Windermere's Fan-Dance" and more sombre and solemn than any of Roughton's poems, "Tomorrow will be Difficult" presents, through a series of apocalyptic images, the cataclysm that follows the revolution bombastically announced in "Animal Crackers in your Croup". One thing to be noted about Roughton's poems is that they show a higher degree of formal elaboration than those British Surrealists who, like David Gascoyne and Roland Penrose, adhered more firmly to Breton's psychic automatism, and "Tomorrow will be Diffifuclt" is paradigmatic in this sense: it has a fixed stanzaic structure, which definitely echoes the sonnet form, and makes use of a strict meter (iambic pentameters) and rhyme scheme. This formal elaboration, which seems to contradict basic Surrealist tenets on psychic automatism and the nature of poetic creation, might be related to Roughton's stronger commitment to the literary classicism propounded by Communism, and may respond to a personal need that Surrealism be sanctioned by the Communist Party as a respectable scholarly literary form.

The poem presents a series of distressing visions of a riot or a guerrilla uprising that is being quelled by soldiers. The initial apocalyptic image of the white horses plunging "hysterical through glass" immediately places it in relation to Gascoyne's "The Diabolical Principle". In both Roughton's and Gascoyne's poems there is a direct relation established between the

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[433] Harriet Monroe, the founder of the literary magazine *Poetry*, had become an early promoter of the Imagist poetry in America.

white horse(s) and a state of liquidness and chaos: waters creep below the streets in Roughton's poem, whereas "A white horse stamps upon the liquid floor" in Gascoyne's. Furthermore, both poems reveal the spasmodic and convulsive nature of an anti-climatic apocalypse. Gascoyne, concerned with the spiritual dilemmas triggered by erotic desire, presents a troubled vision of carnal union; Roughton, on the other hand, an engaged materialist, depicts the chaos and confusion that follows the outbreak of a popular uprising: the plunging of the white horses is hysterical and, as they are ridden through glass, it is also violently deafening. Simultaneously, waters silently creep underground, an image that suggests the presence of further conspirators against the revolution (the "turncoats" in Roughton's poem "The Foot of the Stairs") as it echoes the lines from Shakespeare's *Henry VI* (1623): "Smooth runs the water where the brook is deep; / And in his simple show he harbours treason. / The fox barks not when he would steal the lamb" (II, iii, 1). In his poems and in his political writings, Roughton does not only attack the reactionary attitude of Fascists and those who openly oppose the revolution; most conspicuously, he denounces the political indifference, accommodated passivity and counterfeit pacifism of the national government and those who, through their silence, become accomplices to Fascist crimes. A shift of local focus takes place and the city is replaced by a natural landscape in which thunder-clouds meet and yellow fungus grows, which emphasises the idea of decay and destruction. The uprising is suppressed by the "iron figures", figures of military authority who force the agonising people to retreat "across the barricades of broken glass". The army officers and soldiers are dehumanised and turned into murdering machines which annihilate the revolutionists. This annihilation is both physical and psychological, for the crowd, conceived as a stampeding herd, becomes animalised. The animalisation takes place as far as there is no individuation of its members: they are treated like cattle forced into the stalls. We can see here how Roughton's images of dehumanised figures of authority and animalised workers or victims reproduce ideological concepts inherent in the social mythologies of the 1930s. This sort of images responded to concerns regarding industrialisation and technology in the period leading to the first fully technological war, which also had a not insignificant effect on the Surrealist texts of Charles Madge and Humphrey Jennings, as will be seen.

Then, death is introduced through the image of the waxen hand "which crumbles slowly with a sulphur smell". The electric fingers that clutch onto the hand synechdochically point to the strained condition of the combatants: this is the strenuous peregrination of the wounded and the dispossessed who, expelled from their houses, are forced to search refuge in a strange land, an image which bears echoes of Eliot. The stranger becomes the archetypal

stranger, the symbol of the anonymous exile of thousands of war victims and political refugees. Through the reference to the incomprehensible prayers that the stranger repeats, religion is presented as inefficient in providing an intelligible answer to human agony. Prayers become meaningless and purposeless, they are learned and repeated, but not understood and therefore remain unable to offer spiritual solace: the opium of religion is no longer capable of numbing consciousness, or obliterating pain. Thus, no spiritual or physical solace is achieved, and even when the doors open, pain and death permeate everything: "Doors open, but the rooms are full of sand, / White bitter plants are climbing up the well, / And in the night the graves begin to swell / Until like sores they fester on the land". The parallelisms with Gascoyne's "The Diabolical Principle" (1936), in which there are also references to the living dead, to storms and electric nerves, are obvious:

> A sound drops into the water and the water boils
>
> The sound of disastrous waves
>
> Waves flood the room when the door opens
>
> A white horse stamps upon the liquid floor
>
> The sunlight is tiring to our opened eyes
>
> And the sand is dead
>
> Feet in the sand make patterns
>
> Patterns flow like rivers to the distant sky
>
> Rippling shells like careful signatures
>
> A tangled skein of blood. (Gascoyne 1936d: 37)

In Roughton's poem, this landscape of barrenness and death is as much an outer as an inner landscape, as much a reflection of external material conditions, as of a subjective state of mind. References to sand as an element that represents confusion and uncertainty are recurrent in Roughton's texts. These provide the only instances of Roughton's doubts about the outcome of the revolution, which were never voiced in his political writings. Sand appears as a corrupting element of organic matter in Roughton's proto-Surrealist poems, which explore the relationship established between the organic and the inert, subverting both states. Sand is also central to Roughton's oneiric short story "The Sand Under the Door" (Roughton 1937e: 67-80), published also in *The Criterion* in October 1937. "The Sand Under the Door" is an anti-narrative which condenses elements from Roughton's Socialist Surrealism with elements from the Modernist tradition. It has been argued above that the demands of the doctrine of Socialist Realism in Soviet literature included a form of revolutionary Romanticism which transcended the boundaries of mimetic representation (reality as it is) and allowed the representation of

reality in its revolutionary development (reality as it could be). Although this form of revolutionary Romanticism responded to a desire to portray reality in revolutionary transformation, in Soviet practice it became a way to transform the reality of the revolution. Roughton's Socialist Surrealism simultaneously draws on and subverts this mode of representation. "The Sand Under the Door" portrays a reality in transformation by presenting a pseudo-realistic omniscient narration in which an increasing emphasis on psychologism and perspectivism, together with the progressive development of an internal focaliser, gradually thwarts and supersedes any attempt at objectivity. Knowledge of the achievements of the revolution, or of post-revolutionary life, is an end which the text approaches but never fully grasps. The progressive construction of an oneiric atmosphere obscures and confuses expectations regarding resolution and conclusiveness, and it is in this sense that Roughton's story also shares features with the Modernist psychological narrative. Roughton's journey describes a rite of passage which never actually takes place as it is abruptly interrupted by a mysterious presence. As the journey progresses it becomes a psychological and highly subjective experience in which all laws (time, logic, causality) are suspended. In his seminal study *The Rites of Passage* (1909), the French anthropologist Arnold van Gennep described this transient moment of passage which, in Roughton's text, lacking a satisfactory resolution, becomes suspended in eternity: "Whoever passes from one to the other finds himself physically and magico-religiously in a special situation for a certain length of time: he wavers between two worlds" (Van Gennep 2004: 18). Var, the purported hero of Roughton's story, is in a similar liminal position, no longer here and not yet there, in constant movement and transformation. As the narrative progresses, he *loses* reality to the point that he does not *exist*, in the sense of permanence that the verb implies, but rather is gradually degraded into inexistence.

Contrary to the trend initiated with the Industrial Revolution, Var reverses the industrial diaspora to the urban centres by abandoning the city to work in a rural farm. Var's move, which is never fully accomplished, is also an attempt to reverse the otherwise unwavering advancement towards the establishment of economic capitalism. Little information is given about the reasons or the conditions for Var's departure and, although the social relevance of the event is highlighted by the official arrangements and preparations which surround it, a certain sense of confusion and disappointment pervades. Despite the expectations created in the text, the inevitability of failure looms over Var's enterprise: the lateness of the cheering at his arrival at the train station, the wet weather, the absence of photographers, the interruption of Var's speech (which would reveal "the real reason of his

leaving and the truth about the meeting") by the station bell, Var's confusion of the porter with some important official, the fact that Var had to pay for his own ticket, the loss of his luggage and the delay of the train progressively build up an absurd context for an otherwise transcendental journey. As in many Modernist narratives, it is the journey itself that occupies the central part of the narration. However, unlike the Modernist journey, which often explores the linguistic and identity constructs of modern existence through a mythological structure, Var's journey becomes an exploration of the psychoanalytical import of the myth of revolution. Thus, Roughton's text reconciles both a materialist stance and a psychoanalytical concern in a search which has no end, or rather whose end is thwarted as chaos and confusion precipitate an ambiguous resolution. As the journey advances, the atmosphere grows increasingly oneiric, intensified by the loneliness of the carriage, the stale air, the smoke of Var's cigarette, the muddy landscape through the window and the incessant rattling of the train. Var's memories of the events that preceded the journey are gradually distorted, and the reasons for his journey, the meeting which had purportedly precipitated it, remain unknown, except for the fact that he received a telegram warning that he was needed at the farm. The speech which Var never delivered contained a truth which now seems impenetrable, and this is as close as the reader gets to it:

> something, he could not remember what, had stopped him from making it [the speech]. Certainly it would have been a fine speech if he had been able to remember all that had happened before at the meeting and the reception; but perhaps it was as well that he had been interrupted for he might have forgotten everything he had wished to tell them, and they would only have thought him careless or stupid, not knowing at all how difficult was the thing he was trying to say. Though he had made the decision quickly, the decision to substitute what he knew of the few hours before, in place of the empty genial speech he had learnt by heart, it had been very hard for him. (Roughton 1937e: 72)

The journey resonates with expectations of achievement which are never fully realised: the honour to be called, the chance of advancement, the certainty of leaving an old urban existence behind. The journey is oriented towards a future that is presented as a compound of disappointment and optimism, precariousness and tranquillity, lack of freedom and simplicity of life, through a series of letters in which the new life is described by John, another recruit who awaits Var at the farm:

> here I have no money, all my wages are paid to me in kind, food, bed, fire, a few clothes, a ticket at the local cinema [. . .] Sometime, they say, if I show myself to be a

strong and clever worker, they will give me money and time to go away. For the present I am content and willing to stay here indefinitely [. . .]. (Roughton 1937e: 73)

Var's questioning of what he sees as the censorial and oppressive methods at the farm is countered by the possibility of a future: "Now, thought Var, I am alone with a silent woman and my fear, riding through the high wind and the dunes to a possible future" (Roughton 1937e: 79). Nevertheless, on the train, the reality of everything that may comfort Var is made elusive: the veracity of the letters, John's presence at the farm, the identity of the characters that board the carriage as the journey progresses, Var's convictions and his commitment to the new life: "I am going to work on the farm with a friend who is possibly after all not there. The wind is blowing the sand from the dunes against this train, and I am afraid. At the top of the window I can see the veins and arteries, coloured by a certain hand" (Roughton 1937e: 80). The forceful wind constantly threatens the womb-like security of the carriage. In an earlier prose piece, "The Journey" (Roughton 1936j: 152-154), a critique of human immaturity and incomprehension, the wind catches a branch which, like a sickle, breaks the four legs of a dog, already strained by age and labour. The ambiguous reference to the sickle as both annihilator and redeemer is resolved by the unambiguous exploitation that both forces (natural and human) exert on the dog:

> Peter now saw the broken legs of the dog, though this also he was little able to comprehend. Throwing down the twig again he urged the dog to move forward, and this by the same twisting and turning of its body it did, carrying him once more along the route he desired, though at a pace now of only a few yards each hour. Nor did the force of the wind at any time abate. (Roughton 1936j: 154)

> In "The Sand Under the Door", the end of the narration is suddenly precipitated as the

woman, Var's last hope in the prosperity of life at the farm, leaves the train, and runs

> over the dunes, over the shore, into the sea. Black clouds followed across the sky. Var leapt after her, and the door blew shut. He saw the train departing, but their carriage stood still. 'Come back,' cried Var, falling in the great water, 'Come back.' He could only see the long shore. The sand blew into the empty carriage, through the broken windows and under the door. (Roughton 1937e: 80)

The inert invades again the organic and, just as the woman's stare is described as a "stone stare", so the carriage is filled with sand. The door, a barrier that separates past and future, origin and destination, is also a frontier that separates the inside from the outside. The door implies a tension between the inner and the outer, an inherent dialectics between open and closed which, in Roughton's text, is obliterated by the fact that the outside contaminates the

inside while the door remains closed. In Roughton's poetics, this stresses the fissures and the inconsistencies of ideological commitment.

While engaged in the revolutionary process, in this text Roughton shows that doubts and uncertainties are essential parts of it. However, it is Var's eventual lack of commitment and his fear of the future that truncate the possibility of realisation of the ideas which move the text. If considered in the context of Roughton's political writings, the text is also a critique of the inability of the parties of the left to unite under an all-embracing ideology, to counteract its multiple internal scissions. The image of the sand invading the carriage is also a reference to those toxic elements which prevent unity, to those doubts that assail the individual, out of fear or prejudice towards an actual revolution. The text is as much the representation of an uncertain revolutionary failure as of the narrative's failure to ascertain the revolution. The revolution is never fully ascertained because the narrative itself constantly deviates from it, being increasingly dragged into the psychological turmoil of the character: this exposes the deficiencies of modern narrative to give expression to the ideas which it tries to realise, while simultaneously underscoring the Surrealist elements (exploration of unconscious fears and collective myths) through which the poet strives to reconcile image and ideology in the text. It is precisely this space left for ambiguity, doubt and self-disruption that lies at the core of the text's revolutionary stance in the context of 1930s British Surrealist ideology. In this direction, the Soviet critic Leontii Spokoinyi, in his argument for a less normative conception of Socialist Realism, defended the role that this type of subjective, ambiguous and self-disruptive images was to play for the continuation of art in the new Soviet society: "To think that the contradiction between the ideas that form the base of the writer's imagination and the realization of these ideas in his work could disappear is to adopt the view that art is unnecessary in a socialist society" (in Günther 2011: 102). What Spokoinyi suggests here is not that image and ideology are necessarily irreconcilable, but rather that the process of reconciliation between the two is never fixed or stable: if this were so, the poeticisation of politics that takes place in this kind of revolutionary literature, certainly in Roughton's Socialist Surrealism, would in no way differ from that produced in accord with totalitarian ideologies. As we have seen, the ideological stance of the British Surrealist Group was always in a permanent state of transformation and reconfiguration, and even Roughton had a fairly open conception of Communism. The imagery used to convey such ideas was necessarily also constantly evolving, and their relationship, naturally unstable. Roughton's Surrealist aesthetics was one of resistance because, by revealing those fissures in the revolutionary discourse, it resisted appropriation by the homogenising narratives of the dominant ideology. It was precisely

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through the acknowledgement of the difficulties in the process of reconciliation that image and ideology were brought together in British Surrealist writing of the 1930s.

In a manner not unlike "The Sand Under the Door", "Tomorrow will be Difficult" (1936) also presents an oneiric landscape in which the figures, deprived of an identity, remain unknown; and the landscape itself, urban and natural, outer and inner, becomes defamiliarised: the street is mentioned, but only the menacing water creeping underneath is perceived; the valleys are sprung with yellow fungus instead of grass; religion is useless as prayers become unintelligible; and the only safe place turns out to be a wasteland in which bitter plants grow out of the barren sand, and the dead abandon their graves. This is the pessimistic vision that Roughton provides of the revolution, a revolution whose success, as he suggests in his political and poetic texts, depends on the self-sacrifice and engagement of the middle classes, to which these may not be willing to commit themselves: "*Together will they understand the joke / And save the Venus with the broken nose, / When carefully the old man in the night / Lets in the bailiff with the bloody cloak?*" Although very different in style and intent from the rest of the poem, these final lines recover Roughton's sardonic and defiant tone, which so characterises his poetic calls to arms: in what may be a coded, and ironic, reference to Penrose and Gascoyne's role in Catalonia in the early months of the Spanish Civil War as safeguards of the Spanish riches, the poem supports, while it simultaneously questions, the capacity of the revolutionary left to remain united against the activities of traitors and conspirators. Roughton was critical of the incipient anarchist orientation of some members of the Surrealist Group. Nevertheless, being aware that internal scissions within the left would debilitate the revolution, he was also a strong supporter of collaboration among the parties of the left in a common United Front.

These questions are also addressed in Roughton's last known poem, "The Foot of the Stairs" (Roughton 1937d: 28-29), published in the autumn 1937 issue of *Contemporary Poetry and Prose*. The poem takes its title from a northern English expression of surprise or amazement: the phrase "I'll go to the foot of our stairs" was generally used in the early decades of the 20th century in plays and radio comedies to characterise a northern regional accent. Published in the last issue of his journal, this poem anticipates Roughton's decision to leave Britain for America, which he also announced in the pages of *Contemporary Poetry and Prose*. More abstract in its references than the other poems, "The Foot of the Stairs" brings together a succession of Surrealist images and subtle political allusions, creating a text that oscillates between the uncanny representation of domestic realities and a political diatribe. The poem is addressed to a fictional character, known by the cryptic name of Miss O'Dicker,

who is urged to abandon her bourgeois lifestyle, while it is still possible before the capitalist structure of petty commodities on which her existence is based collapses. The poem is prophetic in its depiction of a decaying world in which economic profit does not compensate for the losses that escalating Fascism is already bringing about: "You've stolen the profit, but what of the loss?" Throughout the poem, Surrealist images are infused with ideological content: "Come down while the windows still paint you, / With cunning, the view to the east, / For over the eiderdown politics peeking / Will grow like a tumour, the girl on the beast"; "Yet the turncoats and the strip-pleas rain in crowds, / The leader gives a nickel lining to the clouds, / The fatted guns are featured on the postage stamps, / While we concentrate in concentration camps" (Roughton 1937d: 29). Thus, references to Communism as the last ideological hope, and to Fascism as the last ideological evil, even if visibly Manichaean and simplistic, acquire a poetic dimension as they are presented through highly aestheticised images which deliberately preclude mimetic representation of reality, or make use of metonymic and often obscure associations, as in the case of "nickel", pointing both to the colour of the clouds and to the metal of which coins are made. Aural echoes created by the use of rhyme, assonance and alliterative couplings contribute to this process of poeticisation of politics: "turncoats-strip-pleas"; "crowds-clouds"; "leader-nickel-lining"; "fatted-featured"; "postage-stamps-camps"; "concentrate-concentration". The Surreal atmosphere that these images transcribe by means of unlikely juxtapositions, together with their visual plasticity and their grim denunciatory tone, is reminiscent of the dark conglomerates and black humour of George Groz's Dadaist collages. It was precisely a few months before the publication of Roughton's poem, in July 1937, that the exhibition Entartete Kunst (Degenerate Art), organised by the president of the Reich Chamber of Fine Arts, Adolf Ziegler, opened in Munich. It brought together several hundreds of works representative of different Avant-Garde movements, confiscated from a variety of museums and galleries. These were considered an attack on German decency and an example of the degeneracy of modern art. The purge that followed the exhibition and, especially, the international auctions organised with some of the most important masterpieces created in Germany during the Weimar Republic, shocked international public opinion.[434] George Grosz's biting social satires were among the works exhibited, and it is likely that Roughton had this kind of art in mind when he wrote "The Foot of the Stairs".

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[434] See Shearer West's chapter "Degenerate Art" in *The Visual Arts in Germany 1890-1937: Utopia and Despair* (2000): 181-206.

As we said, in the poem, Miss O'Dicker is trapped in a decadent existence of bourgeois petty commodities which she is urged to escape. The decadence of this accommodated world is portrayed: the road that is seen from the window, and which will lead her to "perfection", is "proud of its mould and wet stockings"; the stairs which she must descend in order to leave the house are made of rusty iron and a skeleton is kept in the cupboard. The claustrophobic atmosphere is enhanced as the house is described as a "prison-house" to which a governor (one of those figures of authority in Grosz's drawings) calls regularly to impose his punishment if the linen is not clean: "His armament varies but always he conquers / With apple or arrow or poker or pen" (Roughton 1937d: 28). The poem gradually abandons the petty preoccupations of the bourgeois household to enter the realm of international politics with unmistakable references to the "leader", the "ruler" and the "concentration camps". The description of the power of the leader is sarcastic as it opposes intelligence to slyness and brute force: "Clever, did you say? Life is sometimes clever: / Mountains moved by faith or faulty maps, / Railways crossing oceans at a ruler's bidding, / Rivers running constantly from kitchen taps" (29). Through a succession of imperative forms, Miss O'Dicker is given the instructions she must follow in order to regain contact with reality: "Put on your Schiaparelli apron. Mind the cat. / Now there's someone at the door; better open, / Let him see you [. . .] / Fold your wings and brush your teeth and cut your losses / [. . .] Come to earth" (29). The reference to the Schiaparelli apron, in all its apparent ambiguity and frivolity, is interesting in the context of the Surrealist aesthetics and is worthy of a brief digression. Elsa Schiaparelli (1890-1973) was an Italian designer who became involved with Surrealism in the 1930s. She collaborated with Dalí and Cocteau in designing Surrealist clothes and accessories, in which the everyday utilitarian object combined with a sense of the marvellous. By 1937, Schiaparelli had already made herself a name as an Avant-Garde designer: photographs of her hats had appeared in British Vogue in 1935 and accompanying Tristan Tzara's 1933 essay "Of a Certain Automatism of Taste" in *Minotaure*; also, in the photograph of the Surrealist Group at the New Burlington Galleries on occasion of the London 1936 Surrealist Exhibition, Eileen Agar wears a hat designed by Schiaparelli.[435] In a lecture delivered at Chelsea School of Art in 1988 entitled "Surrealism in England in the 1930s", Eileen Agar stated that the Surrealist women's aesthetic preoccupation with appearance was an extension of their aesthetic preoccupation in art, and

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[435] For a study of the significance of dress and Surrealist fashion in the context of the 1936 London Surrealist Exhibition, and Schiaparelli's relation to Surrealism, see Alistair O'Neill's *London: After a Fashion* (2007): 73-100.

that it responded to a desire to expand the boundaries of Surrealist creation over the boundaries of the private and the everyday. Of the Surrealist women she stated:

> They were elegant and dressed with panache, caring about clothes and their surroundings, however strange the interiors. Our concern with appearance was not as a result of pandering to masculine demands, but rather a shared attitude to life and style. This was in striking contrast to the other professional woman painters of the time, those who were not Surrealists, who if seen at all, tended to flaunt their art like a badge, appearing in deliberately paint-spotted clothing. The juxtaposition by us of a Schiaparelli dress with outrageous behaviour or conversation was simply carrying the beliefs of Surrealism into public existence.[436] (Agar 1988: 120)

Thus, the "Schiaparelli apron" in Roughton's poem, far from being a petty bourgeois or domestic garment, is in itself a symbol, not only of the ensuing Surrealist revolution, but also of women's social liberation, for it subverts the very utilitarian character of the domestic apron. The only question that will probably remain unanswered is whether Miss O'Dicker was not actually Eileen Agar, and whether Roughton was not asking her to elope to America with him: "But this is hardly what I meant to say; / Now you've heard so much, will you go to-day, / Keep a secret, pack your trunks and lose the keys? / Will you do it? Please, for my sake, Miss O'Dicker, PLEASE" (Roughton 1937d: 29). Regardless of these possible biographical concordances, the political message contained in this exhortation must not be underestimated: in Roughton's texts, the journey motif tends to be associated with the revolution, as a rejection of bourgeois values must precede the embracing of a truly revolutionary stance.

Roughton excelled in combining poetry and propaganda in his texts. One more example is "Final Night of the Bath" (Roughton 1936f: 166), a prose text which presents a dark satire on the British Establishment. The title is precisely a pun on one of the British orders of chivalry, the Order of the Bath, and its members, known as the Knights of the Bath. Roughton makes use of the Surrealist collage technique: the text is an assemblage of passages taken from the 6 June 1936 issue of the *Evening Standard* which are eventually used as propaganda for the Communist Party. The text combines two main actions: on the one hand, the staged murder of a mysterious woman in a bathtub and, on the other, the events surrounding the thwarted preparations for the coronation of Edward the Eighth, whose abdication was already imminent. Roughton's text was published in December 1936, at the time the institutional crisis

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[436] The manuscript of the lecture is kept at the Tate. Archive reference TGA881/12. The text was reproduced under the title "Am I a Surrealist?" in Eileen Agar's autobiography *A Look at my Life* (1988).

brought about by the king's abdication, which took place that month, was at its peak. The abdication crisis shook British public opinion and became a major concern for those involved in political and cultural affairs: with Hitler's steady imperialistic advances and the development of the Spanish conflict into a full-scale civil war, the fragility of the British Establishment exposed the shortcomings of European democratic systems. The emergence of Mass-Observation, the Surrealist anthropological movement initiated by Charles Madge and Humphrey Jennings, was conditioned by the abdication crisis. The development of the mass reactions to the crisis was followed by a series of mass-observers up to its point of culmination with the coronation of George the Sixth on 12 May 1937, the official date initially allocated to Edward.[437] Roughton's text is prompted by a similar desire to make sense of these events by recording and interpreting the reactions in the press. Its socio-political relevance is made patent by the co-occurrence of its publication and Edward's abdication on 11 December 1936. As in the case of the collective textual collages created by Madge and Jennings, behind Roughton's collagistic assemblage there is a conscious poetic and political intent, the underlying idea being that the resulting text is not more absurd than the events themselves. A subtle dialectics is established in the text as both the murder of the mysterious woman and the thwarted coronation become interdependent and almost indistinguishable. Thus, the murder is described as a staged murder: it is attended by two thousand people to whom appetisers and boiling bathwater are served and, in the bathroom, "the searchlights beat, uniforms marched, trumpets and drums and bugles played, and caparisoned horses cantered" (166). The female protagonist's part includes a proclamation from which an ironic comment on the crisis may be drawn:

> I could take the crown back to England: a murderer is composing an opera for the Coronation which deals with members of the Royal Family, Ministers of State, representatives of the Church and members of the Opposition. [. . .] It ends with a riotous shooting match and seals the friendship of the English-speaking peoples. (166)

Thus, it is a murderer, a person with no moral principles, who composes a piece to celebrate the Coronation; and the piece itself, a farcical reflection of the British Establishment, reveals its corruption and depravity: the ironic image of the shooting match as a point of encounter for the English-speaking peoples contributes to the denunciation of Imperialism and war under the pretence of patriotic values. The criticism of British institutions is further emphasised by the king's careless behaviour, which is made responsible for the woman's murder: "We did not think she seriously meant to go swimming because the water was so cold" (166). Finally, the corpse, which becomes the symbol of the self-destruction of the defeated British

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[437] See pages 536-538.

Establishment, is also the main argument for embracing Communism: "The body was left lying on the pavement of Downing Street and was damaging to Mr. Baldwin's reputation. [. . .] Now Mr. Baldwin has taken the body back into the Cabinet Room; it contains an exhortation to read 'The Daily Worker' and a form for joining the Communist Party" (166). With this image, Roughton reveals the absurdist ethos inherent in Baldwin's actions (and, by extension, in the British government's decisions), who tries to hide the crime by bringing it home, and uses it towards his own propaganda aims: the invasion of the Cabinet Room by those Communist messages unveils the fissures in the discourse of power of the British Establishment.

Another piece of poetic prose with a clear political intent, "A Date at the Kremlin" (Roughton 1937c: 33-39), purportedly belongs to a longer work which Roughton started writing in 1936 under the title *The Largest Imaginary Ballroom in the World*.[438] Although in the first issue of Roughton's journal *The Largest Imaginary Ballroom in the World* is said to be a "novel" about the United States, the fragment in question, which was published in *Contemporary Poetry and Prose* in March 1937, can hardly be described as a narrative, or as *about* the United States. In spite of this, and of the Kremlin reference in the fragment's title, allusions to England abound in the text both through toponyms (London, Hampstead, Westminster, Peckham) and anthroponyms (Crossley, Westinghouse, Gorringe, Drake). From a variety of angles, the text offers an incisive and mordant critique on Western society, epitomised by the English capitalist caste. Roughton elaborates a complex nonsensical universe through an apparently incoherent juxtaposition of disconnected scenes in which a series of characters interact with each other without actually communicating or, in some cases, even ascertaining each other's presence. In spite of its apparent disconnectedness, the text develops internal cohesion through two leading images: on the one hand, the journey to the Kremlin, in which all the characters are involved; on the other hand, the parody of the bourgeoisie, which affects all the intervening characters in this charade, which are not really characters but rather types representing different vices of capitalist society. The text is a social satire whose very theatricality further accentuates the parodic element which is central to Roughton's Socialist Surrealism.[439] At the end of the text, the characters are presented "in inverted order of seniority" (39), and each is assigned a trait or an object with which they are

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[438] No manuscript of this longer text has so far been traced. In personal correspondence with Yiyi López Gándara, Deborah Moggach has suggested that Roughton probably invested his texts towards support of the Communist Party.

[439] A recent study has brought to light the correspondences between humour and social protest in a variety of historical contexts: see *Humour and Social Protest* (2007), edited by Marjolein 't Hart and Dennis Bos. A study is still required on the central role that humour and parody play in Surrealism as forms of political transgression and triggers of social change.

characterised in the text. These are all types, albeit difficult to classify, a fact which underscores Roughton's caricature of modern society:

Clu Cleverly with his joke cigar;

Pauline Boundary with her maidenhead;

Myrna Buskett with her bruises;

Arhtur Drake with his telephone;

Bridget Caslon with her kiss;

Maisie with her mirror;

Mox with his picture;

Ricardo Buskett with his press-cutting;

Paul Bosanquet with his horse;

Harold Miklas with his semi-quaver;

Frederick Gorringe with his shadow;

Mrs. Boundary with her candle;

Margaret Westinghouse with her dance;

And Mr. Crossley with his lay figure. (39)

The placing of the list of *dramatis personae* at the end of the text also stresses its parodic nature. It is generally claimed that a parody necessarily entails the existence of an original which is parodied.[440] In Roughton's text, this prototype does not exist as such, for its referent is merely the everyday reality of capitalist society, whose customs, idiosyncrasies and modes of expression it satirises. Nevertheless, it is also possible to observe in the text's theatricality, dialogic style and poeticism an intention to mock, or parody, the conventions of dramatic representation, and of the novel. The text indeed precludes categorisation, while it simultaneously demands an original which may categorise it. It is the text itself that seems to call forth a prototype which does not exist, but which is nevertheless fabricated in and by the text. The original, insofar as society, is also a fiction, and the text becomes a poetic parody of life, which is a fictional construct in itself presented by Roughton as the "largest imaginary ballroom".

Roughton's text seeks to undermine different forms of established power, be it economic, institutional, political, domestic, moral or cultural. The industrialist Crossley dictates a letter to his secretary while simultaneously undressing her. His moral irresponsibility is

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[440] An exhaustive study of parody is offered by Linda Hutcheon in *The Theory of Parody* (1985). For Hutcheon, "parody is repetition", a definition which presupposes the existence of an original from which to deviate (Hutcheon 1985: 37). A similar binary structure underlies Gilles Deleuze's articulation of repetition and difference in *Difference and Repetition* (1968).

further stressed by the pettiness of the tasks that he develops: the letter is addressed to the inconsequential and absurd "Invisible Crocheting Company" and it includes, together with Christmas greetings, the socially inconsequential statement that "only God can make a tree" (33), a clichéd image of no significance in modern society. Of particular interest is the imagery associated with the politicians, described as a bunch of ant-eaters which

> are rapidly assuming a leading role in the direction of the affairs of this happy breed of men. Since their arrival they have formulated a Plan under which, in the near future, the few remaining factories will be closed down, the farms and the farmers will be ploughed into the fertile fields, trade will entirely cease and every seaworthy ship will be sunk in the Pool of London, so that there will be dust on all the quays. (34)

The travesty of power and authority is made patent in the description of the policemen who "disguised as burglars were waiting outside nightclubs for burglars disguised as peers of the royal Blood (even their best friends won't tell them)" (35). The total confusion of identities and roles evidences the imposture of power. Even the figure of the poet becomes an object of Roughton's criticism: Ricardo Buskett, being an abusive husband, is not redeemed by his poetry, for he is as corrupt as the rest of the characters. A caricature of officialdom is presented as the ant-eaters engage in "a civic reception they are holding for each other", of which the other characters take advantage to make their escape to Moscow. Finally, a parody of journalistic language is used to satirise the nobility's lack of empathy and extol the working classes:

> 'On Monday afternoon,' the commentator told him, 'the Duke of Walthamstow visited the unemployed centre in Westminster, where he was greeted with a spontaneous outburst of popular indignation. Staying there for less than five minutes, he showed a striking lack of interest in the handiwork of the men who, through the good graces of the Government, are able to spend their time making simple articles of domestic use, such as Mah Jong sets, collapsible canoes, hand-painted theodolites and rosewood croquet mallets. His departure was the occasion for a demonstration of disloyalty, nausea and general apathy, and on stepping into his car he was overcome by the fumes of a stink-bomb, and would have been rushed to hospital immediately, had not all the tyres been punctured during his brief absence. (36)

In this passage, Roughton makes use of ironic inversion as the Duke is greeted, not with applause, but rather with indignation; the government makes the unemployed engage in producing, not useful objects, but pieces of petty bourgeois use; finally, their attitude is not

one of fidelity, but of disloyalty. Roughton thus denounces the conditions of the working classes while supporting violent protest against the figures of authority.

However, the revolution that Roughton advocates is social as much as it is linguistic: the reconciliation of image and ideology takes place through a parody of language which transgresses the linguistic mannerisms of the bourgeoisie, its cliché expressions and worn-out empty idioms. It exposes language's incapacity to communicate meaningfully and, therefore, to approach reality: "In the forest the wind could not see the wood for the trees. In the ocean the wind found more fish than ever came out of it. In the sky the wind discovered that it's love that makes the world go round" (35). Even when it seems that some meaningful ideological content may find expression, language thwarts the attempt with its trite expressions which distort the ideological import of the message: "Rainbow coloured birds glided above his head, most of them silent or singing their natural songs, but a few of them speaking in human voices: 'Unity is Strength, I bet you say that to all the girls, this is the Voice of Experience speaking, that's what you think" (35). Roughton uses and abuses the dull stereotypes of language, which he stretches to underscore its meaninglessness. Thus, Clu Cleverly is described in the following antithetical terms which, while showing language's plasticity, they also present language as essentially insubstantial:

> cool as a cucumber, hot as an oven, red as a beetroot, brown as a berry, black as pitch, white as a sheet, thin as a rake, fat as a pig, clean as a whistle, wise as an owl, dumb as an ox, crazy as a coot, wily as a fox, sober as a judge, drunk as a lord, pleased as Punch, big as a big dog and long as a piece of string, he is the cynosure of all eyes. (34)

As opposed to this succession of meaningless set phrases, the capricious transgression of other fixed expressions which, if unaltered, would in fact retain some metaphorical significance, contributes further to this parody of cliché: "[Mox] saw London (pop. 8,736,122) spread out before him quite unlike a map" (34). Roughton makes use of these forms of discourse parody and linguistic transgression to expose the vacuity and insignificance to which language has been reduced by bourgeois use: the communicative inefficiency of the bourgeois idiom, unable to establish solid relations between word and idea, reflects an ideological void. Since no idea lies behind the signifier, language remains cut off from reality, unable to engage in its material development. The parody of the common idiom that Roughton performs unveils the absurdism (i.e. lack of contact with reality) of purported *common-sense* expressions: the fact that one can be "wise as an owl" is no less absurd than the fact that one can be wise and dumb, cool and hot, thin and fat, sober and drunk, all at once. By parodying the linguistic rituals of everyday language, Roughton liberates language from the significant and ideological

erosion caused by repetition: to liberate the word is also to liberate the idea behind that word, and to re-establish language's capacity to engage in the real. Roughton's puns and discourse parody are reminiscent of the puns and linguistic games of Lewis Carroll, to whom he pays homage in the text.[441] Thus, Maisie walks "through the looking-class" while Paul Bosanquet encounters a little girl who sings a popular nursery rhyme. The transgression of the popular song also bears Carrollian echoes, and takes us from a children's nursery rhyme to a sexual encounter, as the images suggest:

> One, two,
>
> Kiss my shoe,
>
> Three , four,
>
> Try the floor,
>
> Five, six,
>
> Start your tricks,
>
> Seven, eight,
>
> I can't wait,
>
> Nine, ten,
>
> Come again. (38)

Reference has been made to the ritualistic nature of language, and how repetition gradually empties language of ideological significance. This is most clearly seen in Roughton's parody of religious discourse, which is also part of Roughton's iconoclastic aesthetics. The transgression of the Lord's Prayer suggests that Pauline Boundary is an illegitimate daughter: "'Our Father which art in heaven, Harold be thy name,' murmured Pauline Boundary, fourteen years old and born on a merry-go-round" (35). On the other hand, Mrs. Boundary's lullaby, which she sings to her daughter, further stresses the sacrilegious tone of the scene: "Corpus Christi is my love, / On the cross his thoughts were all for me; / he sent a message by his holy dove / Asking me to come to Calvary" (35). Nevertheless, it is towards the end of the text that Roughton's sacrilegious apparatus is fully displayed in a scene which combines parodic language, absurdism and a strong political satire. As Paul Bosanquet is thrown on the ground by his horse, he encounters an old woman, Miss Westinghouse, dressed in Greek attire. She mistakes him for a modern reincarnation of Christ, come to Moscow to convert the heathen

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[441] Here, there is also a clear parody of proverbial expressions, similar in effect to Benjamin Péret and Paul Éluard's "152 Proverbs Adapted to the Contemporary Taste" (1925), which included the following: "Beat your mother while she's young", "Cold meat puts out no fire", "Skin that peels goes to heaven", "He who sows fingernails reaps a torch", "All that fattens is not soft", "Faithful as a boneless cat", "I came, I sat down, I went away" (in Gascoyne 1935a: 65-66).

Communists to Christianity. In a parody of Puritan discourse, Paul Bosanquet is described as "A Saint [. . .], the First Missionary, the Bringer of Light to Darkest Asia" (38). The irony lies in that Bosanquet is himself a convert, having been persuaded by the articulate arguments of a worker: "I'm not a missionary; as a matter of fact I'm an agnostic. Of course I used to be C[hurch] of E[ngland], but I was cured of all that by a clever chap in a debate at the Union" (38). The aim of this date at the Kremlin, in which all the characters eventually become involved, remains ambiguous. Miss Westinghouse insists on accompanying Bosanquet "To Moscow! [. . .] To convert the wicked Bolsheviks. What noble work, to venture out alone against the citadel of Anti-Christ" (38). On the other hand, it is also suggested in the text that the journey may be an opportunity to "escape" the rule of the ant-eaters and, therefore, a form of liberation from the nonsensical and frivolous lifestyle of Western society. The use of the present perfect tense, which contrasts the inconclusive simple past used throughout the text, indicates the closure of a phase as an optimistic and promising future is announced: "The word has been spoken, the stamp has been issued, the signal has been flashed, the letter has been posted, the bell has been rung, the secret has been revealed. To-morrow they sail at dawn" (39). Roughton's use of expected associations ("word-spoken", "signal-flashed", "letter-posted", "bell-rung", "secret-revealed") again derides linguistic conventions while opening up the possibility that the revolution may be realised.

As can be seen from all of the above, the interrelation of poetry and ideology in Roughton's work is made visible in his Surrealist poetics, described as a form of Socialist Surrealism, which combines social satire, political propaganda and humour. Roughton makes use of a variety of techniques in order to deploy humour as a form of social protest, from Carrollian nonsensical wit and Dadaist satire, to parody and Surrealist juxtaposition. Although Roughton's texts tend to underscore the merits and virtues of the revolution in ways that evoke the Romantic myths created by Socialist Realism, they also disclose the fissures and uncertainties that the political events of the time, especially the failure of the United Front, impressed in his ideological stance and in his poetry. Roughton maintained his materialist stance, in poetry and politics, until his untimely death in 1941. In his last essay, "The Human House" (1941), he embraced the "immortality" of the physical world, and rejected the deceitful mercies of mysticism:

> Shun mysticism. There are no short cuts to love, though there are paths treacherously so signposted. Mysticism is pipe-dreaming, at the worst it kills sense, at the best 'it doesn't do much harm.' But better not to live at all, than be content to stand aside, if once you try to take no part, unanswerable logic will drive you back into the forest;

and there, when your pince-nez is broken, you will knock your head against the trees.

(Roughton 1941: 51)

Roughton and Gascoyne thus epitomise the two extreme positions that Surrealism adopted in Britain, a fact that did not prevent a close friendship between them. Gascoyne in fact wrote "An Elegy" to Roger Roughton in which he acknowledged that "It proved hard to remain / Convinced of the Word's efficacity; or even quite / Certain of World-Salvation through 'the Party Line' …" (Gascoyne 1988: 113). In most cases, Surrealism necessarily moved half-way between these two extremes, between the *word* and *world-salvation*, searching for a genuinely committed materialist stance without altogether denying a certain amount of poetic mysticism. This equilibrium and hope for reconciliation secured Surrealism's position as the most significant aesthetic and political movement of the 20th century.

3. Towards a Collective Poetics: Charles Madge and Humphrey Jennings.

It may indeed be said without the least concern for critical misapprehension that Mass-Observation was, in its initial stages, an offshoot of Surrealist practice in Britain and Charles Madge's and Humphrey Jennings's involvement in this project in the late 1930s was very much related to their own activities within the British Surrealist Group. However, Madge's and Jennings's is a peculiar contribution to the development of British Surrealist writing through the creation of a collective poetics, an endeavour which they carried out as both Surrealists and Mass-Observers. In the first place, a brief history of what may be considered the *Surrealist phase* of Mass-Observation, a period that expands from its inception in 1937 to Jennings's and Madge's desertion in 1938 and 1940 respectively and that allows us to explore a not insignificant number of connections between this movement and British Surrealism, such as their shared anthropological interest in the British condition and British identity; their psychoanalytical interest in the unconscious (superstitions, fears, beliefs, habits); the importance placed on coincidences and recurrences; the implementation of a scientific method of exploration of the collective unconscious; the defamiliarisation of common images and familiar modes of discourse; their common concern with modernity and the role of the mass media in shaping ideology (ideology understood as false consciousness); their attempt to democratise art and poetic creation by means of a poetics of the everyday and of the common individual; and finally, their common aim to transform material reality. All these aspects, which are central to both British Surrealism and Mass-Observation, and to Madge's and Jennings's writings as Surrealists and Mass-Observers, prove, not only that there was an irreducible Surrealist ferment in the emergence of Mass-Observation, but also, and most importantly, that the development of Surrealism in Britain differed greatly from that of the movement in other European centres.

Thus, I contend, Mass-Observation was a Surrealist enterprise of the *second phase* which, while drawing on it, transcended in many ways the nature and aims of the Marxist programme of social action of this *reasoning epoch* of continental Surrealism. Whereas Madge's and Jennings's efforts to broaden awareness of the self (through psychoanalytical research) and of the nature of society (through anthropological research) relied heavily on the Marxist conception of consciousness as class consciousness, their contribution to the creation of a collective poetics went far beyond Marxist, and Surrealist, propositions. In this way, British Surrealism and by extension Mass-Observation managed to bring together the previously dissociated realms of science, politics and art, an achievement which had remained tentative on the continent. In the first part of this analysis, I also examine the way in which this was

accomplished through the use of textual collage, the Surrealist technique employed by both Madge and Jennings to reconcile image and ideology in their compositions. In this poetic form they both found a medium through which images of collective significance could be explored, as their textual collages responded to a series of shared and individual concerns which are discussed in detail in the sections devoted to Madge and Jennings. These were concerns regarding the nature of poetic creation in a technological age and the need to redefine the relationship between the poet and society. Also, their use of textual displacement responded to a desire to dismantle official narratives of power by providing the masses with opportunities to create new meanings out of pre-existing images, or to produce their own images. As a technique of unsettlement, collage allowed these writers to defamiliarise familiar sights and to question concepts and ideas which had so far remained uncontested. Finally, as an aesthetic form, collage was also used to reflect the fragmentary nature of modern experience. In the analysis of Madge's and Jennings's texts that I propose, linguistic form and ideological content are brought together in the creation of a truly collective poetics.

3.1. Mass Observations in British Surrealism.

> Ideally, it is the observation of everyone
> by everyone, including ourselves.
> Charles Madge and Tom Harrisson. *Mass-Observation* (1937): 97.

Mass-Observation was an organisation for anthropological research founded in England in 1937. Previously, during 1936, Charles Madge and Humphrey Jennings, both associated with the British Surrealist Group, entertained the idea of creating a form of popular poetry, or poetry of the masses, a Surrealist-oriented socio-poetical project that looked for recurrences and coincidences among everyday images. They sought to find images of collective significance through which an exploration of the collective unconscious could be performed. By giving voice to the previously inarticulate masses, they would achieve a double goal: on the one hand, they would unveil the mechanisms of ideological control inherent in modern societies; on the other, they would come to an understanding of the nature of poetic creation, which would make a collective poetics possible at last. While their purported methodology was scientific and their ultimate aim was socio-political, their interest was both sociological and poetic. In this regard, the new *sciences of the masses*, as psychoanalysis and anthropology came to be known in the 1930s, informed the Mass-Observation movement in Britain, and the

combination of these two disciplines also marked the peculiar nature of British Surrealist writing as it was developed by Madge and Jennings in their texts.[442]

As it happens with any movement related to Surrealism, Mass-Observation came into being out of a coincidence. Early in January 1937, Tom Harrisson, an ornithologist turned anthropologist who was just back in Bolton, Lancashire, from an ethnographic research trip to the New Hebrides (now the Republic of Vanuatu in the South Pacific Ocean), sent his poem "Coconut Moon: A Philosophy of Cannibalism in the New Hebrides" for publication to the *New Statesman and Nation* (1931-1957). Coincidentally, Harrisson's poem appeared right beneath a letter written by the Surrealist poet and former *Daily Mirror* reporter Charles Madge. Harrisson was attracted to Madge's project for engaging in an "Anthropology at Home" (Madge 1937a: 155), as he had already entertained the idea of applying the ethnographic method to the study of the native people of industrial England. For Madge, the merging of both disciplines, anthropology and Surrealism, brought about the possibility of studying British society and British consciousness, and how these were shaped by the mass media which, he understood, had become the new religion of modern societies. In his letter, Madge outlined his project to recruit a number of nation-wide observers to perform regular observations of everyday life in Britain. In the *New Statesman*, only Madge appears as the author of the letter, sent from Blackheath, London, where he had begun his anthropological research on the British people. The letter, acknowledged to be the result of a series of meetings of a group of friends which included other Surrealists, was famously prompted by Geoffrey Pyke's proposal to analyse the mass reaction to the abdication of Edward the Eighth and the subsequent institutional crisis.[443] For Pyke, the crisis provided material (in the form of reactions, collective images, pieces of news and propaganda) fit for producing an anthropology of the British. Around that time, a group of Surrealists which included not only Madge and Jennings, but also David Gascoyne and Ruthven Todd, had begun working on a sort of British anthropology. They engaged especially in the study of unconscious repression exercised on the masses through the recurrent imposition of social symbols of power and authority. Both Madge and Gascoyne had been, since the 1935 Jubilee celebrations, increasingly concerned with the influence that symbolic institutions such as the monarchy exerted in the lives of the common people: Madge was one of the signatories of the "Protest Against the Jubilee" (1935), published in *Left Review*, and

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[442] As a consequence of the recent reappraisal of Mass-Observation in scholarly circles, several critics have written on the relationship between Surrealism and Mass-Observation. See, for example, Jeremy MacClancy's "Brief Encounter: the Meeting, in Mass-Observation, of British Surrealism and Popular Anthropology" (1995) and "Mass-Observation, Surrealism, Social Anthropology: a Present Day Assessment" (2001), and Ben Highmore's "Surrealism and Mass-Observation: the Missing Link" (2005).
[443] Pyke's proposal was published in the *New Statesman* on 12 December 1936.

David Gascoyne denounced the monarchic institution in his "Premier Manifeste Anglais du Surréalisme" (1935). Although their method was eminently scientific, combining psychoanalysis and anthropology, their approach was that of the Surrealist: their aim was to unveil the mechanisms of repression that function at the unconscious level through an analysis of normalised behaviour, accepted beliefs and thoughts, common superstitions and the collective fears and desires of the masses. These records were understood, not as scientific reports, but rather as poems of the everyday, the poetic expression of the collection unconscious of the British people.

Tom Harrisson was then an amateur anthropologist, whose interest in an anthropological approach to the British seemed in accord with the Surrealists' project. Harrisson came into contact with them and in a further letter to the *New Statesman* they co-founded Mass-Observation. However, the moment Harrisson entered the circle, his excessively scientific and, one might say, *unimaginative* approach deterred some of the Surrealists, who thought of Mass-Observation as a form of poetry rather than as a form of science. In the second letter that was sent to the *New Statesman*, this time signed by Harrisson, Jennings and Madge, they established the bases of the new science: Charles Darwin's study of the human animal, Karl Marx's analysis of economic man, Edward Burnett Tylor's anthropological approach to primitive peoples and Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytical treatment of neurotics.[444] Moreover, the group took Pyke's mention of the need for "an anthropology of our own people" as a watchword for Mass-Observation (Harrisson, Jennings and Madge 1937: 155). Their approach was to be determined by their interest in the industrial areas of Britain, which was manifest from the beginning: being left-wing writers of bourgeois or wealthy background, they were drawn to explore the conditions of the working classes. As Harrisson explained, this was "a period when the upper classes and the intellectuals were groping to get out amongst the proletariat and establish communications across that class-gap which was very, very real in those days, and which the war in Spain had brought out in another way" (in Hodgkinson 1975: 32). Harrisson and a group of observers who joined him worked in the Worktown Project in Bolton. Madge and the London group worked in Blackheath, although they paid several visits to the Northern industrial areas, which they often recorded in Surrealist poems, photographs and paintings. In this, they were not far from other British Avant-Garde artists obsessed with industrialism. Edward Wadsworth, associated with Wyndham Lewis's Vorticist movement, a merging of German Expressionism and Italian Futurism, designed several works that recreated

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[444] Edward Burnett Tylor was, together with James George Frazer, one of the precursors of social anthropology in Britain.

the labyrinthine streets of his native industrial North. Wyndham Lewis would later recall a visit to Halifax with Wadsworth: "[Wadsworth] stopped the car and we gazed down its blackened labyrinth. I could see he was proud of it. 'It's like Hell, isn't it?' he said enthusiastically" (in Meyers 1980: 112).

In the second letter to the *New Statesman*, the group's plan of action is outlined. However, the disjointed and almost eccentric nature of the group's stated concerns was indicative of their Surrealist approach to the study of British life: "Behaviour of people at war memorials. Shouts and gestures of motorists. [. . .] Bathroom behaviour. Beards, armpits, eyebrows. Anti-semitism. Distribution, diffusion and significance of the dirty joke. [. . .] Female taboos about eating. The private lives of midwives" (Harrisson, Jennings and Madge 1937: 155). But their emphasis was not only on social behaviour, but on its psychological basis too: "Other inquiries involve mental phenomena which are unconscious or repressed, so that they can only be traced through mass-fantasy and symbolism as developed and exploited, for example, in the daily press" (Harrisson, Jennings and Madge 1937: 155). As will be seen, Madge's Surrealist texts would develop further this interest in the image-making mechanisms of the mass media; on the other hand, Jennings's Surrealist compositions explored the effects of technology on the literary work and the role of the poet in a technological society. In both cases, literary collage was the technique deployed to unveil how the new technologies of mass production and distribution of information (in the form of magazines, books, newspapers and radio broadcasts) favoured the manipulation of information and the formation of images which would subsequently have an effect on collective views of reality. Finally, the aim of Mass-Observation was set: to understand fully how these mechanisms of repression and control work so that society may be transformed. The underlying idea was their conviction that, in spite of the democratising potential of these new information technologies, the voice of the masses had been in recent years forced to succumb under the power of official rhetoric, either through politics (an idea that also underlies Roland Penrose's poems) or the media. However, their attempt to get in touch with the masses was seen as a petty bourgeois whim by some, and undermined by many. In a review of the pamphlet *Mass Observation* (1937), issued by Madge and Harrisson, the Communist Derek Kahn, who was an assistant editor of *Left Review* from June 1936 to June 1937, did not only criticise the haphazardness of the subjects they were interested in, but their very use of the term "mass":

> The Mass implies something quite formless, whereas society as we know it consists of
> individuals in certain relationships, the principal of which are institutionalised. [. . .]
> You will meet no one who says he belongs to a mass, but most people will admit their

sex, family, occupational group, religion, etc. It is only when the field-worker understands the operation of the major institutions that his information about mantelpieces, depilation, or whatnot can fit into place –however much the modern intellectual may have learnt, chiefly through Surrealism, to value the irrelevant as a means to the relevant. (Kahn 1937: 373)

Kahn's review, which betrays a common distrust of Surrealism in Communist circles of the time, also reveals what was then seen as the excessively idealistic, almost poetic, beginnings of an otherwise scientific enterprise, something for which Madge and Jennings were mostly responsible.

As it has been stated, Mass-Observation emerged from a growing anthropological concern shared by several members of the British Surrealist Group. Charles Madge, Humphrey Jennings, David Gascoyne and Ruthven Todd held several meetings in Madge's apartment in Blackheath.[445] In an interview with Anthony Hodgkinson, Tom Harrisson himself acknowledged what he called, in a brilliant coincidence with Herbert Read, a *super-realist* ferment in the early stages of Mass-observation:

[Madge and Jennings] developed the idea of setting up a nationwide panel of people who would write about themselves as a sort of 'subjective literature,' an idea almost poetic in concept. There were a lot of painters involved, too. All these people had a kind of visionary concept [. . .] about everything, an approach which was unscientific-literary, or poetic-literary. It wasn't a question of 'social realism' at all –in fact, just the opposite: a kind of social super-realism. Not surrealism, super-realism. (in Hodgkinson 1975: 32)

Apart from that, the work of Julian Trevelyan and other painters associated with the movement made of it a very visual project. The image, very much in the Bretonian sense of the Surrealist image, acquired relevance in this context, too, and it also played, as will be seen, a central role in Madge's and Jennings's poetics. In the first few assignments of the group, observers were asked to concentrate on the recurrent or dominant image of the day, something which would later be repeated in Madge's "Oxford Collective Poem" (1937). The image was seen as a visual entity which, like the manifest dream in Freud's theory, was the representation of some latent content, an inner desire or fear. The study of the

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[445] Other satellites of the Group are also credited with being present at the moment of inception: Kathleen Raine (already separated from Sykes Davies and married to Madge) and Sheila Legge, among others. The headquarters of the GPO Film Unit, for which Jennings worked at the time, were in Blackheath too: film-maker Stuart Legg joined the meetings, as did William Empson, a former member of the Cambridge Experiment group and friend of Sykes Davies's and Jennings's.

correspondences and coincidences among the recorded images would provide an insight into the collective unconscious of the community. The image was not understood as fixed or stable, but rather as a historical, and therefore transient and variable, category subject to material change. This interrelation of science, poetry and politics had two main consequences: on the one hand, these experiments served to expose the fallacy behind the absolute truths of scientific discourse; on the other hand, from an ideological viewpoint, these collective observations, and the narratives that emerged from them, unveiled the fissures inherent in the false ideological *continuum* of the dominant discourse.

In its initial stages, Mass-Observation was a project for the socialisation and democratisation of art and poetry, which was in fact the way Surrealism was understood by Madge and Jennings, who embraced Breton's announcement of the movement's "reasoning epoch" (Breton 1936b: 51). Mass-Observation was for them the final step required to cross over from absolute idealism to dialectical materialism. With regard to this, in his foreword to Madge and Harrisson's pamphlet *Mass Observation* (1937), Professor Julian Huxley assured that "Nothing could well be more valuable than to contribute towards ending the present divorce between the artist and society at large, and towards initiating a period of truly socialized art" (in Madge and Harrisson 1937: 7). The trend was also followed by other left-wing writers of the 1930s. As we have already seen in the fourth chapter of the present study, Hugh Sykes Davies strove to recover the patterns of the folk tradition in order to regain contact with language's pristine character and function. Jack Lindsay also attempted to revitalise the popular and oral origins of poetry: his poem "On Guard for Spain!" was intended to be "A Poem for Mass Recitation" (Lindsay 1937b: 79) and, in October 1937, his article "A Plea for Mass Declamation" was published in *Left Review*. It denounced the rift that Capitalism had created between the poet as producer and the reader as consumer, and defended the oral tradition as the means to re-establish a meaningful relationship between the speaking voice and society: "The essential thing is a linking of poetic form to the speaking voice in a socially valuable relation" (Lindsay 1937a: 514). The revolutionary proletariat constituted for Lindsay the homogeneous audience which the new poetry should address: "Here, then, I make my plea for Declamation, Mass-recitation, as the initial and primary form of our new poetry. For there we get the most direct contact with the new audience" (Lindsay 1937a: 516).

In the same way, for Madge and Jennings, the alliance of Marx and Freud in Surrealism was symptomatic of the ultimate convergence of politics, science and art, which had become dissociated since the Industrial Revolution. This separation was further reinforced at the time by the outbursts of atavism and the revival of racial mythologies which characterised the rise

of totalitarian ideologies in a purportedly civilised Europe. The study of how these forms of superstitious and mythological thought had replaced scientific and intellectual endeavour in modern Europe thus became the starting point for Mass-Observation. Moreover, the current political climate in Britain allowed such a study: the institutional crisis brought about by Edward the Eighth's abdication contributed to the destabilisation, not only of the British institutions, but of the British national identity as such. This, the Surrealists thought, should have an effect on the masses, who received such signs and symbols as evidence of the country's lack of worth and purpose at a time when other European leaders were ready to go to extremes in order to ensure their countries' political and economic supremacy. In these conditions, they contended, people "realised as never before the sway of superstition in the midst of science" (Madge and Harrisson 1937: 10). Moreover, art, they stated, is not opposed to science, but rather precedes it by providing answers to what science has not yet explained. In this way, Rimbaud's *Illuminations* (1886), for instance, "is a pre-scientific parallel to the successive discoveries about the unconscious mind made in the course of Freudian psycho-analysis. [. . .] Because Rimbaud precedes Freud, his works have an historical significance far beyond those of the post-Freudian surrealist writers and painters" (Madge and Harrisson 1937: 26). From this we can see that they wanted to apply the scientific method to the study of those mythologies of power which, at the height of the technological age, collaborated in the shaping of the collective unconscious. It is in this sense that Mass-Observation departed from and transcended Surrealism, for it attempted to reach a collective unconscious which, they understood, had not quite been achieved by the more individualistic, also less systematic, practices of orthodox Surrealism. While Surrealism intended to reach a sense of the collective via the particular, Mass-Observation's systematic fragmentation of perception and discourse worked towards the creation of a true collective poetics to encompass the so far subdued voices and visions of the masses.

The emphasis of Mass-Observation on the material world and the peculiarities of the British condition seems to contradict the conception of Surrealism as the illumination of the hidden places of the psyche, as well as departing from its interest in the exotic and the very process of internationalisation which the movement was undergoing at the time. Nevertheless, Mass-Observation's interest in reality was not naturalistic, but documentary, almost journalistic, and it included all the realms of lived experience which also interested the Surrealists: dreams, superstitions, coincidences, manias, fetishes, fears, obsessions, mass expression and mass reaction. Thus, for them reality was not an external objective entity, but rather the result of an internal and subjective process of interpretation which would enable

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them to explore common denominators in human experience. Their obsession with the mass and the social systems in which its actions are embedded (mass production, mass awareness, mass resistance), and which is made manifest from the very name of the organisation, connected with the Surrealist aim to explore artistic creation as a biologically determined faculty (Hugh Sykes Davies) and therefore as an activity which can be performed by all (Lautréamont). This accounts for the understanding of art as a mass event, both as something which can be mass-produced (in the sense of Duchamp's *readymades* or Penrose's postcard collages), and as something which can be produced collectively (as in Breton's *Cadavre Exquis* sessions, or in Madge's organisation of a mass poem by university students). On the other hand, the exotic interested the Surrealists, not as a Romantic form of escapism, but rather they saw in non-Western societies and non-capitalist economies forms of government and social organisation which opposed those that were leading the supposedly civilised world into an international political and economic crisis. The *blessings* of modernity and progress were questioned at last, and other possible realities were for the first time seen as plausible alternatives.[446] Also, they discovered that ancient beliefs, rituals, symbols and myths were assimilable to those of modern societies, and this was an aspect, halfway between psychoanalysis and anthropology, which they wanted to explore. Mass-Observation thus became the way for these poets to find the exotic at home so that, from this perspective, the Briton (especially the middle- and working-class Briton) became a stranger to himself, closer in his reactions and beliefs to those whom Frazer had described as primitives. In this way, Mass-Observation achieved in the realm of sociology what Freud had already done in the sphere of psychoanalysis: to defamiliarise normal behaviour while simultaneously standardising so-called *aberrations*. By doing this, Mass-Observation attempted to diagnose social illness and act on it as a remedy. The routine and the banal, aspects hitherto neglected by traditional science, were Mass-Observation's detached objects of study, everyday reality became unfamiliar and the British became the unknown tribe to be studied.

Regarding the relationship between anthropology and Surrealism, it has been argued that Breton disliked anthropologists and that he considered their detached perspective suspicious (MacClancy 1995: 495). Nevertheless, several points of convergence can be found between the developing stages of the Surrealist aesthetics and those of the ethnographic

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[446] In his essay "On Ethnography and Surrealism" (1981), James Clifford sees this form of cultural relativism as pervasive both in the Surrealist and the ethnographic approach. In *Totem and Taboo* (1913), Freud had described an archetypal primitive tribe whose members kill their tyrannical leader in order to reinstate a non-hierarchical system. This myth was precisely the one used in Anarchist postulations to put forward a stateless social model, a concept which relativised concepts such as civilisation and social advancement.

discipline of Mass-Observation. In its early stages, during which the Surrealist influence was more manifest mainly through the agency of Madge and Jennings, Mass-Observation was a form of Surrealist anthropology. As opposed to the instances of ethnographic Surrealism studied by James Clifford (Clifford 1981: 539-564), Mass-Observation did not imply the poetic treatment of the anthropological subject, but rather the application of the scientific method to poetic subjects: in a way, Madge's and Jennings's systematic use of the collage technique in their compositions responded not so much to a Surrealist aesthetic urge as to a desire to analyse scientifically and objectify the process of literary creation. Nevertheless, there were principles which Mass-Observation did inherit from Surrealist praxis, such as the centrality of the collective experience and the liberation from external constraints in the act of recording reality. In fact, echoes of Breton's own programmatic texts can even be found in the theoretical expositions of Mass-Observation. For example, in the "Manifesto of Surrealism" (1924), Breton had claimed that "Each of us has within himself the potential of an orator" (Breton 1972: 31), an idea which was re-elaborated in the preface to *May the Twelfth* (1937) where Jennings and Madge stated that "Anyone can be a Mass-Observer" (Jennings and Madge 1937: xi). This kind of assertions shows a common anti-academicist stance and a desire to democratise expression, which was shared by both Surrealism and Mass-Observation. Thus, Mass-Observation was the way through which the previously inarticulate mass could express itself.

The way in which this was achieved was by compiling the reports provided by the Mass-Observers. These were then arranged, studied and statistically analysed by Jennings and Madge. This method of analysis created a sort of critical *mise en abyme*, for these poets-editors observed what others had mass-observed, all the observers being part of the community which was the object of study. In a 1938 picture taken by a Mass-Observer in Blackpool at the entrance of a fortune-teller's booth a sign reads "Truth is stranger than fiction".[447] The photograph, of both poetic and sociological interest, is representative of Madge's and Jennings's attitude towards poetry and reality: the poet no longer occupies a privileged position in society; the poet is the common individual, the observer of everyday reality. Reality, on the other hand, when perceived through the lens of this poet-observer or poet-reporter, becomes fantastic and poetic. This discovery is fundamental and forms a new kind of awareness. After all, self-knowledge was, for Surrealism as much as for Mass-Observation, the first step towards social transformation, and both projects must be seen as

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[447] The picture was later reproduced in Angus Calder and Dorothy Sheridan's *Speak for Yourself. A Mass-Observation Anthology, 1937-49* (1984): 52.

earnest attempts to broaden awareness of the self and of material reality.[448] Also, Breton's defence of the unrestricted flow of language in the process of poetic composition is echoed by the instructions given to Mass-Observers to record everything without the least irruption of moral or any other concern external to the observation of reality.[449] The dialogue that is established among the different reports/fragments that compose works like *May the Twelfth* can be described in the terms that Breton used to analyse interactions in poetic Surrealism:

> Poetic Surrealism [. . .] has focused its efforts up to this point on re-establishing dialogue in its absolute truth, by freeing both interlocutors from any obligations of politeness. Each of them simply pursues his soliloquy without trying to derive any special dialectical pleasure from it and without trying to impose anything whatsoever upon his neighbour. The remarks exchanged are not, as is generally the case, meant to develop some thesis, however unimportant it may be; they are as disaffected as possible. As for the reply they elicit, it is, in principle, totally indifferent to the personal pride of the person speaking. The words, the images are only so many springboards for the mind of the listener. (Breton 1972: 35)

Similarly, in texts like *May the Twelfth* and the literary collages of Madge and Jennings, a comparable disinterested dialogue is established, not only between author and reader, but also between the disparate voices, fragments or images that make up the composition. In order to understand the ideological significance of this free interplay or interaction of parts, and throw some light on the ways in which image and ideology become reconciled in collage, it is necessary at this point to discuss briefly the nature of this literary technique. What follows is an analysis of textual collage that does not only enlighten the interpretation of *May the Twelfth*, but also of Madge's and Jennings's Surrealist writing, as will be seen in the last two sections of this study.

As a first and tentative, also etymological, definition, collage may be said to be the product of a process of *gluing* together two or more dissimilar elements.[450] It is clear from this

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[448] In a commentary on Mass-Observation's achievements for the *Daily Worker*, Roger Roughton stated: "A means to widening our social consciousness. This is the merit of the movement" (in Madge and Harrisson 1938: 61).

[449] The need to record *everything*, an anthropological dictate popularised by the anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski, who wrote the essay "A Nation-Wide Intelligence Service" to be included in Madge and Harrisson's *First Year's Work 1937-1938* (1938), also echoes the Surrealist belief, inherited from Freud's psychoanalysis, that the significance of the dream or any other unconscious state may lie in the most trivial or minute element. This idea was, as we have seen, picked on by the Communists.

[450] Definitions of collage have been provided by a not insignificant number of artists, writers and critics. Different perspectives call for different definitions of collage which, taken to an epistemological extreme, may be said to be the modern rendition of the Biblical postulate from the Ecclesiastes *Nihil*

definition that the nature of collage as a literary technique is not only very different from the psychic automatism of other British Surrealist writers, especially David Gascoyne and George Barker, but also from the intertextual echoes and references found in Hugh Sykes Davies's texts.[451] Related to this, in his *A Short Survey of Surrealism* (1935), Gascoyne stated that the adoption of the collage technique responded to Surrealism's evolution from the subject to the object:

> No longer does a Surrealist await the message or the image to arise from the vast unconscious residue of experience; he actively imposes the image of his desires and obsessions upon the concrete, daylight world of objective reality; he actively takes part in 'accidents' that reveal the true nature of the mechanism that is life far more clearly than 'pure psychic automatism' could. (Gascoyne 1935a: 95)

By the time Surrealism reached Britain in the 1930s, collage had a long history which had been initiated by Pablo Picasso's and Georges Braque's *papiers collés*, and redefined by a series of hybrid works produced by a variety of artists and writers, from André Breton's *Cadavre Exquis* compositions and Tristan Tzara's Dadaist poems to Max Ernst's Surrealist novel in collage, *Une Semaine de Bonté* (1934), and Roland Penrose's postcard collages, just to name a few examples, some of which we mentioned earlier. The process of assemblage behind these works is promptly perceived by the viewer, who soon becomes aware of their fragmentary nature. However, whether it is in this process of assemblage that the nature of collage lies is questionable. Max Ernst himself, in an essay entitled "Au-delà de la peinture" (1937), declared that "si ce sont les plumes qui font le plumage, ce n'est pas la colle qui fait le collage" (Ernst 1970: 256), implying that the significance of collage does not lie solely in the process of bringing together disparate elements or, by extension, in the visible fragmentariness of the resulting product.[452] In particular, Ernst's statement seems to stand as an incontestable axiom in the case of literary collage, where the process of assemblage of material fragments remains hidden from the reader, unless, of course, the reader has access to extratextual information

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novum sub sole. For a critical account of the definitions of collage, see Elza Adamowicz's *Surrealist Collage in Text and Image* (1998): 13-19.

[451] In the last two sections of the present study I analyse different ways in which collagistic form, which is in apparent contradiction with the automatic technique, leads to liberation of unconscious content in Madge's and Jennings's texts. Also, Elza Adamowicz sheds some light on the relation between automatism and collage in Surrealist theory and practice in her book *Surrealist Collage in Text and Image* (1998): 5-13.

[452] Ernst's paronomastic and euphonic statement remains untranslatable. Literally, "if it is feathers that make plumage, it is not glue that makes collage" (my translation).

provided by the author.[453] Although fragmentation or incoherence (in syntax, semantics, voice, perspective, time or space) may be perceptible in (in fact, even a defining characteristic of) literary collage, it remains difficult to pinpoint the breaks between the different fragments and to establish the significance of such interactions and disjunctions. It is this invisibility of any distinction between the fragments, or of the *glue*, which not only binds them together but also, paradoxically, marks the breaks between them, that has favoured critical approaches that privilege the associative mechanisms of collage over its dissociative function. These place the emphasis on its capacity to construct a coherent narrative, rather than on its capacity to disrupt whatever narrative continuity it is set to achieve. In an enlightening article on the relationship between Mass-Observation's early projects and Madge's and Jennings's Surrealist poetics, Rod Mengham draws attention to the dialogic elements that contribute to the creation of a coherent narrative in their texts. However, Mengham also warns of the dangers of a voice-over (that of the poet-editor) enforcing connections, and to the unresolved tension that there remains between "democratic and autocratic perspectives" in Mass-Observation and, by extension, in Madge's and Jennings's Surrealist production (Mengham 2001: 33). Nevertheless, and without denying that there is in these texts an editorial process of *bringing together*, and that a certain coherence may spring from it, in the light of Surrealist theory, it may be questioned whether such dialogic elements should take precedence in the critical analysis over the capacity of the collage technique to disrupt whatever narrative continuity it is set to achieve. As Breton stated, there is not a predetermined thesis to be developed from the interaction of the parts, or a predetermined form that the encounter of distant realities would adopt, for there persists in the gaps between the fragments a space left for doubt and contradiction, and for the reader to become involved in the process. This is Breton's model of creation, according to which the writer or artist does not intend to build up narrative coherence for the reader, but to make use of techniques which demand the reader's active collaboration in the process of the production of meaning. As Walter Adamson has noted in "The Author as Producer" (1934), this is a model which finds correspondences in Walter Benjamin's model of *cultural democracy* (Adamson 2007: 293). Moreover, the persistence of those gaps calls for a reassessment of their ideological significance: whereas a unifying or totalising reading would deny the reader the possibility of taking responsibility for the

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[453] As we saw in the previous chapter, Hugh Sykes Davies left some written notes on the sources from which he borrowed. In the case of Charles Madge and Humphrey Jennings, the matter is more complex: on the one hand, some of their texts, such as *May the Twelfth* (1937) and the "Oxford Collective Poem" (1937), were effectively written by various hands, a fact that was acknowledged at the time; on the other hand, they created a series of textual collages whose unacknowledged sources I have been able to trace thanks to the recent digitalisation of 19th- and 20th-century texts.

rearrangement of pre-existing material and therefore for the interpretation of the resulting text, Breton saw these gaps and disjunctions as *mental springboards* for the elaboration of new ideas. This is precisely the kind of reading of Surrealist collage that Elza Adamowicz proposes, because, as she states,

> The absence of pictorial cohesion or semantic coherence in collage disturbs the viewing or reading subject; information seemingly withheld frustrates and thus implicates the addressee, inducing her active engagement in constructing the work. The imaginative activity triggered by the gaps between the collage elements is seen as an integral stage of the collage process itself. (Adamowicz 1998: 21)

The reader, she continues, takes active part in the hermeneutic activity, "fills in the spaces in the text or image, identifies sources or intertexts, or simply inhabits the gaps" (Adamowicz 1998: 21).

In the same way, Jennings's own conception of the literary work, not as a stable and finished product, but rather as a public and historical entity, subject to material change and liable to take on new forms and meanings, implies that he did not look for a predetermined unity in his texts.[454] In the process of reading (which is also a process of decoding and interpreting) new connections are found and old links are broken, so that the relationship between the fragments, but also between them and the whole, is always unstable. Hence, the expectations created in his and Madge's texts with titles like "Bourgeois News" or "Reports" are constantly disrupted by those fissures in the narrative which prevent attaining a sense of conclusion, or at least force readers to provide a resolution of their own. The disconnectedness and fragmentariness of these texts subverts the sequentiality of the verbal message which they would normally convey, reactivating the tensions between the material parts and the significant whole (a whole which they both seek and disrupt), and resisting assimilation into a coherent totality.

Thus, collage can be seen both as product and process, as a constructive and disruptive technique. According to Mengham, collage may be seen as the construction of a counter-narrative which offers other textual and, by implication, social realities as valid alternatives to those of official discourse; for Adamowicz, collage is an irreducible juxtaposition of fragments, an entity in the making which constantly interrupts its own discursive mode and its own image-making process. Both views must not be seen as contradictory, but rather as complementary: any reading of these texts should acknowledge the conjunctions between the

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[454] A paradigmatic example of this was his *Pandaemonium* (1985), a text to which he kept on adding new material throughout his life and which was only published posthumously.

fragments without completely obliterating its fragmentary and diverse form, because collage is not only a fissure in the narrative and ideological *continuum* of the dominant discourse, but it is also a fissure made of fissures. In any case, either as totality or as the interruption of whatever totality is pursued, the subversive character of this form of collective poetics is undeniable: as counter-narratives (or counter-images), Madge's and Jennings texts present a view of the world which interrupts the false continuity of dominant discourse by unveiling the gaps in that purportedly coherent narrative; on the other hand, their polyphonic and self-disruptive nature resisted appropriation by the homogenising narratives of totalitarian ideologies, not only of Nazism and Fascism, but of the great capitalist democracies too, of which the British Surrealists were particularly critical. In this, the very form and structure of these writers' collages resemble the constantly evolving ideology of British Surrealism, an ideology which, as it has been shown, was not static, but continually shifting, incorporating change and contradiction, resisting accommodation and thus avoiding becoming a form of false consciousness. As I mentioned in the chapter devoted to the ideology of British Surrealism at the beginning of this study, Herbert Read maintained that the true revolutionary artist was "the good artist with a revolutionary technique" (in King 1990: 160). Madge and Jennings found in textual collage a literary technique which was not only radically modern, but it also allowed them to reconcile aesthetic form, ideological content and political action.

Another influential factor for Mass-Observation can be found in Breton's 1934 lecture "What is Surrealism?", translated by David Gascoyne and published by Faber and Faber on the occasion of the 1936 International Surrealist Exhibition in London. Whereas before Breton had endorsed the supremacy of thought over matter, there he stressed "the supremacy of matter over mind" (Breton 1936b: 52). Although this shift from the psychological subject to the sociological object was not as radical as it may initially seem, for the automatic and irrational element was still considered paramount for Surrealist composition (and more so since the Surrealists' enthusiastic adoption of Dalí's paranoiac-critical method), Breton's assertions shaped the way in which Surrealism was understood by some of the British members of the Group, especially those who, like Jennings and Madge, were more concerned with the external order of things. The socio-historical context that framed the emergence and early development of Surrealism in Britain (i.e. the Spanish Civil War and the ominous threat and later materialisation of the Second World War as signs of a rapidly deteriorating Capitalist system) was crucial in the urgent development of the crisis of consciousness to which Breton had alluded. Surrealism in Britain became, mainly due to its very chronology, a denunciation of social conditions. Eventually, the arrival of the Second World War would make the surreality of

everyday life overpoweringly visual and it was precisely the surrealisation of the banal that interested Jennings and Madge during their brief alliance with Surrealism and Mass-Observation.

Thus, the ultimate aim of Mass-Observation was also that of Surrealism: to change life. In 1935, Breton had placed great emphasis on this in his speech to the Congress of Writers for the Defence of Culture: "'Transform the world,' Marx said; 'change life,' Rimbaud said. These two watchwords are one for us" (Breton 1972: 241). However, James Buzard, in his article "Mass-Observation, Modernism and Auto-ethnography" (1997), detects a basic ambivalence in Mass-Observation's propositions, for it presented itself both as a form of objective and detached registering and presentation of facts, and as a form of political action (Buzard 1997: 100-101).[455] This is what Mengham refers to as the democratic and autocratic pulls of Mass-Observation. It was indeed the case that, in the early stages of the movement, Tom Harrisson's interest in the scientific objectification of everyday data tended to be counteracted by Jennings's and Madge's Surrealist aim to change life and their allegiance to a defined left-wing political agenda. Neither position was devoid of certain risks: whereas Madge and Jennings shared a strong anti-Fascist and anti-imperialist bias, which prevented complete objectivity in their observations, Harrisson's approach sometimes drew closer to totalitarian methods of state surveillance.[456] For Madge and Jennings, concerned with the psychosocial factors that had favoured the rise and expansion of Fascism in Europe, the success of totalitarian ideologies largely relied on the production, and re-production, of national self-images which responded to mythical visions of power and to patriotic ideals of racial or political supremacy. They also saw that other non-totalitarian imperialist states such as Britain were not wanting in this sort of symbolic displays which were used, not only to ideologically control the masses, but also to sanction their own imperialist actions. In *May the Twelfth*, Mass-Observation tackled these issues by demystifying the mythical image of Britain promoted by the Establishment in the media, and by making the common individual take active part in this process of

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[455] In a recent study Nick Hubble sees the combination of scientific, political and poetic elements in Mass-Observation, not as contradictory, but rather as complementary. See his *Mass-Observation and Everyday Life* (2006).

[456] F. Montague, the Labour M.P., became, like many others, suspicious of Mass-Observation's intrusive methods, and he declared to the *News Chronicle*: "If I catch anyone Mass-Observing me, there's going to be trouble" (in Madge and Harrisson 1938: 59). In 1940, once Jennings and Madge had left Mass-Observation, Harrisson placed its activities at the service of the Home Intelligence Department of the Ministry of Information, a move which the Surrealists had dreaded. With the outbreak of the war, what had started off as a form of Surrealist research ended up as a form of state propaganda. In "Surrealism in England" (2004), Peter Nicholls parenthetically regrets the dissolution of its revolutionary power: "it would be hard to imagine the Paris Bureau de Recherches Surréalistes delivering itself up to a similar fate" (Nicholls 2004: 415).

demystification.[457] *May the Twelfth* is apparently concerned with a single incident, the coronation of George the Sixth on 12 May 1937. However, with a decentring style which would become typical of Madge's and Jennings's Surrealist poetics, the book is collagistic and elliptical in nature: the coronation itself is its elusive centre, with which the *documentary* is not concerned in the traditional sense. Its focus of interest is not the main event, but rather all the ordinary and trivial events which were simultaneously taking place in the country. The aim behind this deliberate shift of focus was to analyse how the ordinary individual's behaviour and thoughts are shaped by social rituals, and to unveil the mechanisms of ideological control inherent in these. In one of the editorials, for instance, the authors drew attention to the fact that some people "forgot to be angry with the busmen for being on strike", whereas some others thought that it "added somehow to the drama of the occasion by making it more unusual, or even more inconvenient" (Jennings and Madge 1937: 12). Attitudes like these showed the extent to which social behaviour, but also unconscious reactions, were conditioned by this sort of events.

Stylistically, the book incorporates features of the impressionistic narrations of High Modernism, of the social commentaries of Auden's prose and of the Soviet proletarian novel. However, the simultaneity of the reports undermines the very character of historical narratives and the logical progression of historical accounts. Hence, not being a piece of historical writing, a novel or a scientific treatise, *May the Twelfth* can only be considered a poetics of the people. In "They Speak for Themselves. Mass Observation and Social Narrative" (1937), which Madge and Jennings published in *Life and Letters Today*, they bore witness to the authenticity of the people's reports, something which the sociologists and the realist novelists had found impossible to reproduce. The reports, which were not edited, retained the original spelling and punctuation. This was a form of automatism, with no control exercised by reason and no academic or literary bias: a truly popular poetry. Not only in style and form, but in arrangement and format as well, *May the Twelfth* was an incredibly modern product. Moreover, as Jeremy MacClancy argues, the book, with its several indexes, offers alternative ways for it to be read, allowing the reader to shuffle events, perspectives, voices and locations

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[457] In this regard, Mass-Observation bore a resemblance to the French Collège de Sociologie, founded in 1937 and attended by former members or associates of the Surrealist Group, including Georges Bataille, Michel Leiris, Walter Benjamin and André Masson. The aim of the Collège was, like that of Mass-Observation, to privilege the social dimension of the human experience. In parallel with the coronation survey undertaken for *May the Twelfth*, the Collège prepared a session on the "Symbolism of the Crown". See Denis Hollier's *Le Collège de sociologie* (1979).

(MacClancy 1995: 502). *May the Twelfth* thus becomes one of the earliest models in British literature of the Postmodern hypertext.[458]

Regarding content and ideological significance, the book was not less revolutionary. The propaganda apparatus which surrounded the king's coronation had been intended to put an end to the institutional crisis initiated by Edward the Eighth's abdication; the very date of the coronation, the date originally chosen for Edward's ceremony, betrayed a desire to erase historical fact, to omit the uncomfortable episode or fragment, in favour of a new narrative of permanence and continuity. With *May the Twelfth*, Madge and Jennings managed to destabilise the power discourse of the British monarchy by revealing the gaps within that seemingly uninterrupted narrative whole. The way in which the different reports were arranged created an alternative narrative to that of the coronation in order to interrupt the false continuity of the ideological construct that for Madge and Jennings was the myth of the monarchy. By doing so, the book implicitly unveiled how mythologies of power associated with the monarchy work within the complex structure of the social network, boosting the cooperation of the common people in the main event. This cooperation was necessary for the coronation to be a successful happening, as a result of which the monarchy as a symbol of power was not only maintained but reinforced. Furthermore, far from presenting itself as a predetermined and coherent whole, this alternative narrative contained a multiplicity of conflicting viewpoints and voices, creating space for self-disruption and avoiding becoming a form of false consciousness in itself. In fact, the very compositional technique used in *May the Twelfth* resisted appropriation by the totalising and homogenising discourse of the British Establishment. For Madge and Jennings, this dominant discourse was the manifestation of a form of totalitarianism in disguise, an idea which also appeared in the collective pamphlet *We Ask Your Attention*, issued by the British Surrealist Group under the auspices of the Artists' International Congress and Exhibition soon after the coronation. In this pamphlet, the Surrealists denounced the "farcical pageantry of Coronation", which exploited familiar and unchallenged concepts such as nation, patriotism and prosperity to justify the government's military and imperialist aspirations (The Surrealist Group in England 1937b: n.p.).

Understood by Madge and Jennings as both scientific *and* poetic, Mass-Observation set out to reveal a poetics of the everyday by providing an unfamiliar image of the mundane and the ordinary. It was a way of defamiliarising the normal, and normalising what had been so

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[458] Ruthven Todd compiled the index, which was indeed one of the Surrealist successes of the book. For a colourful account of the episode between Ruthven Todd and Jennings while the former was compiling the index, see the letter written by Todd to Mary-Lou Jennings (16 September 1978), reproduced in Kevin Jackson's *The Humphrey Jennings Film Reader* (1993): 194-195.

far conceived as exceptional. In this process, as Ben Highmore states, "the very banality of the daily could reveal a poetics that was saturated with myth. The status of the mythologies of daily life was the problem that Mass-Observation faced" (Highmore 2002: 75). Thus, Mass-Observation as directed by the Surrealists set itself the task to unveil those mythologies of the everyday, taken for granted and accepted by the majority as integral parts of their lives without questioning their validity or assessing their power to control and influence thought. This was not only done in works like *May the Twelfth*, but also in Madge's and Jennings's textual collages, in which ideas assumed to be natural are constantly questioned. Thus, their aesthetics of fragmentation demystifies ideological constructs such as nation, patriotism, imperialism, capitalism, profit and progress. On a parallel level, their plagiaristic technique also challenges academic hierarchies based on concepts such as originality and authorship, as will be seen.

In modern society, recurrence is a central feature of those mythologies of power, which sustain a given ideology (that of the dominant classes) through the reproduction of a message in different media: society is thus revealed as an assemblage of symbols and myths which reinforce a series conventions, beliefs and practices aimed to preserve the current social order. For Madge and Jennings, the study of rituals, both in the sense of everyday routines (like reading the newspaper) and as the social representation of a *false* collectivity (like the king's coronation), became central in the understanding of the conservative and reactionary ideology underlying those social practices, an idea which was already present in Freud's *Totem and Taboo* (1913): "By this method of unconscious understanding of all customs, ceremonies, and laws which the original relations to the primal father had left behind, later generations may also have succeeded in taking over this legacy of feelings" (in Jennings and Madge 1937: 265-266). Also, the Surrealists were very aware of the power of the mass media to create and sustain new mythologies, especially Madge, who became increasingly concerned with the role of the press in controlling the masses, in fascist and democratic states alike. These mythologies could be easily recognised, as Madge acknowledged in his first letter to the *New Statesman*, in mass reactions in moments of social and political upheaval and of institutional crisis, such as the Crystal Palace fire, the king's abdication or the war in Spain.[459] Nevertheless, as he would

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[459] As David Gascoyne recalled in the "Introductory Notes" to his *Journal 1936-37* (1980), the Crystal Palace fire "represented in a sort of symbolic way an image of the world-conflagration which we were already beginning to think of as about to break out, and we felt that it meant this, unconsciously, to the general public, hence the unusual fascination it seemed to have for everyone at the time" (Gascoyne 1980: 9).

also confirm, they were made manifest in everyday customs and habits, collective superstitions that govern daily life and common routines.

What Mass-Observation achieved as a *dissident* Surrealist enterprise was a psychosocial configuration of modern experience as a juxtaposition of fragments.[460] Consciousness thus emerged as the result of the interaction of images, symbols and myths, to which the individual is constantly and unconsciously exposed, forming an apparently seamless view of the world. Madge's and Jennings's texts, which expose the inconsistencies between that seamless totality and the fractured reality of modern experience, fraught with economic, political and ideological crisis, contributed to the collapse of this uncontested cultural and ideological legacy. In an interesting analysis of the concordances between Surrealism and ethnography in the twenties and thirties, James Clifford provides a fairly broad conception of Surrealism as "an aesthetic that values fragments, curious collections, unexpected juxtapositions –that works to provoke the manifestation of extraordinary realities drawn from the domains of the erotic, the exotic, and the unconscious" (Clifford 1981: 540). It is in fact this emphasis on fracture and fragmentation, on collage and juxtaposition, which served these writers to question universal truths, inherited beliefs and normalised behaviour. It was not so much, as Clifford claims, a question of finding the extraordinary in the exotic, but of looking for the extraordinary in old and familiar sights.[461] In the 1930s, Britain became in fact an *unhomely* home for the kind of democratising poetics of the everyday pursued by several writers and artists at the time.[462] In the case of Surrealism, this was especially so, not only because the movement found strong opposition in the criticism, in spite of the British Surrealists' efforts to establish a patronymic lineage for Surrealist practice in Britain, but also and mainly because it was through Surrealism that the very concept of *home* began to be questioned. The Surrealist painter Paul Nash, who as early as 1932 wondered in the pages of the *Weekend Review* whether it was possible to be modern and British at the same time (Nash 1932: 322-323), reinvented the British landscape in paintings like *Landscape from a Dream* (1936-1938) by reintroducing the marvellous in otherwise ordinary images.[463] Elsewhere,

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[460] I use the adjective *dissident* as the activities of Mass-Observation were never openly sanctioned by Breton, and it still remains to be known whether he was actually aware of these, at least in the initial stages of Mass-Observation, when the role of the Surrealists was still prominent.

[461] In this they were following Freud's definition of *the uncanny* in his 1919 essay "Das Unheimliche". The expression, which is rooted in the word "Heim" ("home"), was used by Freud to negate the possibility of such a psychological realm.

[462] A recent study by Christopher Hilliard, *To Exercise Our Talents: the Democratization of Writing in Britain* (2006), analyses the efforts made by book clubs and little magazines to promote proletarian writing in the 1930s.

[463] Nash's painting was reproduced in the May 1938 issue of *London Bulletin.*

Herbert Read denounced British *normality* in his essay "Why the English Have No Taste" (1935). Along similar lines, the literary technique of collage allowed Madge and Jennings to adopt an impersonal perspective in order to dissect modern Britain: in their texts, ideas which seemed inextricably embedded in the British collective unconscious, such as national identity and tradition, became suddenly strange and novel. The figure of the British writer as an "anthropological stranger" (Mengham 2004: 371) pervades their work, but it is not exclusive to them. For example, in his introduction to Bill Brandt's *The English at Home* (1936), Raymond Mortimer describes a feeling which was shared by many 1930s writers and artists, even if they had never physically left their native land:

> One of the pleasures of being English is to return to this country after a longish time abroad [. . .]. After the featureless American plains, the uncomfortable African deserts and the cruel mountains of Asia, the Isle of Wight looks unbelievably green and cosy and neat [. . .] for an hour or two you have caught a surprising vision of your country and your countrymen: you have noticed a hundred details which are peculiar to England; you have, in fact, been able to look through foreign eyes. (in Brandt 1936: 3-4)

Only from a detached and scientific perspective that sees old realities as new and unfamiliar ones may we gain an insight into how normalised rituals function as mechanisms of unconscious repression and control. In the case of Mass-Observation, this is clearly seen in the works produced by Madge and Jennings, of which Harrisson was generally sceptical, but also in their Surrealist writing, whose very fragmentariness and disjointedness is a reflection of the fractured nature of reality: as elements are displaced in the text, so the order of reality, its norms and assumptions, is upset. With no fixed or stable values, the absolute truths that perpetuate the prevailing order become relative and transient.[464] What is considered civilised becomes savage, and what is familiar is denaturalised. In Clifford's terms, "surrealist practice [. . .] attacks the familiar, provoking the irruption of otherness –the unexpected" (Clifford 1981: 562). This approach reverses the movement performed by ethnography, and yet Surrealism and ethnography embody attitudes that "presuppose one another; both are elements within a complex process that generates cultural meanings, definitions of self and other. This process –

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[464] In "The Press and Social Consciousness" (1937), Madge explained how absolutes such as "Beauty, Truth and Goodness" had become relativised in the age of the mass production: "Sex, Scandal and Crime are the poetry of modern journalism" (Madge 1937f: 283). Regarding beauty in particular, Marcel Griaule, the French anthropologist, stated: "Ethnography [. . .] is interested in the beautiful and the ugly, in the European sense of these absurd words. It has, however, a tendency to be suspicious of the beautiful, which is rather often a rare –that is monstrous- occurrence in a civilization" (in Clifford 1981: 550).

a permanent, ironic play of similarity and difference, the familiar and the strange, the here and the elsewhere- is [. . .] characteristic of global modernity" (Clifford 1981: 562-563). For Clifford, there is a basic ethnographic interest in all Surrealism, while there is simultaneously an unavoidable Surrealist drive in ethnographic works: "In every Introduction to Anthropology course, and in most ethnographies, moments are produced in which distinct cultural realities are cut from their contexts and forced into jarring proximity" (Clifford 1981: 563). As will be seen, it is through collage, that is, through a similar process of bringing together disparate elements, that Madge and Jennings sought to reconcile image and ideology in their texts.

 In spite of several methodological flaws in Madge's and Jennings's project for a collective poetics (such as their reliance on coincidence, their autocratic agency in the re-arrangement of material, the subjective nature of their textual choices and their incapacity to transcend completely an idealistic residue in their approach), the mere existence of a movement like Mass-Observation in the late thirties implied some positive undertakings on their part. At a time when new mysticisms and mythologies used pseudo-scientific discourse to achieve racial, cultural and intellectual homogenisation, Mass-Observation's focus on plurality, collectivism and the mass as a collection of individual fragments became a rallying cry for freedom and social justice. Its methodology may have been flawed, but its pluralising aim was symptomatic of the revolutionary force behind it. It was a form of historiography, written by the losers, the poor and the voiceless; an unhistorical history of the trivial and the anticlimactic. Malinowski, who had noted some of its weaknesses, also recognised the social value of the enterprise:

> Scientific discovery, which we all believed twenty-five years ago to be the soul of progress, has now practically become the means of constructing enormous machineries for physical destruction and national enslavement. [. . .] Mass-Observation, alas! is inconceivable in any of the totalitarian communities. This in itself and symptomatically is a high testimony in its favour. Yet in the countries where democracy is still at work, Mass-Observation may not only be a useful instrument of scientific research, but it may become an extremely important practical contribution towards the maintenance of human civilisation where it still survives. (in Madge and Harrisson 1938: 120-121)

But this collectivist and humanistic side of Mass-Observation, which was also central to Madge's and Jennings's Surrealist poetics, as will be seen in the following sections of this study, was soon lost due to Harrisson's overtly pragmatic approach. This was precisely one of the factors that made Jennings abandon the project not long after the publication of *May the*

Twelfth (1937), the most paradigmatic piece of Surrealist anthropology produced by Mass-Observation. Once Jennings had left, the anthropological and scientific side of Mass-Observation took over the poetic. Two books were published by Madge and Harrisson then: *First Year's Work* (1938) and *Britain by Mass-Observation* (1939), both very different in style and form from *May the Twelfth* (1937). By this time, Britain was increasingly concerned with the threat of war and the mass reaction to political events such as Anthony Eden's resignation, Hitler's occupation of Austria or the Munich crisis. Hence, the previous two books were eventually followed by a whole report on the conflict entitled *War Begins at Home* (1940) intended to be a *war barometer* to measure collective reactions since the official declaration on 3 September 1939 and through the first four months of the conflict. The initial state, marked by a mixed feeling of relief and anticlimactic tension, was described as a *war of nerves*: "Even horrible certainty seems better to me than uncertainty" was the statement of one of the observers now turned diarists (Harrisson and Madge 1940: 38). The first air-raid warning initiated the *war of arms*, which completely changed the social structure of Britain: "the structure of the family, through evacuation; the structure of leisure and sex and shopping, through the black-out; the structure of the home, through incendiary-bomb and gas preparations; the structure of civil authority, through A[ir].R[aid].P[recautions]" (Harrisson and Madge 1940: 43).

Inevitably, Madge was also soon to abandon Mass-Observation officially, arguably due to discrepancies over research methods with Harrisson.[465] The outbreak of the Second World War and his disillusionment with Surrealism also account for his desertion. Even so, from February to May 1940, Mass-Observation published a weekly journal, *Us*, which presented short reports and surveys on a variety of social and political subjects: food, war, morale, conscription, holidays, fashion, luck, and so forth. Also, during the war, Mass-Observation worked on commissioned research projects for the British Ministry of Information. However, this was the shift from Surrealism to institutional propaganda that Madge and Jennings had dreaded. Already in the 1950s, it went on to focus on consumption and consumer habits in Britain, becoming a private market research company, the final step in the mercantilist degradation of what had begun as a left-wing, revolutionary movement.[466]

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[465] In Tony Kushner's analysis of the movement *We Europeans? Mass-Observation, Race and British Identity in the Twentieth Century* he states that "Early in 1940, Madge wrote to Harrisson, criticising him for failing to complete projects and then moving on to 'new facts, new people, new projects'" (Kushner 2004: 6).

[466] Since the 1980s there has been a revival of interest in the early activities Mass-Observation, whose archive is housed at the University of Sussex.

3.2. The Mass Mind: Charles Madge's Anthropological Surrealism.

> You can't depend on the accuracy of news or information.
>
> Horoscope on 30 September 30 1938,
> quoted in Tom Harrisson and Charles Madge's
> *Britain by Mass Observation* (1939): 19.

Charles Madge's theoretical and poetic texts contributed notably to the development of a Surrealist system of thought and a Surrealist poetics in Britain. As a theorist, he sought to recontextualise Surrealism and to provide it with a new meaning, which had previously gone unappreciated, and a new ideological dimension in Britain. He also focused on Surrealism's capacity to provide a theoretical frame within which to analyse the material conditions and the ideological superstructures of modern society. His was a conscious attempt to redefine the individual in relation to the masses, and his interest in the workings of the mass mind was shown in his activities within Mass-Observation as much as in his Surrealist compositions. Of his imagery, Kathleen Raine states that it "is informed with a content not only supremely imaginative but infused with the imagination of the collective mind of which it is an eloquent, if unconscious, expression" (Raine 1967: 48). Indeed, he had a Marxist concept of poetry as an activity which had to be performed by the masses and for the masses, and defended Surrealism as a science by virtue of which collective images could be explored. As a poet, he was concerned with the mechanisms of poetic creation, and his experiments in this realm crystallised in two very distinct forms of Surrealist poetics, both of them collagistic in nature. On the one hand, there are his textual collages, composed of pre-existing fragments of which he becomes the editor, and which serve him as a springboard for political satire of the imperial subject, the capitalist system or the British condition. On the other hand, there is the "Oxford Collective Poem" (1937), a Surrealist experiment created through a process of collective arrangement of images obtained collectively which, I sustain, is British Surrealism's most successful attempt to create a collective poetics. For my analysis of Madge's texts, I draw attention to this author's interest in the mass media as both a democratising element and a tool for ideological control in modern societies, in order to examine the ideological dimension of images obtained through textual displacement. I then discuss the different ways in which his textual collages, intended to be *pieces of news*, contributed to unveiling the mechanisms of textual manipulation used in the mass media, while at the same time subverting the writer's purported intention to provide a coherent narration of current events. For Madge, this sort of

collective poetry was the new poetry of the materialist age, from which every idealistic or *superstitious*, as he called it, residue would be erased. This was indeed poetry that could act on reality.

3.2.1. First Contacts with Surrealism.

Charles Henry Madge was born in Johannesburg in 1912, the son of a colonial administrator, a fact which probably accounts for Madge's fixation with imperialism in some of his Surrealist compositions. His family soon moved to England, where he went to Magdalene College, Cambridge. His time at Cambridge, where he became part of a group of left-wing writers and intellectuals, marked his shift from an imperialist to a pacifist stance and, in 1932, he joined the Communist Party of Great Britain. Not long after, he published, together with Humphrey Jennings, his first articulate critique of imperialism and colonialism, a commentary on the present situation brought about by the invasion of Abyssinia entitled "The Space of Former Heaven" (1935). The text predates and significantly prefigures the sort of compositions that both Jennings and Madge would be writing as Surrealists. The narration shifts from one place to another, there are sudden changes in perspective and voice and narrative progression is constantly hindered. The sources from which it draws are varied, anticipating what would become his own and Jennings's copy-and-paste technique: a letter sent by George Bernard Shaw to *The Times* earlier in 1935, John Galt's *The Life, Studies and Works of Benjamin West* (1820) and Stendhal's *History of Italian Painting* (1817), among others. The temporal and spatial displacement created by the frame narrative (concerned with the travels of Benjamin West) contributes to the overall dream-like sensation of the text. This nevertheless contrasts with the urgency and immediacy of the central passage, in which the present political situation is addressed and Britain's international policy in the Abyssinian crisis is satirised by juxtaposing Shaw's letter and a quotation from James George Frazer which had also appeared in *The Times*:

> All this colonisation has been done by what we call unilateral action. The League of Nations is being strongly urged by our Foreign Office, represented by Mr. Eden, to assist the Danakils in killing the Italians with the object of stopping the road-making and forcing Italy to retire discomfited, leaving the primitive tribesmen triumphant over European civilisation: Well done, Eden and Hoare! Through you the voice
>
> Of England spoke in trumpet tones that rang
>
> To the world's end, not in a blast of war
>
> But in a nobler cause, the cause of peace
>
> And brotherhood of man. The Scripture says

Blest are the peacemakers; sure we say

Blessed is England, blest the nations met

In solemn conclave by Geneva's shore. (Madge and Jennings 1935: 55)

While at Cambridge, from where Madge did not graduate, he contributed several poems to the University left-wing journal *Cambridge Left* (1933-1934) where his early revolutionary aesthetics was criticised as the product of a "literary fashion" in John Cornford's seminal essay "Left?" (Cornford 1933-1934: 28).[467] Madge was acquainted with the central figures of the incipient Surrealist Group, especially David Gascoyne and Humphrey Jennings, with whom, together with Tom Harrisson, he founded Mass-Observation. He was a precocious poet and his poems were published alongside those of George Barker, Herbert Read and the Auden group, among others, in William Butler Yeats's *The Oxford Book of Modern Verse 1892-1935* (1936). Throughout the thirties, he contributed regularly to several periodicals which played a crucial role in the introduction and development of Surrealism in Britain, such as *New Verse*, *The Criterion*, *Left Review* and the Surrealist *London Bulletin.* Eliot soon took to Madge's poetry, and secured for him a post in the *Daily Mirror*, of which Madge was a reporter in 1935 and 1936. This would have an effect on his Surrealist texts, concerned with the power of mass media: what fascinated him about the mass media was their capacity to reach the wide public (it was the first popular form of communication *en masse*), but also the dangers involved in this, that is, how it could be deployed to shape and homogenise thought and how, under the deceitful appearance of democratic expression, it could be used to smother public opinion.

During this period, four of his poems, later included in *The Disappearing Castle* (1937), were published in the same 1934 issue of Eliot's *The Criterion* where Hugh Sykes Davies's "Banditti" appeared.[468] Sykes Davies's text was a precocious example of Surrealist writing in Britain and, although Madge's early poems cannot be considered Surrealist in either conception or intention, they do anticipate certain themes which will become central concepts in the development of anthropological Surrealism in Britain: the loss of home in "In Sua Voluntade", class struggle in "The Hours of the Planets", the sense of impending doom in "Man Maniform" and the idea of "patterns awaiting events" in poems like "The Lull" or

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[467] After resigning a Cambridge scholarship in 1936, Cornford became one of the first Englishmen to join the militias in Spain. He died in a town near Jaén in December that year.

[468] The "Four Poems" are "In Sua Voluntade", "In Conjunction", "Man Under Taurus" and "A Monument" (Madge 1934a: 600-602). As has been shown, Eliot was, in spite of his distrust of Surrealist poetics and politics, an unacknowledged champion of Surrealism in Britain, promoting publication of early Surrealist texts, such as Sykes Davies's and Madge's, and later of Barker's *Calamiterror* (1937). He also published other theoretical or ideological works, such as Gascoyne's translation of Breton's *What is Surrealism?* (1936) and Read's *Surrealism* (1936), both on the occasion of the London International Surrealist Exhibition, and Jennings and Madge's *May the Twelfth* (1937).

"Instructions".[469] On the other hand, Surrealist prose poems like "Bourgeois News", "Division of Labour" and "Government House", with a clear political intent, make use of fragmentation, displacement and juxtaposition with a somewhat sardonic effect. These, together with his "Oxford Collective Poem" (1937), are probably Madge's most earnest attempts to systematically apply Surrealist principles (especially, the exploration of unconscious images through automatism and collage) to poetic composition. Madge's theoretical and programmatic essays in Geoffrey Grigson's *New Verse* are interesting in their treatment of Surrealism as an incipient movement in Britain. Intended to provide a theoretical frame in which to understand the movement, they nevertheless betray Madge's apprehension that it might not settle in Britain. Finally, the poet's evolution from Surrealism towards more defined anthropological concerns was made manifest in his contributions to *Left Review*.

Nevertheless, it was in fact his early interest in anthropology and the workings of the mass mind as it crystallised in Mass-Observation that drew him closer to a truly Surrealist stance during the 1930s: he saw in Mass-Observation the possibility of creating a poetics of the masses through which the collective unconscious, which so interested the Surrealists, would be unveiled. In *The Land Unknown* (1975), Kathleen Raine, who became Madge's wife after she divorced Sykes Davies, highlighted the Surrealistic side of Madge's conception of Mass-Observation:

> To Charles, who seemed at the time a man inspired, almost as a medium is inspired or possessed, the idea of Mass-Observation was less sociology than a kind of poetry, akin to Surrealism. He saw the expression of the unconscious collective life of England, literally, in writings on the walls, telling of the hidden thoughts and dreams of the inarticulate masses. In these he read, as the augurs of antiquity read the entrails or the yarrow-stalks, those strange and ominous dreams of the years just before the second world war [sic.]. This was poetry indeed. (Raine 1975: 81)

The outbreak of the Second World War diffused Madge's interest in Surrealist anthropology as a tool for exploring collective images and thoughts. It is generally claimed that Madge abandoned Mass-Observation due to discrepancies with Harrisson over the path Mass-Observation was to take, which had become acute even before the joint publication of their

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[469] "The Lull" and "Instructions" appeared in *New Verse* and were later collected in the anthology *Of Love, Time and Places* (1994). The concept of "patterns awaiting events" was originally used by Sykes Davies to describe the relationship between form and content in 1930s British Surrealism (Sykes Davies 1978: 34). It may be applied to the Surrealist poetics of Sykes Davies, Jennings and Madge and, as a form of generalisation, to 1930s British literature. See Mengham's "The Thirties: Politics, Authority, Perspective" (2004): 366-378.

War Begins at Home in 1940.[470] Nevertheless, it may be argued that Madge's disillusionment with and final break from Surrealism, triggered especially by the war, is also to account for his reluctance to continue what he considered eminently a Surrealist activity, for, after all, he continue to devote his efforts to the development of sociological studies in Britain and in 1950 was appointed the first Professor of Sociology at the University of Birmingham.

3.2.2. The Poet and the Masses.

In 1934, the publication of *Petite Anthologie Poétique du Surréalisme* (1934), with an introduction by Georges Hugnet, who would later contribute to Herbert Read's *Surrealism* (1936), prompted Charles Madge to write a review of the anthology under the title "The Meaning of Surrealism" (1934). Attempting to render intelligible for a British audience what was then seen as a *meaningless* movement, that is, a theory of art only concerned with dreams and therefore detached from reality, Madge's essay is more a revision, and a defence, of the movement's tenets than a review of an anthology of texts. In this sense, Madge provides a *meaning*, an ideological intention, for the dream images of Surrealism. Following Hugnet, Madge states that Surrealism is not a literary school, an artistic movement or any other form of static dogmatism. Rather, it is, as Hugnet had stressed, "perpétuellement en mouvement, confrontant sans cesse tous les moyens qui se présentent de parvenir à la transformation du monde et de la pensée, il est un laboratoire d'études, d'expérimentations, qui écartent toute velléité d'individualisme" (in Madge 1934e: 13).[471] Hugnet's ideas no doubt appealed to Madge, who understood Surrealism as a system of thought which was constantly evolving, never set on predetermined or preconditioned aims, but on an endless opening up of new paths for ideological and social transformation. In this sense, Madge's conception of Surrealist experimentation in the realm of politics and thought prefigured the very development of Surrealist ideology in Britain. His conception of art was Marxist, and Surrealism was for him a collective experiment to be performed by the masses and for the masses. In this, both Hugnet and Madge anticipated what Breton would describe as the *reasoning* phase of Surrealism (Breton 1936b: 51). It is in fact Madge's emphasis on reason and the rational faculty which was novel about his theory of Surrealism. For him, only by giving up subjective individualism, that is, only through collective action and a rational viewpoint, could Surrealism achieve dialectical

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[470] In this regard, Michel Remy has stated: "Mass Observation could have provided surrealism with concrete anchorage in British society's everyday life. But Tom Harrisson's purely ethnological viewpoint and his unwillingness to take sides politically distanced his undertaking from the main surrealist propositions [of Jennings and Madge]" (Remy 1999: 103).

[471471] "Constantly in movement, confronting ceaselessly all the means which come to achieve the transformation of the world and of thought, it is a laboratory of studies, of experimentations which discards all signs of individualism" (my translation).

transformation: "Surrealism is a science by virtue of its capacity for development and discovery and by virtue of the anonymity of its researches. [. . .] its activities are universal, and would continue even if its organised and self-avowed theoreticians were to relapse into silence" (Madge 1934e: 15). The aim of Surrealist science was to study how forms of social and moral repression were revealed in collective expression: in collective myths and images that unveiled well-established views and ideas of the world (fears, superstitions, beliefs and practices). These images, he understood, were fostered by the dominant ideology and unconsciously adopted by the masses. As will be seen, in Madge's theory, the mass media were instrumental in this process, an idea which would also become central to Madge's activities within Mass-Observation. So, what Madge sought, first through Surrealism and then through Mass-Observation, was a reconciliation of poetry and science. The closest he got to this was the "Oxford Collective Poem" (1937), a collective poem produced by scientific method in which a series of common or recurrent images, which he would call *dominant* images (images that recur in different observations or accounts by different anonymous individuals), would give an insight into the ideological make-up of 1937 Oxford:

> The red garment of a woman.
>
> Stone steps leading to a stone building.
>
> Shoes.
>
> Tress against the skyline.
>
> The ticking of a clock.
>
> Smoke issuing from a pipe. (Madge 1937c: 16)

What pervades these images is a sense of time escaping, which was not only collective but also responded to the generalised feeling that dominated the pre-war period.

As regards his poetics, Madge's earliest essayistic contribution to *New Verse* appeared in May 1933 under the suggestive title "Poetry and Politics". This article anticipates Madge's later political concerns by showing his position regarding the role of the poet in relation to the masses. These would eventually crystallise in his activities for Mass-Observation which, although anthropological in nature, were intended to have a direct political application. In particular, the article is a critique of Stephen Spender's essay "Poetry and Revolution", which had appeared earlier in 1933 in the *New Country* anthology. John Cornford's essay, mentioned above, recorded this epoch-making controversy over the question of poetry and revolution in which Stephen Spender and Charles Madge engaged in 1933. As opposed to Spender, who considered poetry to be the "least revolutionary" of human activities, Madge believed that the writer is not a privileged being detached from reality and rejected the typically Modernist

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contradiction between life and art. Although Cornford approved of Madge's demand for greater social consciousness on the part of the poet, he judged both Madge's and Spender's poetry as "only a kind of Utopian wish-fulfilment. It is not the poetry of revolutionary struggle. It is the poetry of revolution as a literary fashion, not as a historic reality" (Cornford 1933-1934: 28). This was a charge commonly made against the Surrealists, which Madge would become, and non-Realist, also non-Communist, revolutionary poets, like Spender.

In his essay, Spender sets poetry apart from the material world. It begins with his powerful assertion that "Of human activities, writing poetry is one of the least revolutionary" and continues:

> A work of art cannot reach out into everyday life and tell us whom to vote for and what kind of factories to build, because injunctions how to act in a world that has nothing to do with the poem destroy the poem's unity. I think propagandist poetry might be written, if the poem were inoculated so extensively with propaganda that essentially non-poetic material came to form a pattern which was like poetry. The mistake made in most propagandist poems is that the writer half the time is trying to create a poem which is self-contained, and the other half he is trying to drag us away from poetry into the real world. (Spender 1933: 62)

Spender considered that so-called propagandist poetry can only exist on the false premise that a poem can be both self-contained (i.e. an aesthetic unity) and simultaneously depend for its existence on an ensuing action. For him, this incompatibility forces true poetry to remain an intellectual and idealistic activity. The poet is, he nevertheless acknowledged, a "potential revolutionary" (Spender 1933: 64) who may write from a truly materialist standpoint without necessarily sacrificing art for the sake of a political message. In this he drew closer to the Surrealist position, for he implied that the aesthetic counterpart of revolutionary politics was not a Realist dogma, but an art that was both liberated and liberating. However, in a way that contradicted Madge's stance, he rejected the idea that a proletarian art, or an art addressed to a proletarian audience, was possible at the time because, in Europe, "there is no tradition of working-class uneducated art" (Spender 1933: 65), save in the primitive and oral tradition. While Sykes Davies intended to recover that oral tradition and Jennings strove to democratise thought, Madge worked towards a poetics through which the masses could express themselves. Thus, whereas for Spender poetic activity implied a forced separation from the masses, for Madge, it was the only way to reach the collective unconscious and therefore to re-connect with the other, by unveiling the social mechanisms of ideological control and thus contributing to giving voice to the inarticulate masses.

Madge's critique of Spender's essay contradicted his key idea: for Madge, poetry is the most revolutionary of human activities, and is naturally related to revolutionary political action. Inverting the general line of argumentation in the criticism of the time, Madge argued, not that poetry may be politicised in order to re-establish connection with reality, but rather that any kind of content may be the subject of poetry, that any content may be poeticised. That is, for Madge, there is no essentially poetic material. This idea fits comfortably within Surrealist tenets and, just as in the case of Jennings, for Madge, imagination, which by its very essence is fantastic (i.e. the product of imagination), must test itself against material reality: this is for him the true essence of poetry. Poetry survives, he states, if it is "relevant to the experiences of many people in many places at many times" (Madge 1933b: 2). In order to support his thesis, he draws on Marx and Engels's definition of language as a form of collective consciousness in *The German Ideology* (1846). Hence, for Madge, poetry is a functional property of language, because it emerges from a necessity to communicate with the other. He measures poetic value on a quantitative standard by making its validity depend on its capacity to reach the wider public; however, in doing so, as he acknowledges, he misses the second standard: that of "subtlety", as he calls it, which only reaches a minority. However, as Steven Connor has pointed out in his article on "Charles Madge's Imminences" (2001), Madge's later appreciation of James Joyce's individualism in *Finnegans Wake* (1939) reveals a new angle of vision, more in accord with a proto-Surrealist stance. In relation to this, in his review of the controversies at the 1934 Soviet Writers' Congress, "Writers Under Two Flags" (1936), Madge asserts:

> A careful study of Joyce reveals that his progress has always been further and further into the recesses of the self, until at last by a process of exhaustion he arrives back at the real and external world. His latest works are not about the self but about the world; however, the language he uses is that of the self, which, smashed into a thousand atoms, begins to recompose itself, in a picture of the world. (Madge 1936b: 230)

When, in "Poetry and Politics" (1933), Madge had affirmed that "Poetical poetry has suited in the past; political poetry, very well. But poetical politics will never do" (Madge 1933b: 3) he was actually denying the possibility of a Surrealist anthropology like Mass-Observation. But it is because of the early date of this article that these statements seem to contradict his adoption of Surrealism. Both Surrealism and Mass-Observation were, as Madge came to understand them, forms of poeticising politics, of turning a political act into a poetic act. When Madge referred later to Mass-Observation as a poetics of the masses, he was not conceiving it

as a British development of Socialist Realism, or a form of political poetry, but rather as a way of driving poetry back into the everyday. Furthermore, mass observations of the kind that were made in *May the Twelfth* (1937), and also in Jennings's and Madge's poems, were not political *per se*, but recordings of reality through the emotional lens of a subjective observer. Hence, for Madge, the role of the poet-anthropologist was for Madge to observe the observations, in order to analyse the psychological and ideological make-up of society. The act of observing the observations was political, for it was intended as a springboard for social change. So, the technique or method which was used was scientific, but the act of giving expression to those observations was inherently poetical.

A clearer contribution to Surrealist theory in Britain was Madge's article "Surrealism for the English" (1933), published soon after Gascoyne's "And the Seventh Dream is the Dream of Isis" had appeared in *New Verse* that year. Probably intended as a response to Gascoyne's text, this article was Madge's attempt to promote a theoretical context which would render Gascoyne's poem intelligible for a British audience. Madge's title reveals a pressing need to introduce Surrealism in Britain, to make it available to an Anglophone readership, which also betrays the generalised feeling in Britain at the time that Surrealism was not only a foreign movement, but an already outdated fashion. This idea is further reinforced by the Classical proverb which Madge uses to introduce his essay: "Ἄρκτου παρούσης, ἴχνη μὴ ζήτει".[472] The implications of this proverb in relation to the belated arrival of Surrealism in Britain seem clear: Madge defends the need to establish a British line of Surrealism which would be valid for this particular time and place, rather than resorting to foreign, obsolete principles from France. More interestingly, Madge's title contributes to a reduction of the movement's aims: by making it specifically "for the English", Madge obviates several aspects of Surrealism which were central to the time in which it emerged in Britain, such as its universalising scope and its concern with the mechanisms of poetic inspiration (also very much in contrast with Hugh Sykes Davies, Herbert Read and David Gascoyne). Thus, Madge introduces a form of Surrealism directly concerned with collective expression: for him, giving expression to the collective mind (an otherwise political act) is a form of poetry in itself.

The first aspect that is remarkable in Madge's approach to Surrealism in this article is his shift from the philosophy and theory of Surrealism to an understanding, not of the

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[472] "Once the winter is settled, do not look for tracks". The proverb is attributed to the Greek sophist Zenobius (2nd century AD), but was first documented in the now lost work of the Ancient lyric poet Bacchylides (5th century BC). See Von Leutsch and Schneidewin's *Corpus Paroemiographorum Graecorum Vol. I*: 42. I wish to thank Professor José María Candau Morón from the Department of Classical Philology at the Universidad de Sevilla for his disinterested help and guidance regarding the sources of this proverb.

movement itself, but of the material conditions which have favoured its emergence as a system of thought: "the philosophy is, like all philosophies, a reflection of that history in which we ourselves are actors" (Madge 1933c: 4). His is an attempt to place the movement in historical perspective, in order to sanction its emergence in Britain: he was aware that its belated arrival in Britain (in fact, it would not officially arrive until 1936), might create grounds for misunderstanding and wrong appreciations of Surrealism. Thus, he re-inscribes the movement within the theoretical frame of Hegelian dialectics and Marxist materialism, returning to two theoretical pillars of Surrealism. In this regard, in order for Surrealism to be truly dialectic in nature, he argues, the British writers must not resign themselves to an imitation of French models, because Surrealism emerged in a specific material context as an antithesis of the repressive forces that function both at the material and the psychological level. These forces, the British Surrealists felt, were more pressing in Britain than in any other capitalist democracy. Hence the apparent irrationality of the Surrealist stance was a response to the excessive rationalism which dominated all spheres of capitalist society. Madge places emphasis on the need to understand the specificity of the British condition and awareness of the British literary tradition in order for the Surrealist revolution to take place. Whether this was a critique of Gascoyne's own stance remains difficult to discern, but it must have been evident for the reading public at the time that two distinct approaches to Surrealism were being attempted simultaneously in Britain: on the one hand, David Gascoyne's earnest adoption of a more intuitive, subjective and even idealistic position; and, on the other, Madge's reasoning, objective and materialistic approach, according to which poetry directly leads to social action in a way that image, ideology and political action become reconciled. There are indeed correspondences between these two approaches and the two epochs that Breton himself would distinguish in the development of Surrealism in France in his lecture "What is Surrealism?" (1934): what he called the *intuitive* epoch and the *reasoning* epoch of Surrealism (Breton 1936b: 50-52). Paradoxically, Madge's own stance, but later Jennings's too, also contradicted some of the principles that underlay this reasoning epoch: their emphasis on Englishness was in conflict with the movement's increasingly universalising character, as this period of approximation to objective reality, was necessarily also an epoch of geographical expansion in which the concept of nation would be dismantled in favour of a truly universal consciousness, not subjected to cultural, linguistic or geographical barriers. Also, it is in their conception of Surrealism as a peculiarly British phenomenon and their use of Surrealist techniques to explore a specifically British identity and ideology that Madge and Jennings

reveal their distinct perspective from that of other British Surrealists, especially Gascoyne and Penrose.

As Read and Sykes Davies would do in 1936, Madge relates the emergence of Surrealism in Britain to an endemic tradition in English letters, and he argues that a movement should be judged by its own standards, and not by external models. Thus, he condemns the "preventive hygiene" with which England tends to resist permeability to foreign fashions, an attitude that did in fact prevent at the time a proper re-contextualisation of the Surrealist element in British literature where, Madge sustained, this element was already present. It was this understanding that led him to place Edward Young and his theory of the double image as the "connection exquisite of distant worlds" (Madge 1933c: 17), at the outset of Surrealist poetics in Britain. In so doing, he placed tradition at the centre of poetic creation while simultaneously acknowledging the role that imagination played in this process. Thus, in a typically Freudian image, he describes the process of poetic creation as follows: "The poet, one might say, is Oedipus; the muse is his mother, his father is tradition" (Madge 1933c: 15).

In his essay Madge also finds early examples of Surrealist theory in the British philosophical tradition. He equates Alexander Bain's idea that contrast (i.e. contradiction) lies at the root of all intellectual process with Max Ernst's theory of the irritability of mental faculties, and he explores John Stuart Mill's study of mental associations as anticipating Freudian theories on linguistic error. While in this essay he tries to make the unfamiliar (what was perceived as alien and strange) familiar, in his Surrealist poetry he would perform a reversed movement: to unsettle thought by rendering unfamiliar and extraneous that which is familiar and common. This would contribute to expanding awareness of the capitalist appropriation of collective thought and expression in the mass media. His anthropological research for Mass-Observation worked in the same direction.

The relationship between the uncanny and the familiar was central to the two trends of British Surrealism mentioned above. In Freud's essay "Das Unheimliche" (1919), the uncanny was described, not as a new or strange idea, but as an old and familiar one, well-established in the mind, which becomes alienated from itself through a process of repression (Freud 1955: 241). The uncanny emerges, according to Freud, when an infantile complex which has been repressed is revived by some impression, or when a primitive belief which has been surmounted is then confirmed by some experience. Processes of animation (bringing to life inanimate matter), double images and fragmentation (all of which are typically used in British Surrealist writing, especially by Sykes Davies, Barker, Jennings and Madge) are forms of regression in which the familiar is defamiliarised, giving rise to strange images which reveal

unconscious ideas and may subsequently have a political projection. In Madge's and Jennings's collages, all these processes take place at the textual level, as will be seen: the old images are given new contexts and new meanings; they become the vehicles of ideas which respond to new historical conditions from those which created them, as in Madge's "Division of Labour" (1935), in which the description of the habits of Alpine marmots acquires new relevance in the context of the Communist system which Madge defended: "The task of thus serving as the vehicle being evidently the least enviable part of the business, is taken by everyone of the party in turn" (Madge 1937e: 34). But Madge goes one step further. When he considers the poet as "the product of his own environment" (Madge 1933c: 17), he is also implying that the conditions that gave rise to Surrealism in France are not present in England, where the Surrealist imprint was already present in poets like Shakespeare or Young. Thus, Surrealism in Britain must take on a different form from that in France, since it responds to different material conditions and ideological structures, literary tradition being one of these very structures. This implies a criticism of Gascoyne's adoption of pure psychic automatism as Madge, more interested in the formation of collective myths and images than in the expression of subjectivity, understood that the new poetry should be done by the masses and for the masses, a concept which clearly contradicted Gascoyne's poetics.

One of Madge's most interesting contributions to *Left Review* appeared in February 1937, soon after Mass-Observation had been founded in the pages of the *New Statesman and Nation* (1931-1957). "Magic and Materialism", although not generally acknowledged as such, was one of Mass-Observation's programmatic texts. Even if Madge explicitly stated that this essay was the result of a series of meetings of a group of young Left-wing writers and scientists (the founding members of Mass-Observation), the text reveals Madge's style and concerns, and this is why it becomes such an invaluable source for understanding Madge's conception of Mass-Observation as a combination of Surrealism and anthropology, poetry and science. In this essay, he establishes one of the principles on which, in his own view, the ideological basis of the movement rested: the need to demystify religious and magical belief, in favour of a truly materialist ideology. He states that their "common front is the application of materialism to superstition" (Madge 1937b: 34). Madge understood the term "superstition" in three different ways: as an irrational residue in a rational society; as the common habits of social classes; and as the collective image which emerges in artistic manifestations (Madge 1937b: 34).[473] For him the systematic study of these would reveal superstition as an ideological mechanism of

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[473] As will be seen, the latter form of "superstition", that of the collective image as it transpires in the work of thinkers and writers, was explored by Jennings in his attempt to collectivise thought.

repression promoted by the mass media (newspapers, advertisements and films) in order to secure the economic and material stability of the dominant classes: this would in fact expose ideology as a form of false consciousness. For Madge, recently developed sciences such as anthropology, sociology and psychology were the sciences of the masses, of the common individual and, as such, "the foremost allies of revolution" (Madge 1937b: 31): "The human materialism of Darwin, Frazer, Freud –above all, of Engels and Marx- met from the first the bitter hatred of those whose domination as a class it directly threatened" (Madge 1937b: 31). He states that "All idealism is a survival of the magical attitude" (Madge 1937b: 31), because it implies, following Tylor, "a belief in the power of words over things, in mysterious sympathies between symbols and things" and, following Freud, that "objects as such are overshadowed by the ideas representing them" (in Madge 1937b: 31). Madge claims that idealism separates the individual from reality, and that the role of poetry was to expand consciousness of the material: thus, a materialist approach to reality would unveil the class origin of superstitious belief. Hence, in order to liberate the masses from this servitude to an alien and alienating ideology, magic (i.e. idealism) must be superseded by materialism in the individual's attempt to approach reality; and doing away with religion will not suffice, for there persists also in art and poetry some magical content, as Madge explains:

> [Art and poetry do] comprise fields of human consciousness which science has not explained or thoroughly explored, because that exploration has been awaiting the epoch of human materialism. Poetry deals, not with the inexplicable, but with what has not yet been explained. (Madge 1937b: 32)

The implication that in the materialist era poetry would be rendered useless contradicted the claims of Herbert Read, Hugh Sykes Davies and, to a lesser extent, also of Humphrey Jennings, who observed with interest the upsurges of mythopoeic activity in periods of technological and scientific advancement, such as the Romantic period and the Avant-Garde (Sykes Davies 1971: 152-153; Read 1938d: 176). The beginning of the twentieth century witnessed a shift in art from accommodated and detached forms of aesthetic refinement to an increasing interest in those sciences of the masses, anthropology, ethnography and psychology, especially since Picasso inaugurated artistic primitivism with *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* (1907). This period, in which the artist faced his inner anxieties, yet again through the magical attitude of pre-historic societies, preceded the emergence of a true materialist art, scientific in nature and devoid of magical content. This epoch is no other than that of dialectical materialism: the time in which the individuals face the conditions of life as objective and historical, and not as the result of

magic or superstition. In this epoch, the artist becomes a scientist and an observer, and his observations, far from being individual and subjective, are mass-observations:

> His observations must be mass-observations, his data mass-data. His works of art must satisfy not his own isolated fantasy, but the needs and wishes of the masses; his scientific generalisations must apply not only to himself but to every member of his society. His problem is not to raise to the level of his own consciousness aspects of humanity hitherto concealed or only guessed at, but he has to raise the level of consciousness collectively of the whole mass, he has to induce self-realisation on a mass scale. He becomes, that is to say, the organiser of collective human-scientific activity, and his poem or thesis becomes a report of this collective achievement. (Madge 1937b: 33)

With this statement, Madge separated himself from the Freudian, intuitive phase of Surrealism, which, partly following Freud's definition of the uncanny, attempted to reveal what had so far remained hidden (Freud 1955: 224). Thus, he drew closer to Surrealist propositions of the second period, according to which artistic creation was a form of enlarging consciousness, which for him was inevitably "class-consciousness" (Madge 1937b: 33). According to him, poetry should become the expression of the masses, and not of a single individual, an idea which unsettles notions of authorship and uniqueness and recurs in Jennings's collective poetics too.

The interest of Mass-Observation in popular culture would at the root of later developments in sociology. However, this interest was not exclusive to Mass-Observation. For example, in his article "On Ethnographic Surrealism" (1981) James Clifford states, "Ethnography, which shares with surrealism an abandonment of the distinction between high and low culture, provided [. . .] a prevailing attitude of ironic participant-observation among the hierarchies and meanings of collective life" (Clifford 1981: 549). Surrealism, especially through the creation of Surrealist objects, not only erased the opposition of image and reality, but it also questioned the hierarchies on which such an opposition was based. Indeed, in British Surrealism, Madge's collective texts further contributed to the collapse of these conventions. Moreover, his understanding of artistic and literary creation as a new form of anthropological exploration showed that ideological content could be accessed through poetic form, an idea which was central to British Surrealism. Even so, he did not altogether abandon the possibilities that the discovery of the Freudian uncanny in everyday experience opened for an analysis of mass consciousness. Thus, he encouraged the study of familiar ideas, customs, beliefs and practices as *unfamiliar* in order to reveal their alienating and repressive

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power. The point was that the ulterior significance of these common views as representations of a false ideology had remained hidden through routine and repetition and, only by defamiliarising them, complete awareness was possible: "It is because these thoughts and practices are *familiar* that we may miss their meaning" (Madge 1937b: 35). These are the ideas that underlie, for instance, the only one of Madge's poems that was published in the Surrealist journal *London Bulletin*. The poem, which was later collected in *The Father Found* (1941) under the title "The Waltz", makes use of the collage technique in order to describe a Blackheath fairground. Blackheath was in fact the London area where Madge lived, and Jennings worked, at the time, and it is by means of textual juxtaposition and displacement that this otherwise familiar sight becomes defamiliarised in the poem, in which time is condensed as the images are superimposed on each other:

> Round they go, terribly late
> To a wonderful ballet, invention of hope, for despair.
>
> The bright eyes may flicker an instant, and then
> For pennies comes a gipsy boy balancing on his toes.
> But the animals haven't finished going up and going down
> In the panoramic, breathless Noah's Ark merry-go-round.
>
> Angel, hold on. The moon is adrift. (Madge 1938: 19)

As can be seen, it is through the abrupt juxtaposition of images that the chaotic nature of the event, the "maelstrom" of this fairly common vision, is made manifest. Thus, the opposition between civilisation and primitivism, between industrialism and nomadism, inherent in this type of intercultural encounters is erased in the poem, which makes the reader question the validity of such ideological constructs. These processes of defamiliarisation and estrangement, which were so central to the decentring aesthetics of British Surrealism, were also a fundamental aspect of Madge's activities in Mass-Observation.

Another side to Madge's ideology stems from his being a member of the Communist Party. His engagement with Communist activism took shape in the pages of *Left Review* where, in a 1934 article entitled "Pens Dipped in Poison", he denounced the imminence of a second international conflict and the intellectual treason of writers who, as had happened in the First World War, would become involved in it. His statements in this article show his pacifist stance, although this would be soon abandoned with the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War. Like other Surrealists, Madge advocated intervention in Spain and supported the struggle of the Spanish

Government against "Fascist repression and terror" in the pamphlet *Authors Take Sides on the Spanish War* (Left Review 1937a: n.p.). Before that, he had collaborated, together with other assiduous contributors to *Left Review* such as Edgell Rickword and Sylvia Townsend-Warner, in a protest against the 1935 Jubilee. The Jubilee found strong opposition from the Surrealists and the Communists alike. For example, it was condemned in David Gascoyne's "Premier Manifeste Anglais du Surréalisme" (1935): "À l'heure où nous écrivons ces lignes (mai 1935) à Londres, toute l'Angleterre –presse capitaliste en tête- se prépare à une explosion hystérique des plus vaines et des plus écœurantes" (Gascoyne 1935j : 106).[474] In his manifesto, Gascoyne already pointed to an idea which would become pivotal in Madge's activities within Surrealism and Mass-Observation: the image-making mechanisms of institutional power as tools for ideological homogenisation and the role of the mass media in the shaping of collective consciousness. In this regard, in 1937, Madge explored the image of the British monarchy as a form of "superstition":

> [. . .] the ancient taboos that govern the king still seem to exert an unconscious influence on a part of the popular mind. To lay bare the sources of this influence would have the effect of lessening the magical power of the symbol of monarchy. To interpret the symbol is the first step towards changing the institution. Interpretation must have this active revolutionary aim always in mind. (Madge 1937b: 33)

For Madge, then, the mass media played a central role in the promotion of these images, being instrumental in the perpetuation of hierarchical structures in society and the preservation of the economic and material status of the privileged classes.

These ideas were taken up again by Madge in an article entitled "The Press and Social Consciousness", published in *Left Review* in June 1937, in which he developed notions concerning the mass media as tools for ideological control.[475] In particular, he was interested in the ways in which material conditions shape thought through language, that is, in the relationship that was established between image and ideology in the mass media:

> Throughout their waking lives they [the people in Great Britain] are uncesasingly bombarded with words. Moreover, the overwhelming force of this bombardment comes principally from two central sources: the written word from the newspaper, and

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[474] "At the moment we write these lines (May 1935) in London, the whole of England –led by the capitalist press- is getting ready for a hysterical explosion of the most futile and nauseating kind" (my translation).

[475] A revised version of this essay appeared under the title "Press, Radio and Social Consciousness" in Cecil Day-Lewis's *The Mind in Chains: Socialism and the Cultural Revolution* (1937).

the spoken word from the B.B.C. The listeners are legion, but the voices which speak are few.[476] (Madge 1937f: 279)

As a response to this situation, in his Surrealist poems, he manipulated texts, mainly from journalistic accounts and other expositive genres, in order to unveil the perils of false consciousness, and to bring about a true ideology of the masses, as will be seen. Another reason why the mass media were so important in Madge's theory was closely related to Penrose's concern with the institutional lie in his poetry. In the age of mass communication, technological development allowed access to more contents by more people. However, this also had a downside because, as Madge understood, there was an ideological danger inherent in a medium which can reach many people at once: this was the danger of ideological indoctrination, which the mass media increased through its capacity to present ideological content under the appearance of entertainment, or even culture. In this sense, mass culture was in fact not necessarily popular culture, but a distortion of it in the technological era: thus, the mass media provided the illusion that the masses could find expression in them, while simultaneously controlling the ideas behind that expression.[477] In "Magic and Materialism" (1937), Madge had stated that

> The first practical measure [of Mass-Observation] to be aimed at would seem to be the mobilisation of observers on a mass basis to carry out according to an agreed programme the observation of the habits of different classes, and their concealed wishes as they reveal them in their superstitions, fantasies and fears, and as they are exploited by advertisements, by newspapers and films. (Madge 1937b: 33)

Elsewhere, in "The Press and Social Consciousness", Madge defines the newspaper as a new daily "bible" (Madge 1937f: 279). For him, mass access to the media has allowed the homogenisation of thought in modern society: instructions on what to think and how to act, what to buy, what is good and bad for your health and, most disquieting of all, what is morally good or bad, creep into the media and change according to who is in power and the class that they want to benefit. But, of course, the increasingly literate masses, while unconscious recipients of these instructions, are never in power. Madge saw the perils of material

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[476] Although there are enlightening studies on the relationship between media, power and politics in modern Britain, a reassessment of this relation in the interwar period is still needed. See Ralph M. Negrine's *Politics and the Mass Media in Britain* (1989).

[477] As opposed to mass culture, popular culture in pre-industrial societies is characterised by temporal permanence and geographical bounds: "The homogeneity of modern society is not founded as in previous cultures on a traditional set of texts, whose influence made itself felt over the course of centuries. Social homogeneity in our day is a function of the Press and the radio; these modern mechanisms insure that everyone should read, and everyone should hear, a statement about the world which is valid for a day, and only for a day" (Madge 1937f: 279).

advancement which, in spite of the benefits of mass literacy, shared the shortcomings of capitalism:

> [. . .] economic 'progress' has brought unemployment, overcrowding, industrial disease, financial crises, threats of world war and revolution, in sufficient force to make seem puny its housing schemes, health schemes, education schemes. What capitalism has given with one hand, it has taken away with the other. Its colossal productive powers turn out to have been linked from the first with equally colossal destructive powers. All the creations of capitalism have to be viewed under this double aspect. In common with the rest, mass-literacy and its incarnations in the Press and radio must be so viewed. (Madge 1937f: 280)

Information was and is subject to selection, suppression and distortion: this is what turns the narration of objective facts into ideological statements. It was precisely through this process that the media, presented as a democratising tool (wider information for a wider public), became a representative of the social, economic and political interests of a given class. The media addresses a mass audience, but their message supports the ideology of a particular group, the economic factor being determinant in this: they support the ideology of the class that will buy the products they advertise because it feels that its social status is not imperilled by the ideas fostered in those media. As opposed to what would be expected, the mass media are reactionary in nature, rather than revolutionary, and the transient character of the news is counteracted by the permanence and prevalence of the ideology behind them. Social consciousness and public opinion are constantly and unconsciously influenced by this ideological content, whether individuals actually believe what they read just because it appears in print or otherwise, for the same reason.[478] However, Madge went one step further in his analysis of the influence of the printed press on the masses: for him, the news is read as *poetic facts*, rather than as objective facts, and this idea reveals a state of pseudo-unconsciousness on the part of the newspaper reader, similar to the state of suspension of disbelief described by Coleridge in his *Biographia Literaria* (1817). In this regard, Madge asserts: "[The news becomes] a poetic memory, affecting our feelings [i.e. emotions, beliefs, ideas] but not our actions. Factually, we become anaesthetised; the Press has put us in a dream world" (Madge 1937f: 282). Thispreoccupation with the power of the media would re-appear in the book *Britain by Mass-Observation* (1939), which he co-edited with Tom Harrisson:

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[478] These contrary positions were held by George Blake and Arthur J. Cummings respectively in their works *The Press and the Public* (1930) and *The Press and a Changing Civilisation* (1936).

This is a democratic country, so we are supposed to have some idea of what is going on. For this we depend on wireless and newspaper presentation of news. But can we believe what we read and hear? People want inside information, they want to get behind the news. This is impossible for the vast majority, so they have to accept what the newspapers say, or else stop bothering. (Harrisson and Madge 1986: 7)

At the root of Madge's idea that the technological era was one of told truths seems to be Johann Fichte's declaration, in *Attempt at a Critique of All Revelation* (1792), that we live in *historic truth*, that is, of the revelation or announcement (*Bekanntmachung*) made by the other. Based on this premise, Mass-Observation made it possible for the masses to know and report the facts for themselves.

All these ideas percolate through Madge's Surrealist poetry, in which the ideological power of news and information is denounced. In his Surrealist texts, there is not only one author, but several. The *revelation* is thus not made by *the other* (in this case, the especially gifted poet) but by a chorus of voices which, in contradicting each other, unveil the gaps and fractures in the ideological *continuum*. It is the role of the poet-anthropologist to arrange the fragments and juxtapose them in such a way that these contradictions are made apparent: for Madge, much more so than for any other British Surrealist, the poet is a craftsman. In "Poetic Description and Mass-Observation" (1937), he stated that the aim of Mass-Observation, which in its early stage was nothing but an extension of Surrealism, was "to de-value considerably the status of the 'poet.' It makes the term 'poet' apply, not to his performance, but to his profession, like 'footballer'" (Madge and Jennings 1937a: 3). The difference between Mass-Observation and British Surrealism as two products of British culture resided in the fact that, whereas the former attempted to de-value the status of the poet, the latter wanted to elevate the common man to the status of creator. In the end, they were two sides of the same coin.

3.2.3. Madge's News.

Madge's concern with consciousness, ideology, collective images and power crystallised, not only in his activities for Mass-Observation, but in his Surrealist texts, especially in those that appeared in *New Verse* in 1936-1937, and in some 1930s poems which were later collected in *The Disappearing Castle* (1937) and in *Father Found* (1941). The literary collage "Bourgeois News" (1936), included in *The Disappearing Castle*, is the text in which his theories on the relationship between language and consciousness in the mass media, and in poetry,

were more systematically applied.[479] In this text, Madge makes use of plagiarism, the formal re-elaboration and re-arrangement of pre-existing material in a manner similar to what Humphrey Jennings was doing at the time in his "poem-reports": both Madge and Jennings juxtapose and superpose dissimilar fragments in order to create literary montages in which a sense of unity or wholeness is sought; they also alter, even if only slightly, their source texts at times, so that new meanings may emerge from fragmentation.[480] However, there is a formal difference between Jennings's and Madge's textual collages that lies in the elements used to bind the fragments together: whereas in Jennings's this function is performed by the leading images of the horse, the machine and the Romantic vision, in Madge's "Bourgeois News" it is the recurrent echoes of a journalistic style that achieves this aim. Even so, all these textual mechanisms not only contribute to unity, they also create tensions between what was understood by these poets as *collective* intellectual property and the individual editorial task, which ultimately fell on the author. As will be seen, these tensions were not resolved by the authors themselves or their theories, and this contributed further to the often self-contradictory, self-disrupting nature of British Surrealist writing and its ideology. Also, as opposed to Jennings, whose images were intended to restore a sense of continuity with the past, Madge focused predominantly on the present, in order to explore the mechanisms of ideological control inherent in media discourse. In "Bourgeois News", his sources include scientific texts on geology, technical journals on electricity, Parliamentary reports and journalistic articles and news from the *Daily Mirror*, for which he had become a reporter in 1935. In the "Introductory Notes" to his *Journal 1936-37* (1980), Gascoyne recalls the kind of work that Madge did for the *Daily Mirror*, then undergoing a make-over from a conservative bourgeois paper to a working-class periodical, and which probably informed his formal poetics:

> [. . .] he was [. . .] responsible for the layout of the centre-pages of photographs, and
> I remember him talking about this as though it represented a sort of 'collage,' or

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[479] Rod Mengham has studied the text as an example of Surrealist collage in his article "Bourgeois News: Humphrey Jennings and Charles Madge" (2001). For an analysis of Madge's poetry, see Drew Milne's "Charles Madge: Political Perception and the Persistence of Poetry" (2001).

[480] Although there is no agreement in the criticism regarding the difference, if any, between collage and montage, in my analysis I use the former to describe texts in which fragmentation or incoherence is manifest, and the latter for those in which a seeming unity is provided and it is only after a process of textual dissection that their fragmentation is revealed. In most cases, collage is regarded as a technique, or indeed as the product obtained from the application of such a technique, whereas montage is generally seen as a perceptual effect. Brian Henderson's definitions of collage and montage are appropriate for my own analysis of these texts: "the difference between montage and collage is to be found in the divergent ways in which they associate and order images [. . .]. Montage fragments reality in order to reconstitute it in highly organized, synthetic emotional and intellectual patterns. Collage does not do this; it collects or sticks its fragments together in a way that does not entirely overcome their fragmentation. It seeks to recover its fragments *as fragments*" (Henderson 1970-1971: 5).

rather, visual poem, summing up in a peculiar way the general national consciousness, and also social unconscious, of the moment. (Gascoyne 1980: 9)

The year 1935 is precisely the date of all the journalistic sources in "Bourgeois News", whose very title already anticipates the journalistic style of the text. The juxtaposition in the title of the terms "bourgeois" and "news" has both literal and symbolic implications: on the one hand, the text is partly a re-elaboration of a series of news articles published in a bourgeois periodical, the *Daily Mirror*, and addressed to a bourgeois audience. On the other hand these are also pieces of information which, used in their original context, contribute to preserving the power of the dominant ideology, and the class that it supports. By placing the fragments in a new context through juxtaposition and displacement, Madge's text exposes and satirises the ideological mechanisms of the mass media. Moreover, the urgency and currency implied in the title ("News" unavoidably refers to the here and now) is counteracted by its lasting character as a literary text, collected and published in a literary volume, whose temporal permanence seems to contradict all that is new, and therefore ephemeral, about the journalistic account. The text is in this sense an ironic comment on the ways in which news (i.e. fragments, images of reality) may be transformed into ideologies (i.e. totalities). It is this sense of apparent ideological continuity between those *falsified* images and material reality that Madge's text is set to disrupt.

Although, as I have stated, the focus is placed mainly on the present, the references to the present are always decentred and empty, pointing to no discernible reality (at least for a present-day reader) outside the text. The text thus becomes self-referential: the here and now to which it refers is phantasmal, perceived as a fiction or a *poetic fact*, just in the same way as, according to Madge, the news is perceived. This highlights the nature of the news as a travesty of experience and further widens the gap between the actual news and the reality to which it purportedly refers. Even the temporal fixation with the present tense is indicative of that urgency and currency to which I have alluded: in fact this insistence on the present recreates a state of oppression, both material and psychological, which mimics the condition of the masses, faced with a bombardment of information, combined with material and spiritual dearth:

Floods are frequent because the rivers of Britain have been neglected for a century. [. . .] Commercial possibilities are not clearly and courageously visualised and the new ventures are often the product and concern of individuals facing the traditional difficulties of lonely pioneers. [. . .] Today you cannot fight summer-heat with haphazard measures. [. . .] Fir bushes grow around, the path has been kept weeded,

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but no one visits this strange, empty mausoleum. [. . .] This is an interesting Government. And a strange one. It is big. Very big. It is strong. Very strong. [. . .] What we have to do is to listen to the tiny voice of conscience and not smother it. [. . .] It takes around eight months to make a 4.7-inch gun. [. . .] It is possible to change some factors; it is not possible to change geography.[481] (Madge 1937e: 41-45)

Here, the scientific and technical language of some of the fragments in the text combines with the increasingly sensationalist tinge of the paper. This produces a striking effect of juxtaposition and contrast, not exempt from a peculiar Surrealising effect which reaches a climax in the final lines: "As the day wore on, and the anticyclone began to withdraw to the Continent, three quarters of those present made for the door. There was no panic. They could go on their way peacefully, because they were strong" (Madge 1937e: 45).

Mengham's words to describe the poems in *The Disappearing Castle* (1937) can also be applied with ease to "Bourgeois News", which certainly transcribes the uncanny feeling, for both the reporter and the reader, of being a stranger in a seemingly familiar land. In the text, this perspective emerges through dialectical development, for the present is not only oppressive, but also the inevitable consequence of a series of past decisions or events. In this light, humankind is treated as a species inhabiting geological eras which overlap, an idea which confers a somewhat circular quality to the text. This is related to how the currency and urgency of the news is constantly counteracted by a pervading sense of inaction, or even inexorability, a feeling which would also creep into the "Oxford Collective Poem" (1937). For example, in *Bourgeois News* we find this:

In the course of yesterday, the successive bulletins were of a more reassuring nature: 'The most probable cause is the present state of flux in native life, the disappearance of tribal discipline, and the results of undigested education. It is possible to change some factors; it is not possible to change geography.' These reassurances did not everywhere produce the desired effect. (Madge 1937e: 45)

As Mengham has rightly pointed out, in this text, meaning and form contribute to the collapse of the reading experience (he calls this a "dereliction" of meaning and syntax). This is so because this is a text based primarily on absences: the absence of fixed referents and the absence of a reality which is nevertheless journalistically recorded and literarily portrayed. Even more elliptical than Jennings's texts of the same period, "Bourgeois News", with no dominant images save the suggestion of a British collective identity, nevertheless allows the

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[481] Regarding the persistence of the present, some of these fragments, which appeared in the past in the source texts, were manipulated by Madge so as to refer to the present.

reader to extract, through its poetics of absence, a clear message about British society: the semantic and syntactic dereliction to which Mengham alludes reflects the state of a crumbling bourgeois world that is at once being constructed and destroyed in the text.[482] This means the point of construction is also the point of dereliction and demystification. For example:

> This is an interesting Government. And a strange one. It is big. Very big. It is strong. Very strong. Yet all the three leaders of it are discredited. Far from being extinguished the antelope has become a menace, since it is roaming the south-west of the province in herds, and farmers are imploring the Government to protect them from it. Even the most thorough-going rogues have enjoyed such popularity that thousands of admirers have refused to believe any ill of them, in spite of all the evidence to the contrary. (Madge 1937e: 44)

> Earlier the text begins with an image of Britain which immediately sets geographically the description that ensues. However, the precision of this first image (recent floods in Britain caused by the neglected state of its rivers) soon becomes diluted as the text moves on to a much wider topic (the prosperity of the country):

> Floods are frequent because the rivers of Britain have been neglected for a century. Positive movements of transgression carry the sea and its deposits over the lands, drowning them and their features under tens or hundreds of fathoms of water. Efforts to advance the prosperity of the country should be directed towards building on the foundations already laid by the native himself, rather than to hazardous introductions or innovations. (Madge 1937e: 41)

Although there is no apparent logical connection between the fragments, a scenario is drawn through the temporal connection of past, present and future (what happened in the past has a consequence in the present and sets a precedent for what should be done in the future) and by means of the co-occurrence of a series of terms which suggest that the text's focus is not on rivers or floods but somewhere else. Thus, terms like "neglected", "positive", "transgression", "prosperity" and "native" (all present in the original texts) acquire a new relevance in the new context which Madge has provided for them. Significantly, the reference to the British citizen as "the native", a reference enabled by textual juxtaposition, was not new in the context of Mass-Observation's anthropological research. Thus, just as Mass-Observation would do, in this text Madge intends to apply the methods of the anthropological study of exotic tribes to the

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[482] Mengham provides an interesting analysis of the development from Madge's early poems (he mentions "In Sua Voluntade") to Mass-Observation's first project (*May the Twelfth*), from a poetics of resignation to the restitution of a collective identity.

British. Not coincidentally, the word "native" appears three times throughout the text, whereas "aborigines" and "tribal" appear once each, always in relation to industrial economies or typically capitalist activities. The contrast between inherited preconceptions of "the native" and economic terminology renders familiar concepts unfamiliar, contributing to the destruction of pre-determined ideas and the creation of new ones. Nevertheless, there are further implications in the fragment quoted above, especially if we consider terms like "foundations", "native" and "hazardous" in the context of Madge's own reaction to the adoption of Surrealism in Britain. For Madge, who insisted on deciphering the "meaning" of Surrealism "for the English", Surrealism of the first, intuitive period was in fact a "hazardous innovation" which would shake the foundations of British culture and unsettle that sense of tradition which he saw as already inherent in a *native* expression of the movement in Britain. The message is, nevertheless, not devoid of ambiguity:

> Commercial possibilities are not clearly and courageously visualised, and the new ventures are often the product and concern of individuals facing the traditional difficulties of lonely pioneers. The indoor staff remains comparatively small. The vigour of mountain building, of volcanoes, and of other manifestations of unrest, has shown no sign of senility or lack of energy. (Madge 1937e: 41)

Indeed, of this excerpt it may be argued that it is both a proposal for a new economic system and a commentary on the nature of British Surrealism. However, it becomes in fact very difficult to reconcile these statements with the preceding ones, and the external referents, which would provide logical anchorage, remain elusive: the negative reference to individualism, the apparently positive comment on the heroic "lonely pioneers" and the current vigour of "other manifestations of unrest" ultimately point to a defence of collectivisation (of economy, of thought, of culture) as a form of revolutionary action. Moreover, through ambiguity, an ambiguity that emerges from textual manipulation, the text becomes also a commentary on language as a form of collective consciousness and the effects that linguistic (i.e. formal) manipulation may have in ideological content.

The emphasis on the here and now is combined at different points in the text with anachronistic references and the overlapping of several temporal and spatial planes, bringing together disparate settings (Britain, India and America), people (the historic figure of Colonel Popham and the current figure of Peggy Guggenheim) and also references to pre-industrial and capitalist-imperialist activities (tea plantations, colonial trade, high-speed transport and consumer trends in urban architecture). All these seem to revert to a form of stigmatization of capitalist modes of production and distribution and of imperialist relations. This idea pervades

the text, full of references to Eastern exoticism, the expansion of Western industrialism, the economic drives of the Capitalist system or the corruption of governmental leaders:

> Colonel Popham, who began work as a tea planter, murmured, 'They say a man is too old at forty. Or is it fifty? I think it must be seventy or eighty. I speak four different Chinese dialects fluently. It helped a lot. Then the slump came and trade went stagnant. [. . .] We now occupy three floors of the building where we began, and have overflowed into an adjoining building. No company such as this with a fine tradition for honest dealing with native peoples can remain in a depressed condition for an indefinite period. A reorganisation scheme has been delayed owing to some difference of opinion with the American (Guggenheim) interests. That has now been settled, and the way is clear for the reorganisation plan. London could be reached in twenty minutes. Rows of imposing neon-lighted shops erected. Supercinemas built. (Madge 1937e: 42)

As the text progresses, the figure of the poet-reporter gradually gives way to that of the poet-anthropologist, whose detached perspective brings about the subversion of inherited prejudices and the defamiliarisation of familiar assumptions. This type of literary character, which Mengham has called the "anthropological stranger" (Mengham 2004: 371), harks back to the works of the Enlightenment, in which social vices were exposed from a foreigner's purportedly impartial perspective. In the case of Madge, the Enlightened attitude combines with a comic Modern approach in the description of an encounter between the *civilised*, industrial, individual and the *primitive*, pre-industrial, people. This already archetypal encounter, more so since the appearance of E.M. Forster's and Joseph Conrad's novels, is subverted by means of ironic juxtaposition in Madge's text:

> Shortly after midnight a great light was seen to be appearing on the high hills a little way off. As the light became brighter they shrieked and lamented and wrapped themselves in white cloth. The light, however, turned out to be the primitive acetylene lights of an early motor-car. The aborigines immediately proceeded to take the carburettor to bits with a great deal of interested chatter that thoroughly frightened the traveller. To his amazement they then put the pieces together again, after which the engine worked perfectly and the boat went on its way. (Madge 1937e: 43)

Paradoxically, these humorous instances, which result from textual juxtaposition, help recreate a cataclysmic scenario in which the values, beliefs and mores of a known and familiar world are on the point of collapse. The different sections of which the text is composed contribute to the juxtaposition of images of decay and destruction which co-occur at

seemingly different times and in different places. From varied perspectives and focusing on different realities, the message of decadence, the present crumbling state of modern Britain, remains the same in images that point to the moral and material wreck of British society: floods and droughts, earthquakes, subjugated colonies, the traps of capitalist and imperialist enterprises, a heavy frost over London, the death of a trader, unsympathetic government regulations, a process of rearmament and a shipwreck. The bourgeois news of which the poet becomes the reporter is in fact bad news: its urgent content and its modern form respond to what Humphrey Jennings described as the essence of modernity, as Kathleen Raine recalled in *The Land Unknown* (1975):

> 'You must be 1932,' I remember his [Jennings's] proclaiming in that year; and indeed he 'was' 1932, following Rimbaud's injunction (often on his lips), '*Il faut être absolument modern.*' It was from Humphrey we caught that magical awareness of the growing-point of the consciousness of the world, which is (or so we then believed) the poetic vision itself. (Raine 1975: 50)

Following Jennings's injunction, Madge's "Bourgeois News" was indeed *as 1935* as one could get, and the growing awareness of reality that it transcribes makes it a remarkable text in the context of a developing Surrealist ideology in Britain.

The text maintains its detached tone throughout and the voice of the impersonal poet-anthropologist retains its third-person focus, avoiding personal involvement in what is reported: thus, British society presents itself in a series of discrete fragments through which a collective picture is obtained. However, it is precisely in this process of obtaining a collective whole through the juxtaposition of individual fragments (a process which in itself describes the collage technique) that an inescapable tension emerges between the objectivity that is aimed at and the subjectivity inherent in the authorial voice which re-arranges those fragments. Britain is ultimately seen, not through the objective lens of the scientist, but from the subjective perspective of the poet's vision. Regarding this, Rod Mengham has warned of the dangers, in Madge's text, "of a voice-over enforcing connections" because "it does not allow the reader to assume responsibility for editing together, collating, the disparate materials of which it is composed" (Mengham 2001: 33). As happens with collage, subjectivity is implied by the very act of re-arranging material, and by the effects of that arrangement. But in the case of "Bourgeois News" a sense of totality, which would be brought about by the unifying role of that authorial voice, is never achieved and fragmentation persists in the spaces left between the fragments: these spaces, typographically marked in the text, are spaces left for disruption and doubt, for questioning the validity of the poet's task in bringing those fragments together.

It is in those spaces that endless possibilities open up for the reader to bring in new connections and to question those made by the poet, to provide new meanings for already existing and re-elaborated images. As in *May the Twelfth* (1937), the disruptive character of Madge's text is found in its capacity to interrupt the false ideological *continuum* of a bourgeois view of the world; its self-disruptive nature is revealed in the interruptions contained within the interruption, as typography makes the reader aware that the poet's voice is just another voice among many.

In many ways similar to "Bourgeois News", the poem "Government House" serves as an act of denunciation of imperial power. The poem also takes the form of a report: a Governor, whose name is carefully concealed, is presented sitting at his desk in an overseas Government House "busily writing his voluminous report" (Madge 1937e: 48). Madge makes use of a third-person frame which provides an introduction and a conclusion to this report; in between, a series of quotations supposedly taken from it: "As the tropic sun rose in the heavens Lord L*** was at his desk again, writing his voluminous report. [. . .] He knew nothing save by hearsay of the doings of his predecessors; their records were soon buried in oblivion" (Madge 1937e: 48-49). However, the expectations created by this frame are soon disappointed. What follows is not an official report of overseas administration, but random juxtaposed vignettes of domestic life which are politically inconsequential. These are taken from George Nathaniel Curzon's *The British Government in India: the Story of the Viceroys and Government Houses* (1925), a study of Calcutta Government Houses and their ruler occupants. In this composition, Madge again makes use of ironic juxtaposition: the arrangement of the pieces and the addition of the literary frame (which is taken from the same source) create the illusion that the Governor is busily engaged in writing an otherwise useless and idle description of his dwelling. The use of the first person in these vignettes of colonial life reinforces this illusion.

In the text, the fragmented description of the Government House and the life of British governors in the colonies functions as a mirror image of the imperial metropolis. The house is in a derelict state, which metonymically indicates the decay of the British Empire. The coachman is described as wearing "gorgeous livery" and there are sphinxes with cut-off plaster breasts as a sign of the opulent decadence and the fake prudishness of the British colonists. The text conveys also a sense of the cruelty and inhumanity of the British towards the colonised other, as they contribute to the extinction of endemic species. Jackal hunting appears in Curzon's study as a common form of entertainment for colonisers in India; in

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Madge's text, the juxtaposition of different fragments accentuates their cruelty and conceited indifference:

> We shot several of these horrid creatures [. . .] and their successors have since been trapped and extirpated. [. . .] Long before that date the ground had frequently been disturbed for drainage schemes, water schemes, tramway schemes, lighting schemes. It was not surprising therefore that I found no traces of the dead whose bodies had once lain beneath it. (Madge 1937e: 48)

However, Madge exerts his own revenge on this form of colonial rape as he anticipates the end of British rule in India in the closing literary frame: "for a short period he and his wife imprinted their own tastes in furniture, decoration or landscape gardening upon the scene; and then they too disappeared, and in a distant land forgot the greater part of what they had done" (Madge 1937e: 49). Although colonial independence would not be achieved until a decade after the publication of Madge's text, the future that the poet imposes on the British rulers is one of oblivion: their presence in the colony is erased, and this foreshadows the disappearance of British rule itself. This is a form of literary punishment or poetic justice that Madge exercises. By means of ironic juxtaposition and textual displacement, a dream-like scenario is recreated in which the figure of the overseas governor is satirised for his idle uselessness and its moral depravity, the political consequences of which, although not shown in the text, are suggested:

> I removed the carpet, and the floor remained bare during my time. I broke the monotonous level of the parapet, unrelieved by a single ornament, by placing upon it classical urns at regular intervals. I filled up the tank, and converted the entire area into an exquisite garden. (Madge 1937e: 49)

The very unreality, and absurdity, of the description of the governor's tasks serve to highlight Madge's denunciation.

Humorous satire certainly is a central element in Madge's literary collages: "Division of Labour" (1935), also included in *The Disappearing Castle*, presents one of the most effective, but also comic, uses of plagiarism and textual displacement. This brief text is in fact a "literary anecdote" which originally dates from the early 19th century; it was compiled by Sholto and Reuben Percy in their 1823 volume *The Percy Anecdotes*, and has been reprinted in several other publications and periodicals since.[483] The text is essentially a description of how Alpine marmots divide up their labour in the construction of their dwellings:

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[483] These were pen names for Thomas Byerley and Joseph Robertson.

> The Alpine marmots are said to act in concert in the collection of materials for the construction of their habitations. Some of them, we are told, cut the herbage, others collect it into heaps; a third set serve as waggons [sic.] to carry it to their holes; while a fourth perform all the functions of draught horses. (Madge 1937e: 34)

The text, which may indeed seem purely anecdotal and inconsequential, acquires ideological significance through displacement: even if Madge kept the original title (which was, in all probability, the reason for his choice of text), a thirties' reader could not have missed the clearly Marxist reference contained in it. Furthermore, the equal division of labour, granted by the fact that the marmots take turns in performing the least agreeable tasks, is used by Madge to set the example of a new and fairer social and economic structure. His humorous and poetic displacement of the marmots' behavioural patterns provides an almost childish example of how Marx's theories on the division of labour may be implemented in society. The message, comic and earnest at once, is clear: even marmots can do it.

Very different from the rest of his Surrealist texts, Madge's most innovative and revolutionary literary project was the production of the "Oxford Collective Poem" (1937), a Surrealist experiment set to explore collective images of an unconscious nature which would reveal the ideological make-up of a given section of society.[484] Unlike his literary collages, the poem was not composed by Madge alone but, effectively, by a group of people. In this sense, the "Oxford Collective Poem", introduced by a theoretical explanation of the creative technique and the scientific methodology used for its production, is set to resolve the tensions between objectivity and subjectivity, between democracy and authority, inherent in Madge's textual collages:

> It can in fairness be called an experiment, because [. . .] it can be repeated at any time and as often as desired, with any number of variations. It therefore differs from the individualist poem, which can only be written once, under an exceptional stimulus (love, alcohol, political passion, etc.), by an exceptional person. (Madge 1937c: 16)

Thus, the poem offers a collective vision of the present as experienced collectively. Also, whereas in his other Surrealist texts Madge was more concerned with the ideological implications of ironic juxtaposition and humorous displacement, in this project he explored the unconscious mechanisms of poetic creation, placed at the service of collective expression. The fact that Madge did not continue with the project of creating collective poetry, in spite of his

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[484] The publication of the "Oxford Collective Poem" in *New Verse* in May 1937 happily coincided with one of the most significant events for the history of Mass-Observation: Coronation Day, which gave rise to Jennings and Madge's *May the Twelfth* (1937).

promise that "technical improvements have been devised for future work" (Madge 1937c: 16), indicates that he might not have been fully aware of the revolutionary potential of the creative technique which he had developed. As a Surrealist experiment, the "Oxford Collective Poem" was not only in the line of the early theories of Mass-Observation, but also in that of the activities developed in the Bureau de recherches surréalistes in Paris ten years before, and in Breton's *Cadavre Exquis* sessions. Nevertheless, it is in Salvador Dalí's "Experiment Concerning Objective Perception", published in *This Quarter* in 1932, that we find the ferment for the "Oxford Collective Poem" and, in all probability, for Mass-Observation's early projects too:

> Each of the experimenters is given an alarm-watch which will go off at a time he must not know. Having this watch in his pocket, he carries on as usual and at the very instant the alarm goes off he must note where he is and what most strikingly impinges on his senses (of sight, hearing, smell, and touch). From an analysis of the various notes so made, it can be seen to what extent objective perception depends upon imaginative representation (the causal factor, astrological influence, frequency, the element of coincidence, the possibility of the result's symbolic interpretation in the light of dreams, etc.). One might find, for instance, that at five o'clock elongated shapes and perfumes were frequent; at eight o'clock, hard shapes and purely phototypical images. (Dalí 1932a: 203)

As usual in 1930s Britain, this sort of unorthodox experiments in literature and art which attempted to explore and unveil the workings of the unconscious in the creative process, took place in an otherwise traditional milieu: at the time, it was mainly in university circles that Avant-Garde experiments developed, and it was from Oxford that Madge gathered a group of twelve undergraduates in order to compose this collective poem.

The methodology used in the "Oxford Collective Poem" was based on the application of the principles of Mass-Observation to the process of literary creation, some of which derived from those developed by the French Surrealists in the previous decade. The aim was to find images of collective significance through the objective observation of their recurrence, and to extract the ideological implications of these in order to enlarge awareness of reality: for Madge, this interchange of observations, of images, was at the basis of social consciousness (Madge and Jennings 1937a: 3). Like the French Surrealists, Madge based his experiment on the analysis of the mechanisms of poetic inspiration and creation through which these images of the collective unconscious are made manifest, and their ideological superstructure accessed. This implied, as Madge himself explained in his preliminary notes to the poem, the recording by individuals of *dominant images* over a period of time, the collation of these in

order to observe overlaps and obtain recurring images and, finally, the collective assemblage of those images into a unified poetic form. Since the poet was essentially an observer, it was instructed that the individual images be *external* images, rather than subjective or internal impressions: that is, they had to be tested against or find confirmation in external reality, so that their potential collective validity was ensured. The six most recurrent images were chosen, and the different participants had to create a pentameter line with each of these. Then the lines, anonymously created, were voted and chosen. Each participant had to submit a poem, containing the chosen lines, for collective revision and alteration, and the best of the final versions was finally voted. In spite of the earnest attempt to get rid of all traces of individual creation, the way in which the experiment was carried out had a basic flaw, which Madge acknowledged:

> The criticism of this process is that the emendations proved insufficiently radical. Single words alone received any real attention: the alterations of one man were often rejected by his successor; and the consequence was that the traces of the individual were not removed as thoroughly as they might be. (Madge 1937c: 18)

Together with this, another major downside lay in the fact that this process was not entirely automatic or scientific, but that it rather responded to conscious choices of an aesthetic kind, conditioned mainly by the fact that the participants were "all interested in literature and the writing of literature" (Madge 1937c: 17). Thus, it was agreed that the lines into which the images were arranged had to be necessarily pentameters, and the final choice of the lines which would make up the poem depended heavily on *subjective* preference, even if this was then partially counteracted by *statistical* recurrence: "We each put a mark against the line we preferred, provided it was not our own; and so took a vote to select one line for each of the six images" (Madge 1937c: 17-18). In spite of these drawbacks, the experiment remains an earnest attempt at the exploration of mass consciousness and the eventual manifestation of a truly collective poetics, which was certainly a new concept in the British poetic tradition. All previous attempts to bring forth a sense of the collective in poetry had been done individually (by Madge and Jennings themselves, with all the dangers of an authorial voice providing unity for a series of fragments); or unknowingly (in the folk and oral tradition). With the "Oxford Collective Poem", Madge put forward a consciously democratic model of poetry in which image and ideology became reconciled in the voice of the masses; and just as for him consciousness was always class consciousness, so poetry could reveal "social fantasy representative of [. . .] class environment" (Madge 1937c: 16). Madge's achievement in this direction ought to be recognised.

These ideas had already been anticipated in an article entitled "Poetic Description and Mass-Observation" (1937), intended to show the poetic quality and the poetic relevance of anonymous mass observation.[485] For Madge, poets are essentially observers: in their observations, the poetic eye and the poetic voice coalesce, and so do subject and object, for there is no distance between the reality that is told and the experience of that reality. As a consequence, the distance between the language used and the ideas conveyed is also bridged. Thus, the images obtained through mass observations are relevant from both a scientific and a poetic point of view, for they record external reality through an unconscious and subjective (emotional, experiencing) lens and are then contrasted by means of the objective analysis of their recurrence. This type of observation-poetry, Madge contended, is more realistic than Realist modes of representation, because fiction necessarily implies imaginative fabrication. On the other hand, poetry obtained through mass observations is based, not on the creation of personal fictions, but on *real* experience. Discussing Madge's and Jennings's imagery, Kathleen Raine noted that it is an "imagery of precise and objective realism, gathered from the daily human [. . .] scene, from the habitat of the common man"(Raine 1967: 48). Furthermore, it is through the process of collective comparison and revision that the images, otherwise individualistic and subjective, become objective because "the subjectivity of the observer is one of the facts under observation" (Madge and Jennings 1937a: 3). When the poet-observer discriminates a series of facts and overrides others, this act of discrimination is objective in itself, for it provides an objective map of psychical formations (unconscious interests, fears, desires and obsessions in the form of images). Hence, through the interconnection of different observations (images) a collective consciousness (ideology) is reached: "The process of observing raises [the observer] from subjectivity to objectivity. What has become unnoticed through familiarity is raised into consciousness again" (Madge and Jennings 1937a: 3). This is the new poetry of the masses, the product of a materialist approach to the observation of reality and to poetic creation: it is a mode of exploration of the psychological unconscious in order to enlarge consciousness of the material.

In the "Oxford Collective Poem", Madge made use of an inductive methodology, extracting from the observation of particular psychic phenomena (images formed at an unconscious level, which for him were the result of the influence, via mass media, of power and official discourse) the collective thoughts revealed in such images and, ultimately, the

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[485] The examples that illustrate the article were collected by Jennings, but the text is Madge's.

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material conditions that determine the prevalence of such thoughts.[486] Madge was aware of the social import of those psychic images, from which the *dominant image* was obtained: this is what he called the "social fantasy" which surrounds the image, and which provides information of the individual's class environment and class consciousness and of the material conditions in which those images are formed. In the following images from the poem, a convulsive social and political scenario is delineated:

> Their epitaphs clack to the crawling hour.
>
> The clock grows old inside the hollow tower;
>
> [. . .]
>
> And on the edges of the town redoubles
>
> Thunder, announcing war's climacteric.
>
> [. . .]
>
> And on our heads the crimes of our buried fathers
>
> Burst in a hurricane and the rebels shout" (Madge 1937c: 19).

As such, the poem is a synchronic analysis of the material factors that condition the formation of psychic images. Poetry is thus demystified: the poetic image is seen as a historical entity, conditioned by historical (i.e. material, economic) forces, and not as the de-historicised product of an extraordinary personality or of a mystic notion of poetic creation. The purpose behind the Oxford experiment was thus to bring to the fore the social landscape or background of these Oxford students through an analysis of private images which did, in fact, become collective. Moreover, this synchronic analysis of social background might have become diachronic by virtue of repetition. It would have certainly been interesting for the furthering of Surrealist poetic experimentation in Britain to continue to perform this activity throughout a period of time with the same group, and probably with different groups of diverse backgrounds too. The fact that it was discontinued is only to be regretted.

As it has been stated, the process of composition of the resulting poem incorporated a series of phases: finding dominant images, obtaining recurrent images, individual composition adapted to a standard poetic form, collective revision and a democratic vote. Since the process largely relied on literary taste, the text can be understood not only as the result of a particular social environment, but also of a specific educational background, both of which conditioned the content and form of the poem. In particular, Madge drew attention to the atmosphere of

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[486] The influence of the methodology used by Ivan Pavlov's in his research on excitation and inhibition is notable. His results were published in London in 1927 in *Conditioned Reflexes: an Investigation of the Physiological Activity of the Cerebral Cortex.*

impending doom and moral decay recreated in the poem, and saw in it an unmistakable sign of contemporary Oxford:

> [the poem] has the Oxford scene with its stone buildings, its situation in a valley, and its associations and history, with a moral. It has the sense of decay and imminent doom which characterises contemporary Oxford. It expresses a feeling of a responsibility together with a sense of that responsibility being neglected now and in the past. This reflection of the immediate scene is what is looked for in a collective poem. (Madge 1937c: 18-19)

This can be observed in the opening lines of the poem:

> Believe the iron saints who stride the floods,
>
> Lying in red and labouring for the dawn:
>
> Steeples repeat their warnings; along the roads
>
> Memorials stand, of children force has slain;
>
> Expostulating with the winds they hear
>
> Stone kings irresolute on a marble stair. (Madge 1937c: 19)

Of course, it may also be argued that this atmosphere of decadence and degeneration (reinforced by the references to the church, religion, war, the dead and the continued belief in a petrified monarchy) was not confined to Oxford, but to 1930s Britain as a whole. Nevertheless, the ways in which it found expression in the poem were certainly peculiar of the exclusive elite that produced it, a group perhaps too aware of poetic rhetoric and too young to conceal its awareness: the poem, composed in its entirety of iambic pentameters, is full of assonances, alliterations and, what is probably most implausible of all in an automatic collective text, of polysyllabic Latinate words like "labouring", "expostulating", "irresolute" or "climacteric". These tend to undermine that sense of unconscious or automatic creation which the poem intends to convey. Indeed, from a formal point of view, the poem is too Classical, too self-conscious and contrived, as too much thought and interest seem to have gone into the creative process. This is mainly the reason why, as Madge acknowledged, the text itself allowed little alteration in the stage of collective revision, and therefore the attempt to transcend individualist notions of poetic creation and to advance towards a collective poetics remains somehow tentative. However, it is precisely this stage of revision (the only consciously literary stage) which seems to frustrate the revolutionary potential of the experiment, both poetically and ideologically. Earlier stages of the project focus on the mechanisms of collective image-making, which is the first step towards the creation of a collective map of unconscious images: for instance, in his preliminary notes, Madge provides the list of the six most recurrent

dominant images produced by the group. These are objective observations, tested against external reality by means of statistical recurrence and unaltered by conscious processes of formal elaboration:

> The red garment of a woman.
>
> Stone steps leading to a stone building.
>
> Shoes.
>
> Trees against the skyline.
>
> The ticking of a clock.
>
> Smoke issuing form a pipe. (Madge 1937c: 17)

Although these observations are not poetic *per se*, they are significant insofar as they are collective images which transcribe a common view of the world: as Madge himself stated, the poem "is much more a collective account of Oxford than of any single person in the group" (Madge 1937c: 18). Hence, this was virtually a mythology of modern Oxford, through which collective consciousness could be studied. Moreover, as we have seen, a collective poetics emerged as the participants composed lines out of each image, which were then voted, and a line was chosen for each image as the most representative of their common poetic perceptivity. It was at this point that form and content, image and ideology, were brought together within a single, albeit collective, voice. The mere juxtaposition of those lines did not only respond to a Surrealist aesthetics, resolving the tensions between subjectivity and objectivity, fragment and whole, inherent in textual collage; it also revealed a series of collective concerns, which contributed to the development of a Surrealist ideology in Britain: concerns regarding the effects of the exercise of power and ideological control, the relationship between oppressor and oppressed in social organisation, and the inexorable passing of time. It should be remembered, however, that it is this juxtaposition of poetic images, rather than the poem as a whole, that creates an ideological map of 1937 intellectual Oxford:

> Lying in red and labouring for the dawn
>
> Stone kings irresolute on a marble stair
>
> The tongues of torn boots flapping on the cobbles
>
> Trees with their fingers feel towards the sky
>
> It ticks, and stops, and waits for me to tick
>
> Smoke rises from the pipes whose smokers die. (Madge 1937c: 18)

Again, we have here images of decadence, with references to exploited and muted labourers and despotic rulers, to futile hope and time irrevocably passing by. As a set of disconnected

images, these maintain the impromptu of the initial fragmented observation performed by different individuals at different times and in different locations. Their apparent randomness or disconnectedness is reconciled by the fact that these are images obtained collectively, which grants them ideological and aesthetic coherence: they are the result of statistical recurrence (they emerged as dominant images in the observations of different participants) and of a collective process of formal elaboration. Curiously enough, the only line that was altered in the final version of the poem ("Trees with their fingers feel towards the sky") loses effectiveness when a *lectio difficilior potior* principle is applied: "Trees with their corpses lean towards the sky" (Madge 1937c: 19) is less effective because it substitutes two common terms ("fingers" and "feel") with the more learned or intellectually complex "corpses" and "lean". By doing away with the anthropomorphic image, this substitution obliterates the tension between between subject and object, which is so central to the original line, and to Madge's overall poetic project.[487]

The ultimate aim of this project was to enlarge consciousness of the material through an analysis of the mechanisms of unconscious image formation: in order to do so, it was necessary to demystify poetic creation by re-historicising the poetic image. Nowhere in the poem is this achieved as successfully as in this list of juxtaposed lines: the collective (*material*, historical) images presented here are the vehicles for a view of the world which disrupts the illusory continuity fostered by the particular images of dominant discourse of power, while simultaneously accepting fragment and fracture, historical evolution, as part of its own totality, and recognising, not only the fragment within the whole, but the fact that *this whole* is also a fragment. Therein lies the significance of Madge's experiment for the development of a collective poetics in Britain, which was intimately connected with the continuously evolving and self-contradictory ideology of British Surrealism: with this project, Madge showed the potential of this sort of collective poetics for disrupting dominant ideology and unveiling it as a form of false consciousness. At the same time, by turning the poetic image into a historical category, it undermined the very sense of totality and unity which it set itself to achieve: in this sense, the tension between subjectivity and objectivity was only resolved by incorporating it as an integral part of the process of poetic creation. For all of the above, the Oxford experiment, with its implicit call for wider consciousness, was Madge's major contribution to Surrealist poetic and ideological experimentation in Britain in the 1930s.

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[487] Since Madge's experiment is also a form of textual criticism, the term seems fit: it refers to the fact that, in the process of textual criticism, the more unusual word is preferred in case there are conflicting options.

However, as the prospect of the Second World War drew closer, Madge gradually abandoned his collagistic and decentring poetics. His poems in *The Father Found* (1941) differ in form and matter from his previous *The Disappearing Castle* (1937). The titles of the collections themselves reveal this change in attitude and suggest that Madge's poetics was developing from a sense of uncertainty and expectancy towards reconciliation and conclusion. In Sykes Davies's terms, the "patterns" finally met with their events, a movement which had been anticipated in the second issue of the Mass-Observation journal *US* (10 February 1940): "We do not take sides. We do not forget sides. We hear a lot. We see a lot. We know a little. We say NOT what we think or want or feel. The FACTS impose their pattern on US" (Mass-Observation 1940: 8). The castles that were built (castles in Spain and the Spanish cause, in Surrealism, in Mass-Observation, in a collective consciousness and in a poetics of the masses) did in the end disappear; but a new voice was found: this was mostly Madge's own voice, as he no longer resorted to external sources, or re-arranged found material, just as he ceased looking for the ideological significance of collective images.

3.3. The Erotics of the Machine: Humphrey Jennings's Industrial Surrealism.

> There shall be no more gods;
> there shall be no more quiet and holy places of the earth;
> and the sea shall be filled with our dirty works.
> Your women shall breed like sows, and you shall work like robots.
> Richard Aldington. *All Men Are Enemies* (1933): 340.

Humphrey Jennings's interest in the machine and the effects that a highly mechanised society had in the collective imagination anticipated in a way his own incursions in Mass-Observation. In this section I analyse Jennings's position regarding the role of the poet and of poetic creation in a world dominated by machines which were for him fascinating and terrifying at the same time. Like Madge, Jennings found in literary collage the new poetic form of the technological age. However, his use of collage responded to his own anxiety over historical discontinuity, to the split that he felt between pre-industrial Romanticism and technological Modernism. So, in a way, collage was for him a way to restore a sense of continuity with the past because it allowed the exploration of collective images, that is, of images that recur throughout different periods, authors and texts. Indeed, for Jennings poetry implied a process of *bringing together.* But this was not only a conscious process of compiling, collating, re-arranging and editing pre-existing material. There was an element of chance and

of unconscious desire inherent in the apparition of collective images, and the poet-critic had to be *receptive* to the discovery of those coincidences and recurrences in order to abstract their contemporary significance. In Jennings's texts, these particular images of collective significance were in fact images of strong biographical and psychological import: the locomotive, the horse and the Romantic poet. By means of textual displacement, these three images are subjected to processes of identification, forced into a Freudian narrative of origin through which the poet tries to make sense of the mechanised present by referring to the past. Their interaction, Jennings understood, unveiled the psychological mechanisms behind unconscious repression, the economic mechanisms behind capitalist exploitation and the individual's alienation from nature in modern society. However, and in spite of the apparent coherence of the counter-narratives offered in Jennings's *reports*, as he used to call them, their irreducible fragmentariness and polyphonic nature forces a continuous revaluation of the relationship between the parts and the whole. Thus, through the exploration of his own fetishistic obsessions and anxieties, Jennings created a collective poetics in which image and ideology could be reconciled.

3.3.1. A Life in Images.

Three elements which are central to Jennings's Surrealist poetics have a biographical basis: his formal interest in abstract, geometrical constructions (the machine) derived from his father's career as an architect; his plastic conception of the image, from his mother, who was a painter; and his almost mythical conception of the horse, from his grandfather, a racehorse trainer.[488] Jennings's almost obsessive association of horses and machines, especially trains, was also triggered in childhood, as he recalled in an unpublished manuscript entitled "Beyond the Life of Man":

> When I was a child, there was a curious relation of horses and trains at Newmarket like this: my grandmother had a house up the Bury Road on the way to the heath. If you slept in the front of the house you were woken up in the morning by the sound of strings' hooves going out to exercise and then again, as they came back. Running along the bottom of the garden behind the house was a railway cutting and on the left was a tunnel mouth where the trains came out of Warren Hill. (in Jennings 1982: 6)

Another of his fascinations, with Byron and the image of the Romantic poet, harks back to the time when he read English at Cambridge. As Roland Penrose acknowledged in his *Scrapbook* (1981), it was "His knowledge and love of the romantic period in England [. . .] that led

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[488] For more detailed biographical accounts, refer to Mary-Lou Jennings's *Humphrey Jennings: Film-Maker, Painter, Poet* (1982) and Kevin Jackson's *Humphrey Jennings* (2004).

[Jennings] to surrealism and a reason for the ease with which he made friends with Eluard [sic.] and Breton when they came to London" (Penrose 1981: 78). At Cambridge, he designed sets and costumes for the productions of the Marlowe Society (as Penrose had done in the early 1920s) and was an editorial contributor to the Cambridge Avant-Garde magazine *Experiment*. In an article published there, "Rock Painting and *La Jeune Peinture*" (1931), Jennings explores the links between African art, to which Zervos had recently devoted a double number of *Cahiers d'Art*, and Surrealist art. In fact his article turns out to be one of the earliest theoretical approaches in Britain to Surrealist painting. Although, unlike Penrose's article in *Axis*, "Notes on the Ratton Exhibition of North Western American Art, Paris" (1935), it does not attempt to introduce Surrealism in Britain and, certainly, it cannot be considered a sign that the movement was gestating there, Jennings's analysis of the *Jeune Peinture* in France is relevant as a critique of Cubism and an attempt to transcend the Abstract tendency which, a couple of years later, led in Britain to the formation of the Unit One Group, with artists such as Edward Burra, Ben Nicholson and Paul Nash:

> Cubism not only enslaved technique but practically killed the naturalist myths (landscape, still-life, portrait) upon which painting has for the most part relied since Poussin. The want of myths following on Cubism has been filled from various sources, pre-eminently by Surrealism. Of Surrealist paintings, two things can at once be said: their principle of construction is that of dreams and their unity depends, not upon demonstrable composition, but upon mental reconstruction of elements which are in themselves pictorial unities [. . .] the Surrealist myth may be constructed of anything, and the scope of myth-construction is by this almost infinitely widened. (Jennings and Noxon 1931: 39)

Although he did understand the basis of myth-construction in Surrealism (the emotional response to incongruous associations) as ephemeral and liable to decay with time, Jennings's defence of Surrealism's role in the recovery of myth as a necessary step in the development of the arts certainly prefigured the way in which Surrealism would evolve in Britain.[489]

Jennings visited Paris regularly in the 1930s. A letter to Julian Trevelyan of 22 April 1933, written from London, manifests his interest in the work of Braque and shows that he had access to *Cahiers d'Art*, the French Avant-Garde periodical where the "First English Manifesto

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[489] One of the earliest criticisms of Surrealism argues that the Surrealist image's ability to shock is necessarily short-lived, as it largely relies on the effect that the first encounter with the new reality has in the observer. After that first encounter, the reality is no longer new and therefore its initial effect is doomed to wear out. This view does not only obviate the long-lasting effect of that first impression, or the fact that the list of possible juxtapositions is, as Jennings suggests, infinite, but it also reduces Surrealism to a compositional technique.

of Surrealism" would appear in 1935.[490] Previously, he had also had access to Eugène Jolas's *transition*, also crucial for the introduction of Surrealism in Britain.[491] A letter to Cicely Jennings of 1934 reveals Jennings's familiarity with both the humoristic and primitive pathways of Surrealism: "went to the latest Marx Bros. film which I had to admit was terribly funny: surrealism for the million. Also to an excellent short at the Tatler with LL [Len Lye] and Jane, on Voodoo dances in West Africa" (in Jennings 1982: 10).[492] Furthermore, his left-wing political convictions took definite shape around this period, as Cambridge University was effectively "going Marxist" (in Jennings 1982: 11).[493] All these influences begin to appear in his work from an early stage. In 1934, he directed his first films for the G.P.O. (General Post Office) Film Unit: *The Story of the Wheel* and *Locomotives*. From then on, in many of his films, he made use of Surrealistic techniques (mainly collage, fragmentation and juxtaposition, mechanistic imagery and rhythms) and elements (dream-like scenery, automated figures, black humour).[494]

Jennings's career as a Surrealist painter and poet mainly developed between 1936 and 1939. His becoming a Surrealist and, later on, a founder of Mass-Observation, was consistent with his lifelong interest in the expression of the collective unconscious through the exploration of collective myths and images. His activities within the British Surrealist Group were varied. He was a member of the organising committee of the 1936 London Surrealist Exhibition, to which he also contributed a painting (*In a Country Churchyard*, 1933), two collages (*Life and Death* and *The Minotaure*, both 1934) and three image-objects (*Stereo*, *Life and Death* and *Death at Work* -1933, 1934 and 1934, respectively). His works were exhibited on the second floor of the London Gallery from 14 October to 12 November 1938, while Giorgio de Chirico's were shown on the first. Apart from that, Jennings also contributed several texts and translations of the poems of Péret, E.L.T Mesens and Breton to *Contemporary Poetry and Prose* and *London Bulletin*.[495] However, his *original* Surrealist work, if that is an appropriate label for it, appeared for the first time in the Surrealist issue of *Contemporary*

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[490] Letter reproduced in Mary-Lou Jennings's *Humphrey Jennings: Film-Maker, Painter, Poet* (1982): 10.

[491] Although Jennings's biographer, Kevin Jackson, suggests that Jennings might have been aware of Surrealist activities in France as early as 1924 (when he was seventeen), the suggestion seems far-fetched. It is likely that the encounter with Surrealism took place in the pages of *transition*, and then in subsequent visits to Paris, where he met Breton and the other members of the French group.

[492] Also reproduced in *Humphrey Jennings: Film-Maker, Painter, Poet* (1982): 10.

[493] In a letter to Julian Trevelyan of 15 March 1933.

[494] A recent and exhaustive study of Jennings's films is Philip C. Logan's *Humphrey Jennings and British Documentary Film Movement* (2011).

[495] Although the idea that Jennings translated Paul Éluard has become generalised in the criticism, no translation of Éluard by Jennings appeared in *Contemporary Poetry and Prose* or in *London Bulletin*. He did not take part either in the translation of Éluard's *Thorns of Thunder* (1936), but he did in Péret's *Remove your Hat* (1936).

Poetry and Prose in June 1936, under the title "Three Reports".[496] Although *Contemporary Poetry and Prose* announced the publication of Jennings's *Reports & Photographs* for Spring 1937, the book never saw the light of day. He was also one of the signatories of the Surrealist programmatic and political texts of 1936: the fourth issue of the *International Bulletin of Surrealism* and the "Declaration on Spain". At this time, he was defined by Valentine Penrose as "un vrai révolté" and regularly attended the Surrealist meetings organised at the Penroses'.[497]

In his Surrealist texts, literary collages in which the machine and the horse emerge as the leading images through a play of textual juxtaposition and superposition, Jennings explored the conditions of modern life, a life at once fascinated and subjugated by technology in which the individual strives to assimilate the changes produced by industrialisation while retaining a sense, not only of continuity with the past, but of connection with nature. Paul Éluard captured Jennings's concern with continuity and his desire to find common roots in the midst of technological chaos in a 1939 poem dedicated to him: "Le mouvement a des racines / L'immobile croît et fleurit" (Éluard 1939: 17).[498] Jennings also intended to recover this sense of continuity in several of his photographs, images in which technology is presented in connection with a mythical past: for instance, in a photograph of Bolton, reproduced in the *Dictionnaire Abrégé du Surréalisme* (1938), the industrial landscape seems oddly atemporal and rural. It has a mythical quality which is reminiscent of Penrose's depictions of nomadic life and pre-industrial landscape in *The Road is Wider than Long* (1939). Similar ideas also underlay the Surrealistic film *The Birth of the Robot*, which Jennings and Len Lye produced for Shell in 1936. Although ostensibly an advertisement for Shell oil, the film advocates, as much as Jennings's Surrealist texts do, the use of myth as a point of connection between a pre-industrial past and a highly technological present. As Philip Logan has recently stated,

> Myths not only explain the intimate alignment and delicate balance between the
> natural order and spiritual aspects of life but also contribute to the control of human
> behaviour. In the past the idea of mechanics and the character of rudimentary

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[496] As will be seen, his Surrealist texts are literary collages made of pre-existing material which challenge the very concepts of originality and authorship.

[497] The reference appears in David Gascoyne's entry for 13th October 1936 in his *Journal 1936-1937* (1980), where he describes a meeting of the Surrealist Group at Penrose's house in Hampstead with Jennings: "Humphrey, as usual, was boiling over with energy and excitement; he brought a lot of photographs with him which he had just taken, one of which –a horse and an electric light-bulb- he gave to me. When the 'business' was over, I listened to him having a most animated discussion with Valentine Penrose, who had evidently taken to him. 'Voilà un vrai révolté!' she cried [. . .]" (Gascoyne 1980: 36).

[498] "Movement has roots / Immobility grows and blossoms" (translated by David Gascoyne, reproduced in Jackson (2004): 167.

mechanisms could themselves act as metaphors to describe the harmony of existence and the location of humanity within the universe. (Logan 2011: 67)

However, in modern society, Jennings felt, the chaos of modernisation has unsettled this harmonious relationship between the individual and external reality, the recovery of which is at the core of his Surrealist poetics. Also, aware of the role that mythologies play in the shaping of human behaviour, he attempted to discover true collective myths to replace those false ideologies of power. In his texts, those myths (the horse, the machine and the Romantic personality) eventually revealed a common consciousness, characterised by a fascination with and a dread of modernity.

As time went on, Jennings became increasingly interested in Communism and, accordingly, progressively dissatisfied with Surrealism: in his journal entry for 8 April 1937, Gascoyne recorded one of the frequent meetings of the Surrealist Group at Penrose's house in Hampstead at which Jennings, described by Gascoyne as "a very recent convert to the Party line", read "a long passage from Lenin on dreams, implying that the dreams of those present were of the kind that fly off at a tangent and are of no service to the 'toiling masses of humanity'" (Gascoyne 1980: 74). Jennings and Roughton officially resigned from the Group at that meeting. Nevertheless, Jennings continued to take part is some of the Group's activities and his last Surrealist contributions to *London Bulletin* would appear in March 1939.

As the prospect of a Second World War grew into a certainty, Jennings's poetry gradually became a pessimistic attempt to recover a long-lost past. In one of the "Two American Poems" published in March 1939 in *London Bulletin*, the movement of the locomotive becomes nostalgic, almost sentimental: "The swift thought of the locomotive / Recovers the old footprints" (Jennings 1939b: 7). The attempt to escape the looming threat of war in the American landscape is thwarted by the constant "pitiful reminder" of "the open downs of England [. . .] –the Graveyard" (Jennings 1939b: 7). One month after the outbreak of the Second World War, Jennings wrote "Grove Farm", a text in which a rural cart substitutes the locomotive in an effort to capture the eternity of a pre-industrial era:

A derelict cart with dead grass entwined in its great wheels: plants and grasses which had climbed in the springtime and been upheld by the spokes, flowered in the summer and now died in October. The cart unmoved all the year round –the wheels unmoved and unmoving –lit and unlit with the daily light of the great sun . . . (in Jennings 1982: 22)

In the text, which bears such clear echoes of a very similar passage in Roland Penrose's *The Road is Wider than Long* (1939), time comes to a standstill as the gleaming and vibrant

locomotive of his previous texts has given way to a dying and unmoving cart. Whereas Jennings's films become progressively conscious and urgent throughout the war, his poetry gradually departs from the collagistic aesthetics and ideological appeal of his earlier texts, becoming more subjective and impressionistic. In 1941, he wrote "I See London" in which the accumulation of apocalyptic visions of London under siege serves as a counterpoint to Roger Roughton's prophetic epiphanies in "Animal Crackers in Your Croup" (1936). The poem is composed of a series of independent stanzas which he wrote in the Spring of 1941, all of which concentrate on personal visions of the Blitz, and some of which also found their way into his films. However, the final version of the poem as it appears in Kevin Jackson's *The Humphrey Jennings's Film Reader* (1993) does not contain all the manuscript texts which Jennings wrote on this theme. There is one stanza, reproduced in Peter Stansky and William Abrahams's *London's Burning* (1994), in which echoes of Barker's spiralling poetics are perceived: "On a bus at Rickmansworth I see the eyes of Spain and the eyes of East Anglia / I see the solemn cheeks of Wren's cherubim / On the walls of the city the solemn cheeks / splinter cheeks / of Wren's / solemn cherubim" (in Stansky and Abrahams 1994: 101). Both Barker and Jennings echo, of course, Blake. A similar impressionistic technique was also used in another report written in the summer of 1940, a proleptic description of the Blitz in which, as in Roland Penrose's Surrealist works of the time, music becomes the leading motif, and a counterpoint to the noise of the bombers:

> Outside in the dark the corn ripens: it is the last day in July. The trumpets of Haydn call us. The bombers are all gone. The sky is clear. The flutes in the last movement thrill us. The ears of corn move for a moment. The knitting-needles click. The trumpets return. The bombers are already over the white coast-line. (in Jennings 1982: 26)

During the war, especially acclaimed were his war documentary films, such as *London can Take it!* (1940, co-directed with Harry Watt) and, above all, those that he directed for the Crown Film Unit: *Listen to Britain* (1942, co-directed with Stewart McAllister) and *Fires Were Started* (1943, also known as *I Was a Fireman*).[499] In the early war period, his films incorporated the Surrealist vision that was also present in Lee Miller's war photographs, as they both captured the *surreality* of the everyday experience of the Blitz: the moment at which the violent prophetic visions of Surrealism truly hit home. This is especially true of *London Can Take It!* (1940), in which the real and the surreal, the horror of the vision and the jocular

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[499] *London can Take it!* (1940) was aimed at an American audience to show how Londoners were resiliently coping in the early days of the Blitz. There was also a shorter version, *Britain Can Take It!*, for distribution in the UK.

remark, merge. However, as his style grew increasingly propagandistic, his films became mere glorifications of Britishness. Penrose, with his acute Surrealist sensibility, regretted this: "Humphrey will undoubtedly be remembered for his films, but it is a great tragedy that his earlier career as a surrealist painter and poet became diminished by the war" (Penrose 1981: 79). Sadly, in the midst of a successful career as one of Britain's most acclaimed film-makers, Jennings died in 1950 in Greece while climbing up a cliff in order to make sketches for a new film (Bronowski 1959: 181).[500]

3.3.2. Industrial Surrealism.

In the early decades of the twentieth century, the machine exercised a powerful influence on Avant-Garde artists and writers and, in Britain, it was on Humphrey Jennings, together with Wyndham Lewis and the Vorticists, that this influence was greater.[501] At this time, the machine was regarded and depicted as both a redeeming and a condemning force for Western civilisation, a symbol of human progress and of human apocalypse, as both beautiful and terrible, powerful and threatening.[502] The machine fascinated and terrified the modern artist and this fascination lay mostly in its implications of speed and dynamism, its defiance of the laws that traditionally dominated spatio-temporal relations and its power to aid, but also to alienate, human labour. For example, the image of the powerful and implacable machine was depicted by Jennings's futuristic rigid lines in *Train (Locomotive 101)* (1939-1940), now part of the Tate collection, in which the machine is portrayed in rapid movement, caught in the instant of passing in front of the painter's eyes, and almost ready to leave the canvas. A further consequence was this: the possibilities opened up by the mass production of cultural goods not only questioned hierarchical notions of authorship and originality (and hence Marcel Duchamp's ready-mades, Pablo Picasso's collages, or Humphrey Jennings's texts), but also threatened the role of the artist in society. Thus, enchanted by a technological world, Futurism fragmented reality in an attempt to depict its vertiginous rhythm and acceleration. On the other hand, the terror of the machine, emerged in Expressionism

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[500] The fact that Byron, one of Jennings's poetic obsessions, also died in Greece may be seen as a final reconciliation of fate and unconscious desire which Jennings, fond of coincidences, would have enjoyed.

[501] In spite of this, it is only recently that scholarly research has focused its attention on the interaction between Modernist or Avant-Garde aesthetics and technology. See, for example, Sara Danius's *The Senses of Modernism: Technology, Perception and Aesthetics* (2002) and Günter Berghaus's *Futurism and the Technological Imagination* (2009) and Alex Goody's *Technology, Literature and Culture* (2011). I have written on the role of technology in American Expressionism in an article which is now under consideration for publication, "Sex Machines: Futurism and Modernity in American Expressionist Theater".

[502] In a brief note on Magritte under the title "In Magritte's Paintings" (1938), Humphrey Jennings saw the meeting of beauty and terror as central to Surrealist aesthetics. In Jennings's poetics, this idea is transferred to the image of the animal-machine.

from the menace that it posed to human efficacy within a highly industrialised society. The Industrial Revolution, through which the machine had substituted manual labour and animal-assisted implements, started a process of increasing dehumanisation which culminated in the substitution of the individual for the machine in the twentieth century. In response to this, the Avant-Garde both praised and stigmatised the machine for its dehumanising and alienating power: Cubism reduced reality to basic natural figures; Abstract art drew away from the organic to focus on the inert form.

The influence of the machine also manifested itself in other ways. Eroticised images of the mechanised world appeared early in Surrealism: for the Surrealists, Lautréamont's encounter between a sewing machine and an umbrella on a dissecting table was not only the beautiful representation of objective chance, but a sexual encounter on an unexpected plane. Marcel Duchamp reworked the concept of mechanistic eroticism in works where the machine becomes the object of desire, or the artefact that allows the systematised expression of unrealised desire. This is especially seen in *The Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors, Even* (1915-1923), an exploration of agonistic desire and mechanised sexuality. Duchamp's machines imply, not only a redefinition of the human body in terms of the machine, which is typical of the Avant-Garde, but also they reconceptualise desire as a longing for possession and control of the impenetrable artefact. The indecipherability of the complex mechanisms of the modern machine is resolved through a process of fetishisation which places the machine at the centre of desire. Elsewhere, in Dalí's aesthetics, the machine became an "object of symbolic function", intended to represent, and satisfy, unconscious desires: "The embodiment of these desires, their way of being objectified by substitution and metaphor, their symbolic realization, all these constitute a typical process of sexual perversion, which resembles in every respect the process involved in the poetic act" (Dalí 1998: 232). As in Óscar Domínguez's painting *Electrosexual Sewing Machine* (1934), the aim of producing (in many cases, mass-producing) these erotic machines is to possess and dissect reality (the Surrealist object is an objective reality) so that the individual may regain control over it. In this sense, following Worringer's and Read's theories on primitive art, the Surrealist machine-object has a similar function to that of cave paintings, as both express a fear of reality. It is this fear of reality, this *dread of space*, that accounts for much of the obsessive interest in the internal mechanisms, wheels and cogs of invented machines in Surrealist aesthetics. Thus, eroticised visions of the machine merged in Surrealism with an increasing sense of danger, as technology posed a threat, not only to the individual's role in the system of production, but to the continuation of life itself: the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War, in which the latest technological developments in air

warfare were tested, unveiled the machine's potential for total destruction. Hence the Surrealists saw the machine as a symbol of the tensions between the life and death drives which, according to Freud's theory in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), are inherent in the human being: it is in the machine's potential for mass production and mass destruction that they found fertile ground for poetic creation.

Herbert Read's influential study *Art and Industry* (1934) dealt with the effects of the machine age on the production of art and the relation between art and technology in modern society. As such, it acted as a preamble to his authoritative *Art and Society* (1937). In *Art and Industry*, Read poses two main questions: the first question problematises the artistic potential of machine-produced objects; the second addresses the role of the artist in an automated society. In addressing these questions, Read dismantles the traditional distinction between humanistic art (art that appeals to emotional sensibility, and therefore responds to an irrational faculty) and abstract or non-figurative art (art that concerns itself with the creation of objects that exclusively appeal to aesthetic sensibility, purportedly, through the application of rational laws of symmetry, proportion and the like) (Read 1966: 57), by acknowledging that there are abstract forms that appeal to some unconscious or intuitive faculty. Thus, he establishes a connection between the mechanistic and inorganic form and the irrational side of the human psyche, just as Wilhelm Worringer had done in *Abstraction and Empathy* (1908), a connection which would become central to the processes of animation of the machine that take place in Jennings's Surrealist works. In Jennings's painting *Locomotive* (1936-38), the machine (an otherwise rigid and impenetrable metal creature) acquires an irrational plasticity through round forms and an almost melting liquefying quality. In his texts, the machine is described as an eroticised object of desire, the locomotive quivers with "artificial life" (Jennings 1936c: 147) and the engines stop "to take water" (Jennings 1936d: 40). Also, through identification with the horse (a symbol of passion and freedom), the machine opens a path to the individual's irrational fears and desires.

Surrealism deconstructed traditional notions of form, function and ornament, creating machine-objects with a strong irrational and unconscious appeal in which the harmonious relation between those three dimensions is upset. This is achieved by means of what Read called the "plastic ornament": the ornament is not added to the object but becomes the object itself which, without losing its original functionality, also evokes a series of symbolic functions. Such is the case, for instance, of Dalí's famous *Lobster Telephone* (1936). A very different type of object is Conroy Maddox's *Onanistic Typewriter* (1940), in which associations of masochistic pleasure and mechanistic fetishism converge in the evocation of manual work as a modern rite

of self-sacrifice: form and ornament are transformed in order to suit the necessities of a new function. During the Second World War, the effects of the London Blitz further transfigured the beauty of the functional machine into a dysfunctional beauty of epic proportions: in Lee Miller's photograph *Remington Silent* (1940), the rational and functional form of the machine succumbs to the irrational power of destruction. This is achieved through a process which places the abject and the formless at the centre of the composition: the loss of all sense of proportion and symmetry contributes to rendering the machine dysfunctional, therefore increasing its intuitive aesthetic appeal.

All of the above reflects how Surrealism reconciled the tension that is created between the *rational* machine and the irrational mind by its attempt to irrationalise the machine, either by unsettling the relation between form, ornament and function, or by creating incomprehensible and unpredictable mechanical devices that function according to the laws of unconscious desire, rather than those of reason and science. A similar tension between the organic and the inert is present in Humphrey Jennings's texts, which he resolves by animating and eroticisng the machine, by highlighting its anthropomorphic or animal qualities, but also by mechanising the organic, in an effort to provide a link between both. Jennings's obsession with retrospectively recording the organic development from nature to technology responds to an anxiety over historical discontinuity: that is, a disconnection which he feels between Romantic pre-industrialism and Modern industrialisation. This sense of discontinuity was also perceived by Read:

> The continuous chain of sensibility, which stretches from prehistory to the threshold of the modern age, on that threshold lies snapped. Before any further progress is possible the broken links must be re-forged: the chain of tradition must be re-united. The sensibility that coursed along the nerves and veins of countless generations of craftsmen must be made to flow again in the veins and nerves of our industrial designers. That is the single and essential remedy for our alienation: on that possibility rests the recovery of a sense of greatness in the arts of our time. (Read 1966: 12)

Jennings's *Pandaemonium* (1985) did in fact respond to this desire to document the passage from and connection between the natural and the mechanised world, in order to come to terms with human progress, and to overcome the alienating and dehumanising power of the machine. Work on *Pandaemonium* started in the 1930s. This colossal project involved the compilation of texts of varied nature and origin to document the coming of the machine age and the way it shaped the intellectual development of Britain from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century, while at the same time recording the intellectual reactions to the changes

brought about by the Industrial Revolution. In his introduction to the book, Jennings describes it as "the imaginative history of the Industrial Revolution. Neither the political history, nor the mechanical history, nor the social history nor the economic history, but the imaginative history" (Jennings 1985: xxxv).[503] By means of this diachronic perspective and polyphonic narration of the development of the English imagination as shaped by the machine, Jennings created a mythical history of modern Britain. Moreover, many of the principles underlying the composition of *Pandaemonium* were also present in Jennings's Surrealist texts: fragmentation, juxtaposition, a huge variety of sources and an interest in common images as paths to the collective unconscious. Predictably, the three governing images in Jennings's texts (the machine, the horse and the Romantic poet) also recur in *Pandemonium*.[504]

As we have seen, this fascination with the machine finds its way into the writings of many artists and critics around this time and sheds light on Jennings's work. For example, at the time of the first edition of *Art and Industry* in 1934, Herbert Read was a champion of Abstract art in Britain, and it would not be until mid 1935 that he allied with the Surrealists. However, in spite of the criticism's efforts to see Read's evolution from Abstraction to Surrealism as one from reason to irrationality, this opposition was not maintained in Read's propositions.[505] Read's visionary scepticism regarding Roger Fry's comments on the lack of aesthetic quality in industrial design anticipated the *surrealisation* of abstract and functional objects which would later take place in British Surrealism:

> Roger Fry once doubted whether a typewriter could ever be beautiful, but in recent years new designs for typewriters have been evolved which are infinitely better in shape and appearance than previous models, and though one might still hesitate to call them works of art, they are certainly progressing in that direction. (Read 1966: 60)

In his article "Poetry of the Mass-Produced Utility" (1928), Salvador Dalí had rejected the Cubist decorative aesthetics in favour of the modern *poetics* of English industrial design. The

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[503] The introduction was composed by Charles Madge from the notes that Jennings left.

[504] *Pandemonium* was never published during Jennings's lifetime, and it was not until 1985, and after a huge editorial task carried out by his daughter Mary-Lou Jennings and Charles Madge, that the text was finally published, thirty-five years after Jennings's death. For an account of the "troubled publication history" of the work, see Kevin Jackson's *Humphrey Jennings* (2004): 364-372. According to Jackson, Ruthven Todd was proposed by Kathleen Raine to edit *Pandaemonium*, but he declined (Jackson 2004: 370).

[505] Read noted that both Abstraction and Surrealism shared that fear of external reality to which Worringer had alluded. Also, many twentieth-century artists oscillated between Abstraction and Surrealism (Miró), evolved from the former to the latter (Duchamp), or combined both (Picasso). In Britain, the abstract group Unit One was the germen of pictorial Surrealism, and several Abstract artists (Paul Nash, Henry Moore), merged Abstract and Surrealist elements in their works.

emphasis that he placed on the anonymity of mass-produced goods as a path to the collective unconscious enlightens an analysis of Humphrey Jennings's texts:

> Modernity does not mean canvases painted by Sonia Delaunay, nor does it mean Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*. It means hockey pullovers of anonymous English manufacturing, it means film comedies, also anonymously made, of the *loony* type. The decorative art of today is not ceramics, furniture, or cubist wallpaper. It is the English pipe, a filing cabinet made of steel. (Dalí 1998: 58)

In Humphrey Jennings's collagistic texts (created from material found in mass-produced magazines and books), anonymity (of the fragments which make up the whole) contributes to the collectivisation and democratisation of the end product, which consequently loses, in Walter Benjamin's terms, the *aura* of uniqueness and authority traditionally associated with high art. This is for Jennings the genuine character of the new literature in what Benjamin called *the age of mechanical reproduction*: that is, a collective literature in which common images open the path to a new collective consciousness, and a constant re-elaboration of new ideas through common or recurrent images which thus recover their historical significance.

Marxist notions of material development and industrialism are also inherent in Jennings's thought: his struggle for better social conditions was transferred to his texts, in which a yearning for a time when the machine is no longer a threat but a helper predominates. Similar ideas were already present in Oscar Wilde's proto-Anarchist treatise *The Soul of Man Under Socialism* (1878):

> All unintellectual labour, all monotonous, dull labour, all labour that deals with dreadful things, and involves unpleasant conditions, must be done by machinery. Machinery must work for us in coal mines, and do all sanitary services, and be the stoker of steamers, and clean the streets, and run messages on wet days, and do anything that is tedious or distressing. At present machinery competes against man. Under proper conditions machinery will serve man. (Wilde 2001: 140)

In *Poetry and Anarchism* (1938), Read would go one step further in advocating a return to nature through technology:

> I have embraced industrialism, tried to give it its true aesthetic principles, all because I want to be through with it, want to get to the other side of it, into a world of electric power and mechanical plenty when man can once more return to the land, not as a peasant but as a lord. (Read 1947: 9)

The idea that underlies these texts, but also Jennings's Surrealist compositions, is the need to change material conditions so that man can reconcile the machine with his own historical

development. As a corollary, sound connections must be found between pre-industrial and post-industrial forms of artistic expression (i.e. images) so that individuals may retain a sense of their own humanity in the mechanised world: art and poetry must survive the machine age.

3.3.3. Machines and Horses.

Interestingly enough, no study of the work of Humphrey Jennings addresses specifically his Surrealist textual poetics and, whenever some reference is included, if at all, critics tend to neglect the ways in which textual manipulation contributes to revealing Freudian themes through which socio-political concerns are reworked.[506] It seems even stranger that, although it is widely acknowledged that Jennings's obsessive interest in the conjunction of equine and mechanistic imagery pervades his whole work, such a conjunction is never viewed within the Freudian frame in which other Surrealist works are studied. In fact, it has only been Paul Nougé who, in his "Final Advice" to Humphrey Jennings in *London Bulletin*, publicly warned against the dangers of certain social applications of orthodox Freudianism, and complained of the abuse of Oedipal imagery and sexual symbolism in all realms of art and existence (Nougé 1938: 5-6).[507] Even so, Jennings's interest in the machine was certainly not of a purely technological or historical order, as it also reveals a certain erotic fetishism. In a letter to his wife, Cicely Jennings, from Paris on 13 April 1939, he showed his enthusiasm at the prospect of watching *La Bête Humaine* (1938), a film in which the locus of sexual perversity and psychological turmoil is a train in constant and rapid motion.[508] Effectively, the machine and its natural counterpart the horse function as fetish images in Jennings's Surrealist poetics: they both become recurrent obsessions, in many cases equivalent images, in which the writer indulges. Although he makes use of them consciously (these images are not randomly interspersed in his texts, but rather become the conscious centre of his compositions), it is the erotic associations and suggestions that constantly emerge through textual manipulation. Their erotic pulse is felt in evocations of unconscious visions of horses and locomotives which have their origin in Jennings's childhood and are therefore related to the figure of his grandfather, who thus becomes the absent presence in his texts. However, it is also felt in the association of these images with issues of repression and in the constant placing of animal and machine in relation to technological advancement, an idea which raises not only questions of reproductive and organic development, but also of gradual dehumanisation and, therefore, of

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[506] Although not from this perspective, Rod Mengham has recently dealt with Jennings's textual poetics in an enlightening essay, "Bourgeois News: Humphrey Jennings and Charles Madge" (2001).

[507] This was probably a reference to Jennings's text "The Boyhood of Byron" (1936), in which the Freudian element is uppermost.

[508] The letter is reproduced in Mary-Lou Jennings's *Humphrey Jennings: Film-Maker, Painter, Poet* (1982): 22.

extinction. In a letter that Dillon Barry, Jennings's assistant, wrote to Charles Madge, she revealed that Jennings effectively feared "that the coming of the Machine was destroying something in our life" (in Jackson 2004: 365).

Towards the end of 1936, Jennings took part, together with Charles Madge and David Gascoyne, in the initial discussions that led to the formation of Mass-Observation, an application of Surrealist principles to the creation of a poetics of the masses, and he signed the foundational letter published in *The New Statesman and Nation* in January 1937. He and Madge were responsible for *May the Twelfth* (1937), the first *magnum opus* of the organisation, and he designed the cover of a pamphlet entitled *Mass Observation*, which Madge and Tom Harrisson published in June 1937. The pamphlet placed special emphasis on the railway's capacity to modify, not only the materiality of everyday life, but our very "conception of space, of speed and of power", rendering mass activities possible (Jennings and Madge 1937: 16). It was the machine's potential for transforming mass consciousness and the ways in which the collective unconscious found new forms and images in a mechanised society that genuinely interested Jennings as a Surrealist. Moreover, he, together with Trevelyan, Penrose and Read, defended the Surrealist stance in the discussion between Realists and Surrealists organised by the A.I.A. on 16 March 1938. Although his sense of Britishness and his eventual adoption of a publicising style may be seen as a turn to propagandistic Realism, throughout the thirties he remained faithful to Surrealism, condemning the suppression of psychological elements in Realistic modes of representation. In this regard, one of his most conspicuous virtues as a Surrealist was his capacity to explore psychological formations in the experience of the quotidian, to find the marvellous in the banal, and the uncanny in the familiar. Thus, he understood dreams as collective thoughts which could not be separated from everyday life. So, when, on 8 June 1938, the *Daily Telegraph* argued that Paul Nash was not a Surrealist eccentric, but rather "an acclimatised Dorset man", Jennings was suspicious of the opposition that was established between the world of dreams and the customary experience of the English countryside (Jennings 1938a: 40).

Jennings's interest in the effects of industrialisation and the machine age on the collective unconscious crystallised in a series of articles, texts and photographs published in *London Bulletin*, of which he was an assistant editor from April to July 1938. In fact, he worked extensively with E.L.T. Mesens, the chief editor of the journal, in the elaboration of a double number devoted to "The Impact of Machines". His article "Do Not Lean Out of the Window!" was Jennings's main contribution to the issue. This is a theoretical prose sketch composed of several texts which would be later reworked into his *Pandaemonium* (1985). The texts he

makes use of, and for which he provides dates and authors, belong to a variety of sources, ranging from Friedrich Engels's *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (1845) to Robert Michael Ballantyne's *The Iron Horse* (1871), William Blake's *Vala* (1893) and Wilfred L. Steel's *History of the London and North Western Railway* (1914). Some of these had already appeared, in a disguised and manipulated form, in Jennings's Surrealist texts. Intended to provide evidence of the impact of machines in everyday life and the ways in which the individual adapts to the material conditions of a fully industrialised age, Jennings's text captured the fears and obsessions that the machine prompted in the modern imagination. Its title, "Do Not Lean Out of the Window!", was taken from the warnings placed in French railways which, ubiquitous as they were, managed to enter the Surrealists' collective unconscious. Surrealist writers and artists found in this prohibition a fruitful source for their mechanistic imagery, and it became an expression of the dangers posed by external reality. In fact, the directive may be said to be the most Avant-Garde representation of Worringer's *dread of space*.[509]

Jennings's poetic elaboration of the horse, both as a natural and a mechanical image, had acquired Surrealist significance in his article "The Iron Horse", published in the June 1938 issue of the journal as an *hors d'oeuvres* for The Impact of Machines exhibition that would take place at the London Gallery the following month. The exhibition focused on representations of the machine from the 15th century to modern painting.[510] The exhibition committee was formed by Arthur Elton, Humphrey Jennings and E.L.T. Mesens. "Machines are animals created by man": thus begins Jennings's article, which outlines the literary development of the interrelation of man, horse and machine, from the Medieval identification of the knight and his horse, to the image of the animal as machine in Blake's "The Tyger" (1794), and the desire-bound pseudo-machines of Surrealism.[511] "As man is related to the real animals so every machine has a latent *human* content" (Jennings 1938e: 27): this identification of man and machine, or the idea that the machine has a life of its own and is therefore pseudo-animal or even pseudo-human, pervades Jennings's work.

Especially interesting is Jennings's analysis of the Surrealist "anti-artistic creation of pseudo-machines" (Jennings 1938e: 27) as a reintroduction of the mythical, irrational and

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[509] Buñuel and Dalí entertained the possibility of using a version of the French prohibition, "Défense de se pencher au dedans" ("Do not lean to the inside"), as the title of their *Un Chien Andalou* (1929), pointing to the dangers of psychological probing.

[510] These included works by Picabia, Ernst, Duchamp, Ray, and also Jennings's *The Glass Factory* (1937 drawing), *The Locomotive* (1938 oil) and *Edinburgh* (1936 photograph).

[511] A complete integration of animal and machine was achieved in his painting *Horse's Head* (1937-1940) in which a geometric and metallic carcass engulfs the organic body of the animal. The painting is reproduced in the exhibition catalogue *A Salute to British Surrealism 1930-1950* (1985): 30.

unconscious element into an abstract and inorganic form. Moreover, in his article, Jennings establishes a parallelism between the technical developments in archaeological excavation and Surrealism's psychoanalytic exploits: through both, some unknown and latent content is unearthed. A totemic conception of the Surrealist machine-object appears in Jennings's definition of Surrealism as a "'profanation' of 'Art' parallel to the engineers' 'profanation' of the primitive 'sacred places' of the earth" (Jennings 1938e: 28). For him, Surrealist artists attempt to gain control over an overwhelming reality with which they find it difficult to come to terms. Thus, through the creation of pseudo-machines, artists retain, in Freud's own terms in *Totem and Taboo* (1913), "omnipotence of thought" over reality. Such is the aim of several objects produced by British Surrealists in the 1930s, such as Julian Trevelyan's *Machine for Making Clouds* (1937) and Penrose's *The Dew Machine (1937)*, in which the alchemical possibilities of the machine are explored, and the magical and the mechanical merge as reality is subjected to the laws of unconscious desire. Ultimately, what is compelling about Jennings's theory of the machine (although he never articulated it in this way) is his defence of the Surrealist machine-object's potential to alter material conditions, just as the industrial machine had done at the outset of the Industrial Revolution. And this is possible mainly for two reasons: firstly, because, as an object that exists in the real world, it alters the space that it occupies in reality; and secondly, because, by liberating unconscious fears and desires, it also expands consciousness of the material conditions which propitiate repression. Awareness of these conditions would eventually lead to social transformation.

For Jennings, the humanised machine and the mechanised horse became the governing images through which the ideology of modern Britain was revealed. And it was through the poetic vision that both images became in fact interchangeable. In an unpublished manuscript entitled "Beyond the Life of Man", partially reproduced in Mary-Lou Jennings's *Humphrey Jennings: Film-Maker, Painter, Poet* (1982), Jennings explained how the identification of horse and machine was made possible through the poetic image:

> A horse is a horse, an apple is an apple. An image of a horse is an image of a horse, and an image of an apple is an image of an apple. An image of a horse is an image of a locomotive, an image of an apple is an image of the sun and so on. But they are not images of God, or divine Wisdom. Nor are they significant forms or 'pure forms': an apple is an apple. An object cannot immediately exchange its being with another object. An apple cannot immediately become a coal. But an *image* of an object is immediately exchangeable with another *image*. An image of a horse can become an

image of a locomotive. How? Precisely through poetry and painting – 'La terre est bleue comme une orange'.[512] (in Jennings 1982: 46)

A total union of both images, horse and locomotive, is achieved, for instance, in Jennings's "Report on the Industrial Revolution" (1937), in which he creates a striking literary montage by means of juxtaposing fragments from two very dissimilar studies, Robert Michael Ballantyne's *The Iron Horse* (1871) and Charles Hamilton Smith's *Natural History of Horses* (1841). In Jennings's report, both images become so connected and interdependent that the boundaries between the source texts are completely obliterated. Since the text is very short, it may be reproduced in its entirety so that the effects of literary montage can be perceived (I have italicised the segments that belong to Smith's study in order to differentiate them from Ballantyne's):

> The material transformer of the world had just been born. It was trotted out in its skeleton, to the music of a mineral train from the black country, with heart and lungs and muscles exposed to view in complex hideosity. *It once ranged wild in the marshy forests of the Netherlands, where the electrical phenomenon and the pale blue eyes connected it with apparitions, demons, wizards and divinities.* (Jennings 1937: 41-42)

The juxtaposition of both texts creates a sense of uncanniness in the description of the machine. Although the process of animation to which the "iron horse" is subjected is already present in Ballantyne's study, Jennings's use of textual dislocation (the fragments are taken from different parts of Ballantyne's book) contributes to further defamiliarising the image of the locomotive: by giving it a skeleton, a heart, lungs and muscles, and by establishing a connection between its birth and rhythms of the "black country", Jennings highlights the irrational processes that took part in the creation of the first machine. Furthermore, the introduction of Smith's fragment on mythical visions of the horse in Northern Europe creates the effect that the machine is the referent in this passage: in Jennings's textual montage, since there is no mention of the horse of the original text, the pronoun "it" can only refer to "the material transformer of the world" (i.e. the locomotive). This reinforces the connection of the machine with the supernatural: its depiction, associated with "apparitions, demons, wizards and divinities" is reminiscent of the people's fears and superstitions regarding the machine in the early industrial era.[513]

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[512] The quotation is from Paul Éluard's *L'amour, la poésie* (1929).

[513] A consequence of these fears was the 19th-century Luddite movement in Britain. Already in the 20th century, more modern and elaborate representations of the machine as castrator often appeared in Expressionist works, from Eugene O'Neill's *Dynamo* (1922) to Elmer Rice's *The Adding Machine* (1923) and Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1927).

The connection between the machine and the supernatural was further explored by Arthur Elton in his article "The Gods Move House" (1938), included in the machine issue of *London Bulletin*. In this article, Elton examines the processes of animation and mythologisation of the inanimate which are central to human mythologies as explanations of the material world. For him, the gods, as man-made constructions (i.e. myths), were created in the *image and likeness* of the human being, and so is the modern machine, which replaces the ancient gods as the individual's mechanism to cope with the unknown. The machine is, as the gods were, anthropomorphic because, by making it human, the unknown becomes familiar and less threatening, easier to comprehend. With the Industrial Revolution, science superseded religion and the machine replaced the gods, which had been previously used to provide explanations of physical phenomena:

> The Gods had moved house. They left the clouds and forests and waves to live in the machine. Above all machines the locomotive seemed to have life and vitality. It had appetites, for it ate coke. It had free will, for it moved without human agency. It was an animal. It was human. (Elton 1938: 10)

The machine thus became the new god, and was given the name of the gods and the stars.[514] Science and technology intended to banish fears over the unknown by providing logical and rational explanations of reality. However, as the Surrealists rightly noted, there are aspects of reality (the *surrealities* of the unconscious) over which science has not gained control yet. The work of the Surrealists, not completely devoid of a certain mysticism, was a step in this direction. It is with Surrealism, Elton argues, that "The Gods have been driven back into the unconscious": "To-day artists are looking to machines of a dream world, machines with a life of their own divorced from functionalism, self-animating, self-sufficient" (Elton 1938: 12). Thus, the Surrealist object-machine becomes a continuation of the individual's psyche and a projection of its unconscious desires and fears. This idea is further explored in passages from André Breton's study of Duchamp's *The Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors, Even* (1915-1923), which Jennings translated into English also for The Impact of Machines issue of *London Bulletin*. Duchamp's work is described by Breton as "the trophy of a fabulous chase over virgin country, to the borders of eroticism, of philosophic speculation, of the competitive spirit of sport, of the latest elements of science, of lyricism and of humour" (Breton 1938: 17). In *The Large Glass*, as it came to be known, the desiring machine is an extension of man's psyche: the

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[514] Stuart Legg's article "A Note on Locomotive Names" (1938), published in the same issue of *London Bulletin*, focused on the names given to the first steam locomotives in England. Sarcastically, he pointed out that one locomotive named after Stanley Baldwin had been recently withdrawn from service.

tormented cogs of the bachelor-machine point to auto-eroticism and onanistic sublimation, and the Bride is the desire-motor which creates the electric connections between her own desire and the bachelors' sexual longings. As we can see, many others among the Surrealists shared Jennings's fascination with the relation between the machine, nature and the individual.

3.3.4. Jennings's Reports.

During his lifetime, Jennings collected and compiled texts, or relics of them, almost compulsively, becoming a sort of textual antiquarian or collector of literary rarities. As I have already anticipated, his poetic compositions, which he usually called "reports", are textual collages obtained from the juxtaposition and superposition of pre-existing material. The texts of which Jennings makes use are of varied and, in many cases, bizarre origin. Among other sources, Jennings resorts to old travel journals (William Edward Parry's 1826 *Journal of a Third Voyage for the Discovery of a Northwest Passage*, the 1821 *Travels of Cosmo the Third*, John Evans's 1817 *An Excursion to Windsor*), classical studies of literary figures (Edmund William Gosse's 1884 study of Thomas Gray, John Galt's 1830 biography of Byron), works of literary criticism (Gilbert West's 1749 edition of the odes of Pindar), and a miscellany of eccentricities which respond to Jennings's own obsessive fetishism (J.H. Reeves's 1875 *The Orange County Stud Book*, Charles Hamilton Smith's 1841 *The Natural History of Horses*, Wilfred L. Steel's 1914 *The History of the London and North Western Railway*, R. M. Ballantyne's 1871 *The Iron Horse*). Although his sources are varied, there is a tendency to resort to British texts, which signals Jennings's concern with notions of national identity through collective imagery, a concern which was central to his activities in Mass-Observation. In his text "The Boyhood of Byron", published in *Contemporary Poetry and Prose* in December 1936, Jennings's metaliterary analysis of the role of the poet as antiquarian is not only an exposition of his own literary technique, but it also reveals Jennings's Surrealist belief in the alchemy of the poetic word:

> The labours of the antiquary, the verbal critic, the collator of mouldering manuscripts, may be preparing the way for the achievement of some splendid genius, who may combine their minute details into a magnificent system, or evolve from a multitude of particulars some general principle, destined to illuminate the career of future ages.[515]
> (Jennings 1936c: 146)

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[515] This fragment is taken from Samuel Bailey's preface to *Essays on the Formation and Publication of Opinions* (1821). For both Jennings and Bailey knowledge is a collective property: the crucial discovery of one man is not his own, but the result of historical progress and collective interactions.

It is this inductive process that Jennings sought in the composition of his texts: through the act of collecting and compiling, collating, re-arranging and editing texts, collective images would emerge that would lead to an understanding of the ideas that shape modern consciousness. Kathleen Raine expressed it in the following terms:

> Thus the poet re-assumes the ancient role at once of national prophet, and reader of the auguries; not from entrails or yarrow-stalks, but from [. . .] the seemingly fortuitous recurring images in the daily records. Anything and everything speaks to the augur attuned to its meaning. The two apparently irreconcilable opposites are in such poetry brought together: imaginative inspiration, and a realistic objectivity. (Raine 1967: 48)

What is relevant about Jennings's approach to Surrealist writing is his theory that the literary work is so by virtue of perception, for the poet-critic must be *receptive* to the discovery of not only commonality in the dissimilar, but also of the unfamiliar in the familiar: those enlightening images that "contain in little a whole world –they are the knots in a great net of tangled time and space- the moments at which the situation of humanity is clear –even if only for the flash time of the photographer or the lightning" (Jennings 1985: xxxv).[516] As such, the text is created by a collective body of writers, rather than by the single personality of the author. Thus, Jennings dispossesses the artistic and literary piece from the aura of uniqueness and authority which academic notions of artistic creation have bestowed upon it. At the same time, he also transgresses concepts by which capitalism has appropriated art for its own economic ends: concepts such as authorship, originality and technique, which have turned the collective work of art into a luxurious commodity and a privilege of the few. David Gascoyne expressed it thus in his *A Short Survey of Surrealism* (1935):

> The most scandalous thing about Surrealist art, form the point of view of the reactionary critics, is its tendency to do away with the old hierarchies of technical skill, 'fine drawing,' craftsmanship, etc. Surrealism represents the point at which poetry and painting merge one into the other [. . .] What would happen to the artist's prestige, they wondered (and their own, reflected from it), if such a thing were to become more general? It would vanish; or the idea of what constitutes an artist would have to undergo a great change. (Gascoyne 1935a: 80)

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[516] Jennings's definition of the image here powerfully recalls Walter Benjamin's understanding of Surrealism as "a *profane illumination*, a materialistic, anthropological inspiration" (Benjamin 1999: 209).

It is in this process of collectivisation and democratisation of the written word that we observe in Jennings's texts a most genuine reconciliation of image and ideology.[517] However, Jennings's reports are not straight disruptors of power relations and social structures, as the expectations created by his own categorisation of his texts as "reports" are doubly thwarted. On the one hand, he subverts the conventions of this journalistic genre by presenting discrete and disconnected prose sections which, lacking narrative development and exhibiting in many cases a high degree of lyricism, remain fairly inconsequential at the informative level. Moreover, these are texts which do not *report* on any external reality, but on an internal process: that of the poet-editor who, by re-arranging the fragments of already existing texts, gives the reader a glimpse into the unconscious mechanisms that operate in the poet's imagination. Of course, what Jennings considers collective images are also reflections of his own fetishistic and unconscious fixations: the machine, the horse and the Romantic personality. On the other hand, since these are texts factually written by various hands, they are not conventional reports, but rather polymorphic and polyphonic accounts, referring to various realities from varied perspectives, and brought together in a new entity whose meaning transcends that of the sum of its fragments. In the introduction to his *Pandaemonium*, Jennings stated: "I do not claim that they [the fragments, the images] represent truth –they are too varied, even contradictory, for that. But they represent human experience" (Jennings 1985: xxxv). For Jennings, the unconscious image is, insofar as collective, of an impersonal nature and, like the Surrealist object, an *objet trouvé*, a verbal unit which is not constructed, but which *appears* and is made available to the conscious mind in the automatic process of re-assembling remnants of extant realities. In this way, he avoids the personal element in his poetry and therefore rejects the *invented* or *original* expression. In her contribution to John Grierson's tribute to Jennings, "Writer and Artist" (1950), Kathleen Raine explains the significance of this technique in his painting and poetry:

> Just as, in poetry, he used already existing phrases, so in painting he invariably worked on images from postcards, prints or coloured plates, but never from nature. This he felt was important because such images were already human currency. From these the task of the artist is to abstract the contemporary formal values. (Raine 1950: n.p.)

Thus, in Jennings's literary collages, old images, old forms, are given new contexts and new meanings: by re-historicising them, the poet actualises their significance in society, and they become the true vehicles of modern consciousness. According to Jennings, Kathleen Raine

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[517] This clearly contradicts Gascoyne's concept of the poet as one endowed with a special sensitivity, and is closer to Sykes Davies's popular notion of poetic creation.

claims, "The imagination [. . .] must test itself continually against historical actuality" (Raine 1967: 50).

Jennings's poem-reports are his most important contribution to British Surrealist writing of the 1930s. The nature and structure of these, although in many ways similar to the reports contained in *Pandaemonium*, are nevertheless very different in conception and purpose. In a letter from his assistant Dillon Barry to Charles Madge regarding the author's directions for the edition of *Pandaemonium*, she stated that Jennings was clear regarding the manipulation of the original texts:

> He stressed that on no account would he cut down the extracts as opposed to eliminating them. Apparently when he first started on this work he had tried to condense the extracts & shorten them in some cases. He then found that in doing this, seemingly irrelevant facts were cut out, and then in the light of his later work he found that these seemingly irrelevant facts formed a vital part of the extract. In other words he made it a principle, & he was very definite about this, that one can take *out* an extract from a main work, but that in cutting it *down* one interferes with the basic structure of the thought expressed, and this one should not do. (in Jackson 2004: 365)

In spite of this, Jennings did not exhibit such a strict approach regarding the manipulation of original material in his literary reports, for which he re-arranged, mutilated, displaced and amalgamated a not insignificant number of texts. Through the transgression of what he understood as a popular or familiar discourse in some cases, Classical and canonical or even scientific in others, his reports contribute to unveiling a latent, collective content which emerges, not through imitation, repetition or re-presentation of extant material, but rather as the inevitable outcome of his systematic technique of displacement: the marvellous is thus made manifest in the *apparition* of common images obtained through a bringing together of dissimilar texts. Jennings's words in his analysis of Magritte's paintings can be easily applied to his own poetics: "Poetry, according to Aristotle, implies a 'bringing together'" (Jennings 1938c: 15). In Surrealism, he states, this "bringing together is in fact an 'event' beyond choice" (Jennings 1938c: 15), highlighting the chance element inherent in automatic juxtaposition. Replacing Magritte's name for Jennings's in the following statement provides the exact measure of the social significance of this *bringing together*: "It is of the likenesses and discrepancies between the image and the reality that these events are composed, and it is in the relentless logic of these likenesses and discrepancies that Magritte sees the central human situation" (Jennings 1938c: 15). The role of the poet in modern society, as he says in "Poetry

and National Life", becomes relevant through his capacity to find a modern significance in old forms, and new ways to relate the present to the past:

> That idea of extracting an idea of 'what I am' from the past is a thing that the poet does for himself and especially it is a thing that he can do for the community; I mean he can try to tell them who they are. Now he can't tell the community who they are unless he does two things: unless he talks about the things that the community knows about, the things that they're interested in, and unless he also looks on the community's past –at the figures, the monuments, the achievements, the defeats, or whatever it may be, that have made the community what it is. (in Jackson 1993: 282)

Although Jennings's vision of the poet may be seen in the light of T.S. Eliot's thesis in his essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (1919), Jennings transcends the Modernist sacralisation of tradition, by democratising poetry, which reflects what Mengham has called "a left-wing political agenda" (Mengham 2009: 692), and by making of tradition, not a model or an influence, but a manifest presence, which reflects his Avant-Garde aesthetics. His interest in popular culture emerges repeatedly in pastiche constructions which juxtapose classical works with forms of popular literature, and texts of scientific erudition with texts of popular wisdom: in doing so, he reinstates the collective character of human thought, appropriated by scholars and philosophers, and contributes to restoring the mythologies of the people and for the people.[518] If, as Jennings defends, "to be or not to be" is in fact a product, not of Shakespeare, but of the English language, the ideas that emerge in his texts (especially those regarding the nature and effects of industrialisation or technological advancement) are the products of Western human thought. Thus, in "The Boyhood of Byron" (1936) for instance, he combines excerpts from Alexander von Humboldt's *Cosmos: a Sketch of a Physical Description of the Universe* (1845-1847) with fragments from nineteenth-century magazines of domestic and general knowledge, such as *The Family Magazine or General Abstract of Useful Knowledge* and *The Magazine of Domestic Economy*. The result is a text in which the familiar merges with more unfamiliar modes of discourse and scholarly and popular images are blended, giving rise to collective ideas whose significance is realized in the present: through a process of automatic juxtaposition, common images emerge in which collective ideas and concerns are contained. These are what Charles Madge would call the *dominant images* of a period. In the textual

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[518] This was precisely what photography had achieved for Jennings. In his article "Who does that Remind You of?" (1938), he showed a similar Marxist conception of photography as "the system with which the people can be pictured by the people for the people: simple to operate, results capable of mass reproduction and circulation, effects generally considered truthful ('the camera cannot lie') [. . .]" (Jennings 1938m: 22). Similarly, Mass-Observation was intended as an "anthropology of our own people" (Harrisson, Jennings and Madge 1937: 155).

collage "The Boyhood of Byron" (1936), the image of the animated machine, the mechanised horse and the Romantic poet *appeared* to Jennings as the mythical configurations of the collective unconscious of modern Britain. Through them, he understood, it became possible to enlarge consciousness of the psychological mechanisms behind unconscious repression, of the economic mechanisms behind capitalist exploitation, and of the individual's alienation from nature in modern society. Awareness of these would eventually lead to social transformation.

Although it is generally acknowledged that Jennings's literary texts are collagistic in nature, I am not persuaded that there is a real critical awareness of the extent to which this is true, when virtually every sentence of which he makes use is borrowed literally from a previous text.[519] The question of plagiarism and originality in the work of art, which, as will be seen, also underlay the tensions between Read's and Jennings's conception of Surrealism, was one with which Jennings was already familiar. In his essay "Surrealism's Vertiginous Descent on Britain" (1986), Michel Remy recounts how Jennings approached the issue when he was accused of plagiarism in his collage, *The Minotaure* (1934), exhibited at the London International Surrealist Exhibition:

> Humphrey Jennings's *Minotaure* was the subject of a violent argument between the artist and one Mrs. Tait, a miniature portrait painter. *Minotaure* represented Lord Kitchener wearing a fez, with a miniature of a child upside down on his chest. Mrs. Tait, a member of the Royal Miniature Society, 'claimed that the miniature had been cut out of a colour reproduction of her own painting of her son, done sixteen years before.' Jennings simply answered that he was not 'interested in other people's views' and that in any case he did not claim the picture to be his own. 'To a surrealist, everything is anonymous and everything in the world is material to create imagery'.[520]
> (Remy 1986: 27)

Jennings's words on plagiarism serve to enlighten his use of textual collage in the reports. For him, the work of art, be it a poem or a painting, is an autonomous entity which, from the moment it is created, becomes a collective property independent from the artist and in the hands of the public to make free use of it. Related to this, Jeremy MacClancy, in his article "Brief Encounter: The Meeting, in Mass-Observation, of British Surrealism and Popular Anthropology" (1995), has explained that "Poets were not to create, and could only

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[519] Michel Remy and Rod Mengham have pointed, in general terms, to the collagistic nature of Jennings's writings. The recent digitalisation of nineteenth and twentieth-century texts has made it possible for me to trace the sources of approximately ninety per cent of the sentences in Jennings's Surrealist compositions.

[520] The incident was reported in the *Daily Mirror*, 20 June 1936.

communicate a kind of truth to the extent that the images they employed were public, collective and historical" (MacClancy 1995: 497).[521] This is precisely what Jennings does, responding more literally than any other British Surrealist to Lautréamont's maxim, taken from Chant VI in *Maldoror* (1869) and hailed by the Surrealists as the ultimate poetic truth, that "La poésie doit être faite par tous, non par un" (Lautréamont 1965: 333). In a 1937 broadcast on poetry for the BBC, Jennings also addressed the question of literary plagiarism and denounced the narrowness of literary critics who condemn it. According to Jennings, they are wrong in their

> assumption that certain ideas in literature belong to particular people, and [. . .] that in a definite statement –like Shakespeare's 'To be or not to be,' for example –each of these words belongs somehow to Shakespeare. To me that really is not so –they're simply part of the English language.[522] (in Jackson 1993: 247)

A basic difference can be thus drawn between the intertextual echoes, repetitions and references that are found in Sykes Davies's texts and the complex editing labour carried out by Jennings in his reports. And it is interesting to note that, whereas Sykes Davies always resorts to literary texts, Jennings only makes use of non-literary sources in his textual collages. This was explained by Charles Madge in "A Note on Images" (1951), where he also pointed to the plastic and liberating nature of Jennings's images:

> Jennings in conversation often asserted his independence of literature, which he saw as a muddle of unrealised images and inadequate techniques. His aim was to seize and create 'mutations in the subject,' liberating human perceptions from the literature that surrounds them. The 'subject' of a painting, or a poem, is therefore the nucleus of an image, the ordering point. Humphrey Jennings returned again and again to certain 'subjects,' in his battle to transform them. (in Jennings 1982: 48)

Also, discussing the echoes of Homer, Dante, Milton, Dryden and Young in the poetry of Gray (and it is significant that similar echoes appear too in Sykes Davies), Jennings asserted: "I suggest not that he [Gray] had all the books open in front of him, or that he worked it out in a laborious way, but that he certainly had all these things at the back of his mind" (in Jackson 1993: 248). Jennings's collagistic technique, on the contrary, did require laborious work and

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[521] The idea is actually Kathleen Raine's who, in *Defending Ancient Springs* (1967), stated: "Taking as his starting-point 'the surrealist object,' [Jennings] held [. . .] that 'the image' (he spoke always of 'the image,' never of 'the symbol') was valid just in so far as it was not invented, but discovered: never must the poet 'invent an image; because the kind of truth poetry communicates was, for him, collective, public, and historical" (Raine 1967: 49).
[522] "Plagiarism in Poetry" (8 December 1937). The text is reproduced in Jackson's *The Humphrey Jennings's Film Reader* (1993): 247-250.

having the texts physically available for the author. Thus, whereas the literary collage acquires an organic quality in Sykes Davies, whose work reveals an unconscious play of echoes, allusions and influences, the collage technique in Jennings's texts is of a mechanical nature, for two reasons: firstly, because it requires a conscious process of selection and assemblage in which the poet's imagination, set to restore the continuity that he perceives in the succession of fragments/images, acts as an ordering principle; and secondly, because both writer and reader are automatically forced into a process of textual dissection, and into a continuous revaluation of the relationship, not only among the parts, but especially between the parts and the whole, which is also the relationship between the past (old fragments and images) and the present (the contemporary significance of those images). In many cases, the very attempt to recover that continuity between the parts/past and the whole/present, reveals the gaps that exist between them.

Jennings's first Surrealists texts, the "Three Reports", appeared in *Contemporary Poetry and Prose* in June 1936 and anticipated what would become Jennings's leading images.[523] In these texts, the interaction between the individual and the horse is made patent. The image of the horse already appears in the first report, written in 1935, where the focus gradually shifts from the sky (the meteorological conditions of a horserace day) to the ground (the human figure, the tamer of the animal) and back to the sky again (the phenomenon of the aurora). The juxtaposition of the common and familiar image of the horserace and the mysterious significance that the aurora acquires allows the reader's perception of the text to become multifocal and fragmented. In fact, it is in these shifts that the superposition of two different textual sources is discerned. By privileging the uncanny phenomenon of the aurora over the more banal scenario of the race, the poet defamiliarises the concept and the context of the horserace, as the *reporter* synesthetically looks for an audible supernatural manifestation in a natural, visual phenomenon: "It was always evident that the most attenuated light of the Aurora sensibly dimmed the stars, like a thin veil drawn over them. We frequently listened for any sound proceeding from this phenomenon, but never heard any" (Jennings 1936d: 39). The technique that he uses in this text is literary montage, as he juxtaposes two disconnected images (that of the horserace and that of the aurora) in order to provide the illusion of a single reality, creating a sort of *trompe l'oeil* effect. Although the natural-turned-supernatural phenomenon (the aurora) and the cultural event (the horserace) seem to be concurrent, this only occurs through Jennings's imaginative process of textual

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[523] This first report appears under the title "The Oaks" in Mary-Lou Jennings's *Humphrey Jennings: Film-Maker, Painter, Poet* (1982): 13.

composition. Furthermore, in this text, Jennings, by merging the banal and the supernatural, brings the individual closer to a more magical conception of reality. Of course, this is done through the mediating image of the horse which, although seemingly marginal and anecdotal in the text, becomes the link between the individual's genteel, even snobbish, denaturalised *civilised* customs, and a more instinctive urge to communicate with the unknown.

The horse also constitutes the leading image in the second report, which Jennings wrote in 1935-1936, and in which he juxtaposes a variety of texts which are forced to revolve around this central image.[524] Again the context is that of a horserace so that the horse is not presented in its original state of freedom and wildness, rather it is subjected again to the leading hand of the human tamer, and turned into a cultural commodity which satisfies human desire on two levels. On the one hand, the tamed racehorse is placed at the service of man's basic desire to conquer and subdue nature. Thus, as Jennings's text shows, man controls the pace of the horse, restraining its strength in the initial stages of the race, and urging it into full speed towards the end:

> When they reached the place where they were to start, they mounted, and loosening the reins, let the horses go, keeping them in at the beginning, that they might not be too eager at first setting off, and their strength fail them in consequence at the most important part of the race. And the more they advanced in the course, the more they urged them, forcing them to continue at full speed to the goal [. . .]. (Jennings 1936d: 40)

On the other hand, having become a commodity in modern society, the horse is the object of desire of a bourgeois audience, a cultural product to be consumed. In a highly mechanised society which has substituted the animal for the machine, the horse has lost its potential to *aid* humans in a common struggle for survival and is forced to merely *entertain* them, which may suggest that entertainment, but also subjection and repression of natural instincts, have become necessary for survival in the modern age.

As is usually the case in Surrealism, Jennings's text precludes traditional symbolic interpretation. The horse is portrayed as an image of physical and sexual prowess, but this is constantly thwarted by the restraining influence of the human being, or by factual castration. Even Jennings's use of a fragment from Harold Bailey's *The Lost Language of Symbolism* (1912), which would be expected to provide a theoretical frame in which to analyse the horse

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[524] The sources for this report include Lorenzo Magaloti's *Travels of Cosmo the Third* (1821), Gilbert West's preface to the *Odes of Pindar* (1749), Paul Jamot's preface to a 1930 Delacroix exhibition catalogue, Harold Bailey's *The Lost Language of Symbolism* (1912) and John Evans's *An Excursion to Windsor* (1817).

in terms of universal symbolism, is intended to undermine the very possibility of symbolic interpretation: "The flower-laden horse that figured in this ceremony was the symbol of the Divine Mind or Reason, and resolves itself into the light of EK HU –the great mind, soul, or spirit" (Jennings 1936d: 40). By mutilating and displacing Bailey's text, Jennings deprives the horse of its mythical significance. Whereas Bailey's "flower-laden horse" belongs to an ancient custom in which it is a symbol of everything that is good in nature, the horse in Jennings's text is the winner of a bourgeois parade in which man has the leading hand. However, Jennings also undermines the idea of man as *conqueror* by denying his individual deeds the possibility of becoming the proper subject of odes:

> But whosoever imagines that the victories and praises of the conquerors are the proper subjects of the Odes inscribed to them will find himself mistaken. These victories indeed gave occasion to these songs and are therefore taken notice of by the poet, but as such circumstances could scarcely furnish out matter of an Ode of any length, so would it have been an indecency unknown to the civil equality and freedom as well as to the simplicity of the age, to have filled a poem intended to be sung in public and even at the altars of the Gods, with the praises of one man only.[525]
> (Jennings 1936d: 40)

This, together with the image of the prize-winning horse, seems to suggest that the horse would make a better subject for this kind of laudatory composition. Moreover, although a process of identification between human and animal takes place, a tension emerges between illusory freedom and restraint as the horse is both praised as a symbol of power and passion, and subjected to human control: "'Il avait la passion des chevaux: les aima comme des incarnations de mouvement, de force, et d'élégance. Il les élut pour porteurs et messagers favoris de ses rêves. Il fit le cheval femme et le cheval fée'" (Jennings 1936d: 40).[526] This kind of attitude reflects the process of fetishisation of the horse: it is deprived of the very qualities (passion, freedom of movement, strength, elegance) which make it valuable for humans. Moreover, these are also culturally constructed attributes which, being alien to the horse itself, are imposed on it by the human gaze. The fetishisation of the animal is further

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[525] The whole fragment devoted to the theme of the ode is taken from Gilbert West's preface to his edition of the *Odes of Pindar* (1749).

[526] "He had the passion of horses: he loved them as incarnations of movement, of strength and elegance. He appointed them special bearers and messengers of his dreams. He made the horse woman and the horse fairy" (my translation). This fragment, originally about the French painter Eugène Delacroix, is from Paul Jamot's preface to the catalogue of an exhibition of Delacroix's paintings, commemorating the centenary of Romanticism, in Paris in 1930. Jennings probably visited the exhibition and was attracted to Delacroix's horse paintings.

reinforced by the implications inherent in Paul Jamot's words: the horse has not only become the carrier of man's physical weight, but also of his psychological burdens. In Delacroix's paintings, the horse is depicted as fierce and indomitable, but these are only qualities which are imposed on it by the projection of irrational and unconscious human desire upon them. Although for Jennings it is through the horse (i.e. through re-connection with nature) that an ulterior reality can be accessed, the psychoanalytical import of the dynamics between freedom and restraint that is created in his text provides a new key for analysing it in terms of repression/castration: the authoritative figure of the horse trainer which restrains the horse's freedom is, in Jennings's childhood memories, also the grandfather and, by extension, the father himself.[527] As will be seen, the ideological implications of the Oedipal theme are fully realised in "The Boyhood of Byron" (1936).

The third text in the series of reports is "The Funeral of a Nobleman" (1936), which brings together Jennings's two other leading images: Byron and the railway. As Roland Penrose noted, it was Jennings's Romantic sensibility that brought him to Surrealism (Penrose 1981: 78). Byron was revered by the Surrealists as the epitome of the Romantic (also the Surrealist) personality, a personality of abject morality and subversive behaviour. In his introduction to *Surrealism* (1936), Read acclaimed him for these Sadean qualities:

> [Byron] is the only English poet who might conceivably occupy, in our hierarchy, the position held in France by the Marquis de Sade. The function of such figures is to be so positive in their immorality, that morality becomes negative by comparison. [. . .] By all the rules which condemn such [Byron's life] as worthless and without honour, he should long ago have sunk into an oblivion from which his poetry would not have rescued him. [. . .] irrational in his life, he is now the object of irrational devotion. (Read 1971: 51-52)

Because of this tendency to focus on the figure, it is interesting to note that Jennings's use of Byron as poetic material always draws on his biography rather than his poetry.[528] He also saw in Byron the representation of the politically committed Romantic poet, and, in the text, Jennings's anachronistic and fictitious re-interpretation of Byron's funeral grows increasingly

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[527] This idea is further reinforced by the fact that racehorses which are difficult to lead are generally castrated. Jennings was surely aware of this, either through his grandfather, or through specialised magazines.
[528] Jennings's engagement with the theme of Byron's death in the Greek town of Missolonghi was in a way a macabre anticipation of his own untimely death on the Greek island of Poros.

unsettling as it presents a reality which the reader can never completely grasp.[529] A strong contrast is initially created between the death of the poet and the sunny and enthusiastic atmosphere which surrounds it. The dreamlike sensation of the passage is conveyed by the apparently absurd and capricious attention to detail. What ought to be the central event, Byron's funeral, is only mentioned obliquely, and it is to the secondary circumstances that attention is drawn, for example: "The apartment in which he expired is distinguished by an awning in front of the window" (Jennings 1936d: 40). In fact, this sentence is borrowed from an actual journalistic description of Byron's death-place at Missolonghi, reproduced in several periodicals after Byron's death. The focus is then shifted to some engines, which become animate beings in need of water, and to two characters that have not been introduced previously and of whom no further information is provided. It is the familiarity with which two perfectly unknown characters are introduced into the account that reinforces the idea of the dream vision: "Mr. Huskisson having got down from his carriage, the Duke beckoned him to his side and they were just shaking hands when a cry went up from the horrified spectators who perceived that the body was that of Lord Byron being carried to Newstead" (Jennings 1936d: 40). Thus, the reader does not know Mr. Huskisson or the Duke, but is forced into acknowledging them as an integral part of the dream-poem. This fragment, taken from Wilfred L. Steel's *The History of the London and North Western Railway* (1914), is interrupted by a cryptic sentence which similarly triggers an interpretive process on the part of the reader while simultaneously hindering a reliable interpretation (i.e. the text itself prevents the reader from feeling at ease with the text): "Reason never recovered from the hideous coincidence" (Jennings 1936d: 40). Since the circumstances of this coincidence, and the coincidence itself, remain unknown, the reader is compelled to accept the occurrence of the images in the text (the animalisation of the engines; the general enthusiasm, counteracted by the horrified cries of the spectators; the death of the poet; the meeting between the two characters) and forced to accept the illogical as one does in dreams.

The Byron theme is further developed by Jennings in one of his most elaborated texts, "The Boyhood of Byron", published in *Contemporary Poetry and Prose* in 1936 as "a study for a longer report".[530] "The Boyhood of Byron" is an intricate textual collage in which a huge variety

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[529] Delacroix, who admired Byron, painted his *Greece Expiring on the Ruins of Missolonghi* (1826) two years after Byron's death partly in homage to the poet, who had fought for the liberation of Greece from Turkish rule. See Malcolm Miles Kelsall's *Byron Politics* (1987).

[530] Although the "longer report" never actually appeared, a slightly different version of the text was published in *London Bulletin* in March 1939. The original text, composed in 1936, suffered several transformations between 1936 and 1938, which indicates the very organic nature of the text and Jennings's conception of the literary product, not as a fixed and stable entity, but rather as a socio-

of independent and dissimilar sources are combined: Samuel Bailey's *Essays on the Formation and Publication of Opinions, and other Subjects* (1821), the nineteenth-century journals *Family Magazine* and *Magazine of Domestic Economy*, Alexander von Humboldt's *Cosmos: a Sketch of a Physical Description of the Universe* (1845-1847), John Nichol's *Byron* (1880), J.H. Reeves's *The Orange County Stud Book* (1879), John Galt's *The Life of Lord Byron* (1830), R.M. Ballantyne's *The Iron Horse* (1871) and Wilfred L. Steel's *History of the London and North Western Railway* (1914). These contribute to the creation of a Freudian scenario onto which Jennings projects Oedipal themes, such as repression, castration and auto-eroticism, through the interaction of three key elements of his poetics: the horse, the machine and the Romantic personality.[531] As will be seen, these serve as vehicles of specific ideas. The text leaps elliptically from fragment to fragment as perspective is continuously shifted and the reader is taken from the image of the poet-antiquarian's enlightening work to that of the wild gait of Spanish American horses, the myths of ancient Greece, to Byron's childhood and to the modern locomotive in Britain. The multiplicity of viewpoints thwarts any sense of progression, and the text's high degree of fragmentation creates a sense of temporal and spatial overlapping as the reader is thrown violently from the present to the past and the future in a movement which obeys no rational causality. The various spatial references (America, Greece, England and other unspecified locations) reinforce this idea of simultaneity. The reproduction of the first phrase from each paragraph suffices to illustrate these shifting mechanisms. In the table below I offer these, together with references to the leading images in each of the paragraphs and the main ideas conveyed by those images:

Paragraph	First phrase	Leading image	Idea conveyed
1	"The labours of the antiquary, the verbal critic [. . .]"	Poet-antiquarian	Collective nature of literary texts
2	"Observe the horses of Spanish America that live wild [. . .]"	Horse	Pre-industrial, pre-capitalist bliss, freedom, connection with nature
3	"Can we suppose that so gifted a race as the Greeks [. . .]"	Oedipus	Castration, repression
4	"It is certain that one of the poet's feet was, either at birth or at an early period, so seriously clubbed [. . .]"	Byron	Repression

historical product subject to material change. For the purposes of this analysis, the first version of the text is used, as it presents a much more complex relation among the three key elements of the composition (Byron, the horse and the locomotive), while in the second version, it is the image of the Romantic poet that takes precedence over the others.

[531] In Antonia White's *Diaries* (1991) she states that "the horse, the electric light bulb, the train, Byron, the prism" are Jennings's "constant images" (White 1992: 78).

5	"It is surprising how soon the animal which has been accustomed to go where he pleased [. . .]"	Horse	Subjection to authority
6	"From Livadia the travellers proceeded to Delphi. The huge locomotive, the more gigantic for being under cover [. . .]"	Locomotive	Fetishisation of technology, dehumanisation
7	"If we shut ourselves up in a perfectly dark room [. . .]"	*Camera obscura*	Collectivisation of thought, wider consciousness of the material
8	"The seeds of Byron's misanthropic tendencies [. . .]"	Byron	Effects of repression, performative power of poetry
9	"The slavery or servitude of these creatures is universal [. . .]"	"These creatures" (the horse, Byron, the machine)	Denunciation of repression, capitalist exploitation and the individual's alienation from nature

Through these violent juxtapositions (of fragments and images) and abrupt shifts (temporal, spatial and perspectival), Jennings establishes a parallelism between the development of the horse-human relation and how it is shaped by industrialisation on the one hand, and Byron's development as a poet, marked by his childhood experiences, on the other. The horse initially appears as a wild animal, free from human constraint. Their irregular (uncontrolled, unrestrained) movements suggest an innate free spirit which does not succumb to external impositions. The image of the horses pacing freely and undisturbed recovers notions of pre-industrial bliss, uncorrupted by the capitalist process of production and distribution: "Proud of their independence, they wander about in immense meads, where they feed on the fresh productions of eternal spring" (Jennings 1936c: 146). As the focus is shifted to the Mediterranean landscape of ancient Greece, which is described as "the background of a picture of human passions" (Jennings 1936c: 146), references to the Oedipus myth emerge. These are not coincidental in a text in which Byron's boyhood is placed in connection with Jennings's own childhood obsessions (the horse and the train). His twisted, almost dysfunctional foot which hampers his movements from an early age (another point of connection between Oedipus and Byron), is set in opposition to the horses' unrestrained gait by means of textual juxtaposition: "[the horses'] gait, their running, their leaping seem neither constrained nor regular. [. . .] one of the poet's feet was [. . .] so seriously clubbed or twisted as to affect his gait" (Jennings 1936c: 146). However, it is the mother's overbearing presence

which seems to exert the most damaging influence: "Whatever might have been the violence of her temper or the improprieties of her life, the fond and mournful caresses with which she hung over her lame and helpless orphan must have contributed greatly to the morbid sensibility which became his characteristic" (Jennings 1936c: 146). The image of the authoritative father figure (the violent colt-breaker appears in the fifth paragraph) thus combines with that of the castrating mother in the shaping of the poet's character. All the elements inherent in an unequivocal Oedipal complex are presented as the seat of Byron's adult perversions. This idea is further developed a little later in the text, as Byron's "misanthropic tendencies" are said to also have an origin in the "silent rages of childhood" (Jennings 1936c: 147).

The connection established between Byron and the horse is further explored as notions of frustration and submission, and then of violence and viciousness, crop up in the fifth paragraph. The image of the colt-breaker, dulling and dispiriting, resembles that of the mother, as both have a detrimental effect on the horse and the poet respectively: whereas the former "becomes determinedly vicious and dangerous", the latter develops "misanthropic tendencies" (Jennings 1936c: 147). Similar concepts appear in Jennings's photograph *Portrait of Byron* (circa 1936), in which a staged tension is created between the poet and the horse, as both are manipulated into an impotent and submissive position. In the text, although the description of the locomotive introduces a fairly abrupt shift of focus in the sixth paragraph, it actually continues, in its highly erotic symbolism, the theme of the poet's sexual awakening:

> The huge locomotive, the more gigantic for being under cover, was already quivering with that artificial life which rendered it so useful and so powerful a servant. Its brasses shone with golden lustre, its iron cranks and pistons glittered with a silvery sheen, while the oblong pit over which it stood glowed with the light of its intense furnace. (Jennings 1936c: 147)

By means of the word "servant", whose variant "servitude" and related term "slavery" are used in the last paragraph to refer to the poet, the horse and the machine, these three images are connected in the text. The locomotive's inanimateness is gradually transformed through movement into an "artificial life" and the collective memories of the horse as the human being's pre-industrial servant are felt in the locomotive's quivering motion. The beautiful description of the machine, exquisitely elaborate, almost baroque, indulges in its metallic rigidness, its pistons and cranks, whose mechanic movement inevitably alludes to the sublimation of onanistic desire. The accumulation of terms referring to visual effulgence reinforces this idea: in the text, the light emanating from the machine incorporates the idea of

male sexual secretions. Within one single sentence eight semantically related words concur: "shone", "golden", "lustre", "glittered", "silvery", "sheen", "glowed" and "light". These terms, which are traditionally used to describe the beauty of the woman's body (her breasts, her teeth or her pubic area) are now applied to pistons and cranks.[532] The contrast is not only established between the animate and the inanimate, a contrast that is subverted, but also between flesh and metal, roundness and verticality, horizontality and erectness, softness and rigidness. These kind of images also appear in several of his photographs, such as *The Elephant Gate* (Bolton, 1939) or the one reproduced in *London Bulletin* in June 1938, under the general epigraph "English Landscapes", in which dream-like phallic factory chimneys preside over a bleak industrial urban landscape. In the text, the machine does not only replace the woman's body as the object of desire, but also, when this body appears, it is only in the form of an "oblong pit", inanimate and passive, receiving light and warmth from the superior machine. Questions of fetishistic sexuality arise here, and the term "servant", which is unambiguously used in the original text, Ballantyne's *The Iron Horse* (1871), becomes increasingly ambiguous in Jennings's through its association with the horse's castrated freedom, the references to the Oedipal complex, and issues of repressed or unorthodox desire.

In the eighth paragraph, the reference to necromancy, a deliberate textual displacement, contributes to the evocation of the magical and the marvellous as part of the quotidian: "His genius dealt with a necromancy which had its power and dominion amidst the living and the local of the actual world" (Jennings 1936c: 147). Compare this with John Galt's original text:

> When his [Byron's] imagination found not in his subject uses for the materials of his experience, and opportunities to imbody [sic.] them, it seemed to be no longer the same high and mysterious faculty that so ruled the tides of the feelings of others. He then appeared a more ordinary poet –a skilful verse-maker. The necromancy which held the reader spellbound became ineffectual; and the charm and the glory which interested so intensely, and shone so radiantly on his configurations from realities, all failed and faded; for his genius dealt not with airy fancies, but had its power and dominion amidst the living and the local of the actual world. (Galt 1832: 193)

As can be seen, whereas Galt sustains that the source of Byron's spellbinding imagination lay in the materials of actual experience and objective realities, Jennings, through textual manipulation, has the poet engage in poetic creation as a way of connecting with the

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[532] In *The Road is Wider than Long*, Penrose refers to Lee Miller's pubis as "her cup of gold".

supernatural, which simultaneously has an effect on the material world. This highlights Jennings's belief in poetry's power to act on reality.

A similar process of blurring of textual boundaries, and of merging the real and the unreal, takes place in the description of the *camera obscura* mechanism in the seventh paragraph. Whereas the original text, William Talbot's "On the *Camera Obscura* for Photogenic Drawing" (1839), is meant as a straightforward description of the process by which permanent images on light-sensitive paper are obtained, Jennings's textual manipulation, with deliberate key omissions and additions, contributes to the creation of a magical scenario in which the marvellous enters the real.[533] The description of the dark room is thus defamiliarised, mystified, by the inclusion of a sentence (italicised) which creates the effect of literary montage: "If we shut ourselves up in a perfectly dark room, *if the sea-water be slashed with an oar in the darkest night*, through the window-shutter which intercepts the illuminated landscape" (Jennings 1936c: 147).[534] In a way, Jennings's literary montage resembles Paul Nash's pictorial montage in *Harbour and Room* (1932-1936), in which a similar uncanny effect is achieved through the *invasion* of the room (the real) by the harbour (the unreal). In Jennings's text, the forms of external objects that are depicted on the wall by means of the *camera obscura* mechanism appear to be unreal shades, like those in Plato's Allegory of the Cave, rather than "a living representation of external objects" (Jennings 1936c: 147). This contributes further to the defamiliarisation of familiar sights, but also, in this particular instance, to the transgression of scientific discourse, bringing about the collectivisation of thought, processes through which, Jennings believed, a wider consciousness of the material was achieved. A similar idea underlay, for instance, one of his "Reports" published in the Picasso poems number of *Contemporary Poetry and Prose*, in which the irruption of the marvellous defamiliarises the almost scientific description of the horse:

> When the horse is impassioned with love, desire, or appetite, he shows his teeth, twinkles his coloured eyes, and seems to laugh. He shows them also when he is angry and would bite; and volumes of smoke come from his ears. He sometimes puts out his tongue to lick. His mouth consists of the two rays of the eternal twins, cool as a sea breeze. (Jennings 1936a: 95)

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[533] These were Talbot's early photographic experiments, at the time of Louis Daguerre's first daguerreotypes. In his use of Talbot's text, Jennings, also a photographer, addresses questions of authorship and creativity which are central to the ideological implications of his collective poetics, as will be seen.

[534] The text in italics is taken from John Britton and Edward Wedlake Brayley's *The Beauties of England and Wales* (1801).

As in the fragment on the *camera obscura*, poetic discourse disrupts scientific exposition: the juxtaposition of the detached description of the horse with the reference to the volumes of smoke that come out from the horse's ears and to the mouth as "two rays of the eternal twins" creates a verbal montage in which the natural and the supernatural merge. The subversion of scientific discourse allows for the re-introduction of myth as a form of knowledge of and approximation to reality.

As I have stated, the idea of servitude, in which references to Byron, the horse and the machine are contained, is recovered in the final paragraph: "The slavery or servitude of these creatures is universal; they are never wholly free from their bonds: the flying white breath of education, the coals which are its oats, the unvarying pace between rocky walls, already covered with moss and grasses" (Jennings 1936c: 147). Jennings's complex editing task makes it almost impossible to discern who or what these creatures are. However, there are signs to suggest that the three leading images of the poem are brought together as references to education (Byron), the flying white breath and the oats (the horse) and the flying white breath –smoke- and the coals (the machine) merge in this last paragraph. The "unvarying pace" of the train, but also of the wild horses and of lame Byron, suggests total subjection to a figure of authority.

This figure of authority reappears in Jennings's "Prose Poem", published in May 1938 in *London Bulletin*, this time merging with an imposing landscape which indicates, not only superiority, but also aloofness. The poet's inability to remember his grandfather's eyes is suggestive of the alienating distance that separates them, while the light of the declining sun evokes again the magnificent view of the steam locomotive:

> As the sun declined the snow at our feet reflected the most delicate peach-blossom.
>
> As it sank the peaks to the right assumed more definite, darker and more gigantic forms.
>
> The hat was over the forehead, the mouth and chin buried in the brown velvet collar of the greatcoat. I looked at him wondering if my grandfather's eyes had been like those.
>
> While the luminary was vanishing the horizon glowed like copper from a smelting furnace. (Jennings 1938d: 8)

The image of the grandfather is demystified as it is caught at the exact instant of disintegration, breaking out in a chaos of light like that which characterises Turner's Romantic landscapes and to which Jennings alludes:

> Down goes the window and out go the old gentleman's head and shoulders, and there they stay for I suppose nearly nine minutes.

Such a sight, such a chaos of elemental and artificial lights I never saw nor expect to see. In some pictures I have recognised similar effects. Such are *The Fleeting Hues of Ice* and *The Fire* which we fear to touch.[535] (Jennings 1938d: 8)

Thus, the machine and the horse become inextricably entwined, and so do the horse and the poet: neither of them is free, but is the object of abuse, repression and control. It is in this paragraph that the ideological implications of Jennings's images are fully realised: these images, which, insofar as they are collective images, are for him the representations of modern consciousness, show the effects of technological and scientific advancement on modern life: authority, moral repression, fetishisation of cultural products, physical exploitation, dehumanisation and alienation from nature. Jennings believed in the power of images and of the imagination to expand awareness of reality and to transform it: an awareness of the alienating mechanisms of modernity would bring about a change in the material conditions of society.

3.3.5. The Poet and the Public.

Jennings review of Read's *Surrealism* (1936), published in the December 1936 issue of *Contemporary Poetry and Prose*, is central for an understanding of the ideological dimension of his Surrealist texts. In his review, Jennings attacked the theories of both Read and Sykes Davies, especially what he understood as a certain mystification of Romanticism and their presentation of Surrealism as a safeguard of "culture" and "truth" (Jennings 1936b: 168). Jennings abhorred these essentialist conceptions of art, which he rather considered as a socio-historical category subject to material conditions, very much in the line of Éluard's thought. Moreover, although his materialist criticism of Read's and Sykes Davies's arguments on the nature of the Surrealist unconscious image may seem too rigid, he was right in warning of the dangers of subordinating Surrealist ideology to predetermined and essentialist forms of thought:

We all agree with Mr. Read that the eternally fabricated 'eternal truths of classicism' constantly appear as the symbols and tools of a classical-military-capitalist-ecclesiastical racket. But [. . .] is it possible that in place of [this racket] there has come into being a romantic-cultural-*soi-disant*-co-operative-new-uplift racket ready and delighted to use the 'universal truths of romanticism –co-eval with the evolving consciousness of mankind' as symbols and tools for its own ends? Our 'advanced'

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[535] In Joseph Dalton Hooker's *Himalayan Journals* (1854), on which Jennings's text partially draws, he refers to "the fleeting hues over the ice" in Turner's *Whalers* (1845), and to "the ruddy fire [. . .] which one almost fears to touch" in *Wind, Steam and Rain*. This last painting is probably *Rain, Steam and Speed*, an 1844 fiery depiction of the Great Western Railway which was likely to excite Jennings.

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poster designers, our educational propaganda film-makers, our 'young' professors and 'emancipated' business men- what a gift Surrealism is to them when it is presented in the auras of 'necessity,' 'culture' and 'truth' with which Read and Sykes Davies invest it. (Jennings 1936b: 167-168)

Here, Jennings's Marxist criticism condemns, not so much Read's and Sykes Davies's configuration of the Surrealist aesthetics as an heir to Romanticism, but their fetishisation of the Romantic element in Surrealism, their surrounding it with the *aura* of a de-historicised concept of necessary reconciliation and truth: from this it follows that, for Jennings, the notion of universal truth, being outside history, is a false idea and is therefore liable to create false ideologies.[536] The point is that to present Surrealism as the predetermined realisation of that truth, that is, as a form of totality, perverts its aims and, as Jennings suggests, it risks being placed at the service of less ennobling causes, such as propaganda or capitalism.[537] As he says in his introduction to Pandaemonium (1985), art cannot be understood "as a commodity for Bond Street, or as a piece of snobbery in Mayfair, or as a means of propaganda in Bloomsbury, or as a method of escapism in Hampstead" (Jennings 1985: xxxviii), but rather as a form of satisfaction of a basic human need, the need to communicate with an *other*.[538] However, as we have seen throughout this study, for the British Surrealists Surrealism is not a *totality*, but rather a constant opening up of possibilities. For them, as for Jennings, art is the means through which human emotion is expressed as it gradually transforms and is gradually transformed by the changes in material history. Ultimately, what vexed Jennings about Read and Sykes Davies was their academicism, and his critique was much more an attempt to establish the materialist basis of the movement in Britain than an earnest attack on Bretonian Surrealism. In fact, it is from Breton, who was much more dogmatic and idealistic in his propositions than Read and Sykes Davies ever were, and his essay in Read's volume that Jennings drew the concept of "coincidence" which so captivated him:

[Breton] continues to say that Surrealism has replaced the 'coincidence' for the 'apparition,' and that we must 'allow ourselves to be guided towards the unknown by this newest *promise*.' Now that is talking [. . .]. 'Coincidences' have the infinite

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[536] Dr. Rod Mengham, who has very kindly instructed me in his very English vision of British Surrealism during my research stay at the University of Cambridge, argues otherwise: for him, Jennings's claims are indicative of a Classicist concept of poetry (Mengham 2009: 692).

[537] As we have seen, although the idea of a universal truth was central to Roland Penrose's poetic quest, he avoided such idealistic propositions, seeking confirmations of that truth in material reality, and thus turning it into a historical category.

[538] Paradoxically, Jennings himself would make use of Surrealist techniques in his propaganda films during the war.

freedom of appearing anywhere, anytime, to anyone: in broad daylight to those whom we most despise in places we have most loathed: not even to *us* at all. (Jennings 1936b: 168)

It is this disruptive power of the coincidence that Jennings found most appealing about Surrealist theory and practice, the fact that there was no predetermined form that this *apparition* or revelation of the uncanny could adopt: "Creation is *not* the re-presentation of 'the truth,' however much it may at times look like it. But at those times [. . .] the eruptions of doubt and the magic of treachery are precisely at their greatest" (Jennings 1936b: 168). Of course, disruption occurs only, as he acknowledged, when least expected, and Jennings was happy to accept that the life of the average Briton, the standard of uneventful normality according to Read (Read 1935e: 67), was undoubtedly appropriate for such occurrences. Rod Mengham has rightly argued that "Jennings's own poetic practice [. . .] embodies a vision of Surrealism that is unmistakeably English in its sense of tradition and its range of references" (Mengham 2009: 692) and, seen in this light, Sykes Davies's recovery of folkloric forms finds correspondences in Jennings's own sense of cultural continuity and his interest in popular culture. However, Sykes Davies's and Jennings's interest in the British collective unconscious contrasted with Penrose's cosmopolitanism and Gascoyne's adoption of a French *mode* during the thirties. As Penrose noted, Jennings's poetics was always permeated by "a great feeling for the construction of English society, English landscape and English way of living" (in Jacksnon 2004: 178), ideas which are central to his activities in Surrealism and Mass-Observation. Thus, his use, for instance, of William Talbot's text on photography in "The Boyhood of Byron" responds to a desire to collectivise thought, by discrediting notions of authority and originality: Talbot's invention was for Jennings, not the product of a single mind, but of English thought. From this standpoint, it is an urge to construct a common British identity, to recover a sense of continuity in English modern consciousness underlies Jennings's work.

As we have seen, Jennings's plagiaristic process of creation raises a series of issues regarding the role of the poet and the nature of the poetic work in a modern, highly mechanised society, which echo the questions posed by Read in *Art and Industry* (1934). The proliferation of mass-produced goods to be mass-consumed, including books and magazines addressed to an ever-growing literate public, contributed to a democratisation and collectivisation of culture, which thus became a product embedded in the social mechanisms of production-consumption. Regarding this, in "The Lighthouse of the Bride", Breton complained that "It is inadmissible that drawing, that painting should still be to-day where writing was before Gutenberg" (Breton 1938: 17). Of course, Marcel Duchamp's ready-mades

helped to resolve this matter, but Breton's remark is enlightening for a study of Jennings's technique, which produced the best examples of literary ready-mades in British Surrealism, for it heightens awareness of the fact that Jennings's texts were indeed a response to questions already posed by Herbert Read and Walter Benjamin regarding the role and nature of art in a technological society. For Jennings, the role of the writer in the machine age was to find the contemporary value of collective images: that is, to understand, by resorting to collective images made available by the juxtaposition and superposition of different texts, the ways in which material conditions shape modern consciousness. The nature of the new literature was thus collective, a poetics of the masses. However, this kind of poetics was not only a response to the technological present, but it also implied the recovery of a primitive poetic form. In fact, this idea had been explored by Jennings as early as 1931 in his analysis of the relation between "Rock Painting and *La Jeune Peinture*" (1931):

> A fundamental difference between these works [the rock paintings of South Africa] and practically all other painting lies in the different conceptions of time and space evidently natural to the African mind. A single work may have been painted at different times by different men with no apparent consciousness of the consequences of superimposition. Figures overlay, definite planes are abandoned, rhythms intersect and above all, scale is widely varied. (Jennings and Noxon 1931: 37)

Not surprisingly, Jennings was interested in the ways in which the collective unconscious could be expressed in a technological society in which mythical thought had been gradually replaced by scientific knowledge. Thus, he found in the paintings on the street walls of industrial cities reminiscences of the cave paintings of pre-historic societies: in Jennings's photograph of a child's drawing on a wall in Lancashire, reproduced in The Impact of Machines number of *London Bulletin*, the sketchy traces of a train were for him suggestive, not only of the role that the machine occupies in modern consciousness, but also of a collective, and ancestral, *horror vacui* (an urge to fill the blank space) and, above all, of a compulsion to depict what cannot be rationally comprehended, in an attempt to gain control over it. In his literary texts, Jennings makes use of modern mechanisms (the printing press) in order to replicate this primitive process of creation, and a similar palimpsest-like effect is produced: as the images are superimposed on one another and interact, a new collective meaning emerges from the superposition of textual fragments. In this way, for him, the literary text is a collective property to be used, manipulated and transformed at will: he becomes the poet who, rewriting the texts of others, recovers the image's collective value.

Indeed, these questions were addressed in a 1938 series commissioned by the BBC, *The Poet and the Public*, in which he discussed with other poets, such as Herbert Read and Cecil Day Lewis, the role of the poet in society, emphasising the need for a social or political mass movement in order to bring the poet closer to the public. In the issue on "The Modern Poet and the Public" (26 April 1938), Jennings explores the relation between poetry and everyday life, and how modernity had dissociated the two: in modern society, Jennings contends, the poet has become isolated from the mass and is no longer a representative of the public at large.[539] For him, the proliferation of mass media, especially the newspaper, is responsible for this dissociation. Before the newspaper, he argues, the poet was a kind of poet-reporter, in contact with the people, but

> since we have had newspapers, the reading public has been able to choose between reading news about other people (such as the newspaper gives them) and news about themselves such as the poet tries to give them. The newspapers keep things simple, and anyway people's first instinct is to read about other people, so the poor old poet stopped becoming a reporter and got left to himself. (Jennings 1938f: 972)

It is in fact this image of the poet as reporter in contact with reality that Jennings attempts to recover in his texts of the 1930s. As opposed to the reports that he compiled for Mass-Observation, these texts do not attempt to present accounts of external occurrences, but they create a map of collective images in which a shared knowledge or vision of reality is contained. The social and ideological dimension of the image of the poet-reporter lies in the approximation to the objective world that is performed in these texts, which respond to Jennings's desire to re-establish contact with the *other*: it is in this approximation to a shared view of reality that a rapport is established between the poet and the reader.[540] Moreover, the collagistic nature of Jennings's reports, full of interrelated images produced by different and anonymous authors, further contributes to the creation of collective views or ideas of reality. Even so, Jennings's attempt is not devoid of a certain cynicism, and this is precisely his most original contribution to British Surrealist writing: his approximation to objective reality always remains tentative, as his fragmentary texts deliberately disrupt the sense of continuity that they are set to achieve. Also, the lack of specific referentiality and constant displacement and juxtaposition prevent the reader from feeling at ease with the texts, which tend to present

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[539] The contents of the series were discussed by Jennings in several articles for *The Listener*. "The Modern Poet and the Public" corresponds to the article "The Poet and the Public. How has Poetry Become Highbrow?" (1938).

[540] The ideological power of mass media was also central to Charles Madge's Surrealist concerns, as has been seen.

familiar images in unfamiliar contexts. Thus, the rapport that is established between the poet and the reader is more often than not based on suggestions and associations that work at the unconscious level. These processes of defamiliarisation of common images were in fact the focus of one of Jennings's programmes for the BBC series *The Poet and the Public.* "Poetry and National Life" (28 June 1938) addresses the emergence of the uncanny in the experience of everyday life, an idea which is central to his Surrealist poetics:

> We've been so much brought up with the idea that with all our science we've conquered nature and grown into adults, and that now there's no necessity for us to indulge in any curious primitive practices such as the Trobriand Islanders talking to their ancestors, or to indulge in the sort of communication with the mysteries of existence that the poet brings up. And so we're ashamed of admitting that there are still bits of life that we don't understand.[541] (in Jackson 1993: 279)

What Jennings is doing here is to reinstate for poets the role that the latest developments in technology, transport, communication and science have seized away from them. In a way that partially contradicts Madge's claim that poetry would not be necessary in the materialist era (Madge 1937b: 32), an era in which every phenomenon in life would have a scientific material explanation, Jennings defends poetry as a path to the unknown. The difference between Madge's and Jennings's propositions is that there persists in the latter a certain idealistic belief in realities which cannot be grasped by reason. These are for Jennings the realities created in the unconscious: collective myths and images which reveal systems of ideas and beliefs, in sum, *ideologies*, which can only be reached through poetry. Thus, poetry helps explain what lies beyond the material and the conscious: realities which cannot be seen, but which have an effect on the real world. Thus, in Jennings's texts, the familiar is defamiliarised by the act of acknowledging the marvellous in everyday experience. Moreover, for him, scientific knowledge and technological advancement have created a fictitious sense of control over material reality, that is, a sense of false *familiarity*, which needs to be disrupted: the modern individual, assailed by material and spiritual dearth in an alienating technological society, is as lost as ever, and needs to regain connection with that inner world which is only revealed, as Herbert Read sustained, in myths, dreams and poems (Read 1938d: 176).

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[541] He is referring to Malinowski's anthropological study of the natives of the Trobriand Islands. Jennings's full text is reproduced in Kevin Jackson's *The Humphrey Jennings Film Reader* (1993): 276-282.

CHAPTER 6
CONCLUSIONS

If Leon Trotsky's thesis, that revolution is more likely to prosper in peripheral spaces where social conditions are seemingly less appropriate for major social transformations, holds some truth, then it may be said that, in view of the examples analysed in the previous chapters, Britain presented itself as an ideal place for the Surrealist revolution to succeed. Trotsky's thesis of "combined and uneven development" is the basis for his theory of *permanent revolution*, according to which not all the stages in the revolutionary process need to be covered for the revolution to take place in a given system (Trotsky 2010: 269-274). The present study began with an exposition of Britain's isolation from the European Avant-Garde which drew attention to the fact that it was a rather reactionary and excessively formalist Modernism that predated the kind of revolutionary poetics and ideology for which Surrealism stood, whereas on the continent it was the apolitical nihilism of Dada that opened the path for Surrealist experimentation. If Dada is regarded as a transitional stage (although there were many others) between Modernism and Surrealism, this was a stage that Britain did not go through, and maybe that was the reason for the general lack of understanding or misapprehension of its claims, as Anthony Blunt later recalled in his apologetic article "Surrealism Revisited" (1978):

> Of Dada we knew –as far as I can remember- almost nothing. [. . .] We were confused by the belief –mainly derived from Fry- that the artists who belonged to the tradition in which we believed were 'intellectual.' In Cézanne it was 'the cube, the cone and the cylinder' that we regarded as fundamental, not his intense reaction to the visible universe, and Cubism was for us in its early stages a 'rational' analysis of material objects and later a series of geometrical schemes, which were, of course, 'rational.' [. . .] It was therefore natural that a movement which declared itself basically opposed to reason, which relied entirely on the subconscious, which valued dreams above reality and violence above restraint should be totally alien to us. (Blunt 1978: 35)

In spite of this, or maybe precisely because of it, Surrealism appealed forcefully to the writers that have been the focus of this study, giving rise to an important but still fairly unknown aesthetico-political movement. As we have seen, the richness of their approaches to poetic creation is undeniable, and so is their contribution to the development of poetic experimentation in English and to the continuation of an Anarchist tradition in Britain. Unjustifiably, for long years their work was, it has been stressed, to a great extent neglected.

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This study has filled numerous gaps that the criticism has persistently left in the profuse studies that have been produced on Modernist and thirties' literature in Britain and it has provided a theory of the poetic image in British Surrealism which is necessary for a critical approximation to Surrealist writing. This theory encompasses a variety of perspectives which show that the image is not only a special form of metaphor obtained in moments of intense trance in which reality and dream become merged, but rather, and most importantly, a mechanism of disruption which, by resisting logical apprehension, also resists assimilation into the authoritative discourse of dominant ideologies (capitalism, imperialism, Fascism), disrupting or revealing the gaps in their *rational* and totalising *continuities*. As such, the Surrealist image is also a form of knowledge, because it expands awareness of reality and of the mechanisms of repression and manipulation which work at an unconscious level in capitalist societies. Thus, the mere act of imaging has an ideological dimension, because the image, as a myth-making mechanism, creates new systems in which to interpret reality.

While it may be claimed (in fact, it *has* been claimed) that Surrealism was a typically bourgeois enterprise, the previous chapters have successfully argued in favour of the British Surrealist writers' earnest commitment to the proletarian revolution.[542] In this regard, although there is a basic dissociation between their ideological stance and their class (something not contemplated in orthodox Marxist materialism), their engagement in a programme for expanding awareness and for world transformation has been sufficiently proven here. Nevertheless, let us provide one further example which seems to resolve the paradox of ideology and class in British Surrealism: when accused of this same charge by none other than Julian Trevelyan, who rather malignantly pointed to the price charged for entrance to the 1938 West End exhibition, Roland Penrose retorted that there was "No real inconsistency. *Guernica*, and modern art generally, may appeal to the working classes; but the working classes cannot afford to buy paintings or in any other way support artists. For that we need a new social order" (Penrose and Mesens 1939: 24). Furthermore, the fact that the reconciliation between image and ideology in British Surrealist writing is not a case of predetermined union, which would leave no space for self-questioning and evolution, shows that Surrealist images, even if springing from a *collective* unconscious, may not be said to put forth absolute or, in Sontag's terms, *universal* worldviews. As we have seen, the Surrealist image is a constant opening up of new possibilities, and, as such, it can only be seen as a fragment. It is in fact in those fragments, in those spaces left for the reader to produce

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[542] Susan Sontag, for example, has stated that "Surrealism is a bourgeois disaffection; that its militants thought it to be universal is only one of the signs that it is typically bourgeois" (Sontag 1971: 53).

meaning and to extract significance that consciousness is broadened; and awareness of material conditions and of the mechanisms of ideological control inherent in capitalist societies was for the Surrealists the motor of social change. Thus, they managed to bring together artistic expression, intellectual activity and political activism.

By exploring this dynamic relationship that exists between the ambivalent and disruptive images of British Surrealism and its evolving ideology, this study has exposed the shortcomings of critical approaches which, considering British Surrealist writing, either as a moderate copy of French Surrealism or a modest continuation of British Modernism, have perpetuated conceptions of Surrealism as an incomplete or failed enterprise in Britain. As we have seen, Surrealism in Britain was a syncretic movement which catalysed trends already present in the literary tradition, which stepped far outside the Classical canon of High Modernism, and which, in a number of ways, simultaneously drew on and departed from the incendiary practices of French Surrealism. Certainly, one of its most important contributions to the history of poetic and political movements is the way in which image and ideology are brought together in texts which are both highly experimental and deeply committed. As it has been stressed, British Surrealist writing of the 1930s is exceptional in this achievement, and maybe this is due to the fact that it managed to transcend the excessively dogmatic ideological stance of Bretonian Surrealism. Thus, the argument that the peculiar adoption of Surrealist tenets and of a variety of Surrealist techniques was less radical in Britain than on the continent or in other *peripheries* is one that, after the exhaustive analysis offered in these pages, can no longer be sustained. As this study has shown, it is precisely in these texts' capacity to disrupt formal coherence and to resist univocal interpretation, to constantly defamiliarise perception and to systematically unsettle the relationship between form and meaning, as well as in these writers' disowning of established systems of thought and rejection of static or monolithic worldviews in favour of more tolerant, self-contradictory even, ideological postulations, that their subversive potential is realised. Thus, the image in British Surrealist writing becomes a form of consciousness, because it opens the path to awareness and, in so doing, it does not only contribute to the collapse of dominant ideologies, but it also and effectively transforms our vision of reality and, hence, reality itself. In this, the Surrealists were half-way between Hegelian idealism and Marxist materialism, a position which finally led them to the adoption of Anarchism by the end of the thirties' decade.

The outbreak and development of the Second World War was indeed a major focus of disruption of Surrealist activity in Britain and elsewhere. Certainly, whereas the Spanish Civil War was the ideological axis of the British Surrealist Group during the second half of the

thirties' decade, central for the development of new ideological positions and setting a context and a cause for these writers' involvement in direct political action, the Second World War put an end to much Surrealist experimentation, forcing the Group towards reconfiguration. We have seen that several Surrealists (such as Penrose and Trevelyan) decided to take up camouflage as a form of Surrealist sublimation and that, in the case of Jennings, this became gradually diluted in his propaganda work for the British Establishment. The Second World War had a devastating effect on the core group of Surrealist writers: with the exception of Penrose, who continued writing Surrealist poetry throughout his life, the rest had abandoned Surrealism by 1940, and so did many of the *satellites* of the Group. Julian Trevelyan later explained these desertions as a consequence of the war proving to be a more *surrealistic* account of the fate of humanity than that put forth in Surrealist texts and paintings:

> It became absurd to compose Surrealist confection when high explosives could do it so much better, and when German soldiers with Tommy-guns descended from the clouds on parachutes dressed as nuns. Life had caught up with Surrealism or Surrealism with life, and for a giddy moment we in England lived the irrational movement to its death. (Trevelyan 1957: 80)

While the war did this, it simultaneously served several *minor* Surrealists who had stayed in the background to acquire more prominent positions and eventually take the lead in Surrealist wartime affairs. Significantly, most of them were painters rather than writers, and British Surrealism thus became a movement with an important pictorial, rather than poetic, orientation in the 1940s. It may be argued that this is also the reason why a study of 1930s British Surrealist writing like this one is so central for an understanding of the inception and development of a Surrealist aesthetic and ethic in Britain, where, in the 1940s, Surrealist writing became a much more *disperse* activity. Remarkably, the Belgian artist and writer E.L.T. Mesens, who had established close contacts with the British Surrealist Group in the late 1930s, was one of those to acquire prominence in the forties. In 1938, he took over the management of the London Gallery on Cork Street, from where he started editing the *London Bulletin*. Whereas the London Gallery became an important centre for radical Avant-Garde art, with regular shows of paintings by Dalí, de Chirico, Ernst, Magritte, Miró, Picasso and many other Surrealists of national and international renown, the *Bulletin* emerged as the official organ of the British Surrealist Group and, as we have seen throughout these pages, it became an ideal arena for poetic and political experimentation, and for the conjunction of image and ideology

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through the publication of several poetic and theoretical texts by British Surrealists.[543] In *London Bulletin*, major contributions were published, such as Hugh Sykes Davies's poem "It Doesn't Look Like a Finger", some of Humphrey Jennings's and Charles Madge's literary collages, Ithell Colquhoun's prose texts, Ruthven Todd's poems inspired by the works of Spanish Surrealists and fragments from Roland Penrose's *The Road is Wider than Long*, among many other features. Although the journal placed great emphasis on the visual element, with the reproduction of numerous photographs of the works of art shown in the various exhibitions at the London Gallery, it also offered a space for discussion of ideological positions, and for controversy: for example, the texts which accompanied and served as commentaries of the exhibition The Impact of Machines appeared there, and so did André Breton and Leon Trotsky's influential manifesto "For an Independent Revolutionary Art", Grace Pailthorpe's controversial essay "The Scientific Aspect of Surrealism" and Herbert Read's comments on the social dimension of abstract art. The question of whether an art of the unconscious could engage with reality was highly debated, and finally settled by Conroy Maddox's "The Object in Surrealism", commented on earlier in this study. In this regard, it is significant that the last issue of *London Bulletin* (June 1940) opened with the most direct and visually powerful political declaration in the journal. The calls for arms for Spain in *Contemporary Poetry and Prose* were now replaced by an equally dramatic denunciation of the present state of things and a call to action, more in the ideological than in the material sphere:

NO *dream is worse than the reality in which we live.*

No reality is as good as our dreams.

The enemies of desire and hope have risen in violence. They have grown among us, murdering, oppressing and destroying. Now sick with their poison we are threatened with extinction.

FIGHT

HITLER

AND HIS IDEOLOGY

WHEREVER IT APPEARS

WE MUST

His defeat is the indispensable prelude to the total liberation of mankind.

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[543] Michel Remy has offered a detailed account of the activities and exhibitions at the London Gallery. See his *Surrealism in Britain* (1999): 147-150.

Science and vision *will persist beyond the squalor of war and unveil* a new world.

(London Bulletin 1940: 1)

Nevertheless, there was also some space for hope in the midst of destruction, and, indeed, the last issues of *London Bulletin* point in this direction in texts like John Banting's ironic "The Careless have Inherited the Earth" (1940): "The rich kill time and the poor are killed by it, for the careless have inherited the earth and, braver and braver carousing at the bottles of their intoxicating Power, are throwing it away –which is hopeful" (Banting 1940: 2). Also, in an earlier 1939 issue, there appeared a catalogue of artists which had exhibited their work in the London Gallery exhibition Living Art in England. For Herbert Read, these artists were the bearers of some hope for the future of art and society, at a time when artists were either the objects of suppression (in Fascist countries) or of indifference (in democratic countries like Britain) (Read 1939a: 5). This exhibition already anticipated the names of some of those who would become key Surrealist figures in the forties, such as John Banting, Conroy Maddox, John Melville, Eileen Agar and Ithell Colquhoun. Furthermore, it is precisely the ascent of women Surrealists like Agar and Colquhoun to more prominent positions within the Group that is most significant about forties' Surrealism in Britain. Their contributions, together with those of Leonora Carrington (who had been active in France in the 1930s and then moved to Mexico, where she met several other Surrealist exiles), Emmy Bridgwater and Edith Rimmington became remarkably visible then. Indeed, although there are recent studies that have focused on the pictorial work of British Surrealist women (especially in relation to magic and occultism), their writings still offer fertile ground for research, as they have not received much critical attention yet.[544] But the hierarchies of gender were not the only ones that were debunked in 1940s British Surrealism, for the movement also became progressively decentralized, or, as Penrose explains,

> terribly dispersed, far too dispersed ever to be at all effective. Humphrey Jennings, who was I think one of the most important people of that generation, took to filming. Herbert Read went to Yorkshire and became very inaccessible. Everybody was scattered. In fact, the only people who did hold together at all were Mesens and Jacques Brunius who were in London. Mesens, having adopted a little bit of Breton's 'Pope style,' excommunicated Herbert Read which made things rather more difficult. (Penrose and Young 1977: 6)

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[544] See, for example, Susan L. Alberth's *Leonora Carrington: Surrealism, Alchemy and Art* (2004) and Richard Shillitoe's recently revised *Ithell Colquhoun: Magician Born of Nature* (2010).

It must be stressed that this kind of Bretonian excommunications performed by Mesens never took place during the 1930s, a fact that attests to the cohesion of the Group, but also to its ideological tolerance, which allowed a fairly heterogeneous group of individuals to meet regularly, share ideas and an aesthetic programme, discuss politics and take part in social action. Also, in the forties there was an increasingly active group of Surrealists in Birmingham, which included Conroy Maddox, Emmy Bridgwater, John Melville and Desmond Morris.

In spite of Mesens and the desertions and dispersions which followed the Barcelona Restaurant meeting of April 1940, when Mesens tried to impose stricter directions on the Group (prohibition to exhibit and publish in non-Surrealist venues and media, and forceful and unconditional support of the proletarian revolution), and the closure of the *London Bulletin*, Surrealist activity continued, somehow modified and redefined, throughout the war. Toni del Renzio's journal *Arson, an Ardent Review* appeared in 1942 without Mesens's authorisation, and creating not few feuds and strongly biased allegiances, but also invigorating wartime Surrealist activity, as Sylvano Levy has convincingly argued.[545] Several independent attempts were made in the last years of the war (especially by del Renzio on the one hand, and by Mesens, supported by Penrose, on the other) to bring a coherent group of Surrealist artists together again, and this, by contrast, also evinces the cohesion of the pre-war Group, centred mainly around writers, rather than painters. In 1944, the Surrealists intended to resume their activities with two new journals, Mesens's *Message from Nowhere* and Simon Watson Taylor's *Free Unions Libres*, but their efforts remained somehow tentative (Remy 1999: 280). The end of the war, and Breton himself, called for revitalised action in Britain, as the preparations for the first post-war Surrealist exhibition, which would take place in 1947, began in Paris. The "Déclaration du Group surréaliste en Angleterre" was published in Breton and Duchamp's catalogue *Le Surréalisme en 1947*, but, instead of setting new paths for action, it rather marked the dissolution of historical Surrealism in Britain. The "Déclaration", signed by Roland Penrose, E.L.T. Mesens, Conroy Maddox, Emmy Bridgwater, Edith Rimmington, John Banting and Simon Watson Taylor among others, unwillingly (and unconsciously) voices their nostalgia for a past of great British Surrealist characters, which surfaces in their virulent attacks of those who had deserted them:

> Henry Moore, passant sans crier gare du surréalisme à la fabrication d'ornements sacerdotaux, pour s'abîmer ensuite dans la monotone production en série de croquis dans les abris, misérable vulgarisation de ses 'personnages couchés' d'avant-guerre. Sans vouloir atténuer le cas de Moore, il est juste d'ajouter que l'éclectisme de Herbert

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[545] See Sylvano Levy's "The del Renzio Affair: a Leadership Struggle in Wartime Surrealism" (2005).

Read atteint à présent des proportions ahurissantes, que les mystifications de Gascogne le laissent prostré et la bave à la bouche et que Jennings est décoré de l'Order of the British Empire.[546] (in Breton and Duchamp 1947 : 46)

However, the Surrealist influence on British literature continued also outside orthodox Surrealist circles in the 1940s, with the exponents of the New Apocalypse movement, especially J.F. Hendry and Henry Treece, and beyond: the influence of Surrealism is felt in the absurdist nihilism of Samuel Beckett, who had in fact been involved in the Surrealist activities of the British Group during the 1930s (together with David Gascoyne, he had translated some of the poems for George Reavey's collection of Paul Éluard's poetry *Thorns of Thunder*) and in the neo-Surrealist trends of Postmodern fiction, with writers such as J.G. Ballard.[547] In this regard, critics such as Jean-François Lyotard, David Lodge and Linda Hutcheon have observed in Postmodernism tendencies which, it must be said, had already appeared in British Surrealist writing several decades before. For example, Lodge describes Postmodernism in terms of contradiction, discontinuity, randomness, excess and short circuit. For him, this implies "combining in one work violently contrasting modes –the obviously fictive and the apparently factual; introducing the author and the question of authorship into the text; and exposing conventions in the act of using them" (Lodge 1977: 240). As we have seen, all these traits are present in the writings of the British Surrealists: in their incorporation of contradiction and ambiguity in their texts, in their *discontinuous* forms, in their resort to objective chance and unconscious association, in their aesthetics of excess (especially in the case of Hugh Sykes Davies and George Barker), their short-circuiting of reason, their questioning of hierarchical notions and structures (authorship, originality, uniqueness, the canon, progress, civilisation, social class and the state), and in their use and abuse of literary conventions and previous discourses. Also, Lyotard famously defines Postmodernism as "incredulity toward metanarratives" (Lyotard 1979: xxiv), whereas Hutcheon stresses that

the postmodern's initial concern is to de-naturalise some of the dominant features of our way of life; to point out that those entities that we unthinkingly experience as 'natural' (they might even include capitalism, patriarchy, liberal humanism) are in fact

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[546] "Henry Moore, passing without warning from Surrealism to the manufacture of priestly ornaments, in order to spoil himself then with the monotonous mass production of shelter drawings, a deplorable debasement of the 'reclining figures' of the pre-war period. Without desiring to downplay the case of Moore, it is fair to add that the eclecticism of Herbert Read acquires now staggering proportions, that Gascoyne's mystifications leave him prostrate and dribbling and that Jennings is decorated with the Order of the British Empire" (my translation).

[547] Jeanette Baxter has recently provided an interesting analysis of Surrealist influences on Ballard's prose in *J.G. Ballard's Surrealist Imagination: Spectacular Authorship* (2009).

'cultural'; made by us, not given to us. Even nature, postmodernism might point out, doesn't grow on trees. (Hutcheon 1989: 2).

All these ideas certainly underlie Surrealism's endeavours to broaden consciousness, and are clearly present in the frequent processes of defamiliarisation of familiar sights which take place in Surrealist writing and in its challenging of official narratives. More recently, in digitally-born literature there are also aspects which are typically associated with Surrealism, such as the combination of different media, the use of hypertexts and collective writing. As in Surrealism, these contribute, not only to the blurring of boundaries between genres and the collapse of the distance between writer and reader, but also, and most importantly, to the democratisation of poetic expression.[548]

However, as has already been suggested, the most important Surrealist influence on British culture came not from further poetic experimentation and ideological dissidence, but rather it emerged from the very core of the capitalist system which Surrealism decried: in spite of its subversive and dialectical, evolving, character, the Surrealist idiom was finally assimilated into the dominant consumerist discourse of bourgeois ideology in the 1960s, something which was made visually explicit in 1986 by the touring exhibition Contrariwise: Surrealism and Britain 1930-1986, arranged by Ian Walker. In this regard, Maarten Doorman has argued that the exhaustion of artistic paradigms or movements in favour of new ones partly responds to changes in the historical or material background and the development of new worldviews as a new social context emerges (Doorman 2003: 67-69). Indeed, it seems commonplace to state that post-war conditions in most allied countries, dominated by a compulsion to reconstruct and forget, were very different from those that gave rise to the historical Avant-Garde. However, this argument falls short of explaining a movement like American Abstract Expressionism, which, in the post-war period, still relied significantly on automatism. In any case, Surrealism's undeniable legacy is, according to Peter Stockwell,

> its success and its failure: surrealist images, techniques and influence can be discerned today in most contemporary art and writing, in much poetry and song lyrics, and in many film and television works for both children and adults, but also in the images of advertising and corporate branding, in the architecture of multinational headquarters, and framed in the hushed office corridors of investment banks, currency speculators, and in the sleek boardrooms of the operators of the military-industrial complex. (Stockwell 2012: 48)

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[548] A general overview of these and other aspects of digital literature is offered in Ray Siemens and Susan Schreibman's *A Companion to Digital Literary Studies* (2007).

Although it is certainly intriguing how Stockwell got such multifarious inside information, what is at stake for us here is whether this kind of appropriations of revolutionary Surrealist discourse by mainstream trends and institutional bodies does in fact constitute a proof of Surrealism's *failure*. Whereas Read's and Penrose's acceptance of a knighthood in the 1950s and 1960s is positively problematic, it should not be seen necessarily as a sign of the shortcomings of a once held revolutionary ideology, and may be explained as a personal response to the British Establishment's efficiency in assimilating radical forms of artistic expression and turning them into advertising tools of British Culture.[549] However, these and other instances, such as the commoditisation of Surrealist art as a collector's fetish (a slight look at the catalogue of the 2009 exhibition British Surrealism in Context: a Collector's Eye gives one an idea), seem to spring from a consideration of Surrealism merely as a *means of expression*, which responds solely to the aesthetic morphology of the Surrealist *style*, a vision which often reduces the works' revolutionary potential to their shock value through unlikely juxtapositions. However, unexpected juxtaposition was just one of the very many techniques and procedures devised and carried out in Surrealist practice and, as we have seen, these were never completely dissociated (as they are in those instances of capitalist appropriation) from a revolutionary ideological stance. This study has served for the most part to demonstrate this. Indeed, if Surrealism is considered, as it was by the main exponents of British Surrealist writing of the 1930s, a state of mind, a form of consciousness or, in Herbert Read's terms, a *Weltanschauung*, then it becomes clear that its non-conformist spirit, its effort to incorporate antagonisms, its constant self-questioning, its endeavours to re-contextualise old forms and activate new meanings, to democratise thought and expression, to liberate expression from the corseting influence of Culture, reason, decorum, morality and decency, and to expand awareness of material exploitation and ideological manipulation, are all part of a universal and ongoing struggle for individual liberties which still underlies social movements nowadays. In this regard, it is significant that there has been an upsurge of Surrealist discourse (and humour) in recent anti-capitalist and Anarchist protests and demonstrations throughout capitalist countries, which offers immense opportunities for further research, as in the case of the Occupy London Stock Exchange demonstration of 15 October 2011, in which the protestors' signs read messages like "Spread the awareness", "This is not a protest. This is a process", "I threw out the moneylenders for a reason" (carried by a demonstrator dressed up as Jesus

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[549] Nevertheless, the Establishment encounters resistance too, as in the case of the poet Benjamin Zephaniah and his illustrious "Up yours" to the monarchic institution after being selected to be appointed an officer of the Order of the British Empire in 2003.

Christ) and "KEEP CALM AND OCCUPY LONDON" (a version of the famous slogan used by the British Government at the outset of the Second World War). In view of these, one is led to wonder whether Surrealism, as a salient part of this ongoing struggle, is not, in fact, a universal discourse.

APPENDIX

1. New Insights Into the Poetics and Politics of Roland Penrose. An Interview with Antony Penrose. Yiyi López Gándara. Farley Farm, 4 September 2010.

Q. I suppose people ask you more about Lee Miller than about Roland Penrose, and in fact it seems that people know more about Lee's work than about Roland's.

A. Yes, indeed. And, really, the astonishing thing is that in their lifetimes together Roland was far better known than Lee and then, after he died, she became much better known, so it's like she's got an international name, but as a result of that Roland is beginning to get more attention.

Q. Yes, his painting is becoming well-known internationally now. As you said during the tour, in Barcelona people know him...

A. That's right. And we had that lovely show of his work in Málaga, and then that went to Tenerife...

Q. But still, his poetry is still neglected by the critics...

A. It's virtually not known. There's only one guy who's working on it, and that's Michel Remy, I'm sure you know that he's got a new book coming out which contains some more poetry by Roland, but there's still more, as I understand it, there's more which is not yet published, and that is in the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art.

Q. Why is that? Why is it not published?

A. Well, mainly because not enough people have taken an interest in it. I mean, Surrealist poetry has not been a hot, well-published subject, until recently there's been more interest in it. But it takes people like Michel Remy and yourself and other scholars to realise that it's worth looking at. Interestingly, Valentine's poetry is still holding interest, people are still paying attention to it. But you know what it's like with poetry, it is so difficult to get the attention that it deserves.

Q. And also, what I find is that the women are getting more attention now because there is all this gender studies thing...

A. Absolutely. And it's really interesting, we worked very closely with Patricia Allmer, Manchester Museum of Art, and I was really thrilled that she made that whole fantastic exhibition about women in Surrealism, and she found women Surrealists that everybody else had forgotten and neglected. A fabulous piece of work. And, you know, there are others like her who are doing similar things in America, in New York, and I am delighted.

Q. But the men are being forgotten.

A. No, I think they are all in there. A lot of British men, Surrealist men, have been kind of neglected, but the big guys will always be around, and I think the growth point is the women Surrealists.

Q. Also, regarding the fact that Roland's poetry is, as you said, unpublished and neglected, I have found that at different points throughout his *Scrapbook* (1981), and in different texts in the Roland Penrose Archive, he acknowledges that he is more drawn to the visual than the literary, and apologises for not being good with words. Is it that he gave himself a bad reputation as a writer?

A. Yes, he did downplay it, significantly. And I regret that he did that. I think basically, again, it was a lack of confidence. He was moderately, well, he was still lacking in confidence about his painting, but he felt more comfortable with it than he did with the written word. He never really saw himself as a writer. He was a guy who wrote significant work on Picasso, Miró, Ernst, Man Ray, and plenty of others, you see, that bookcase there is mostly filled with books by Roland, or books that he helped to produce in some way. You know, that's a big help for a guy who was severely dyslexic and never rated himself as a writer.

Q. Yes, I was surprised when you said that he was dyslexic.

A. Well, he didn't know that because nobody knew what dyslexia was...

Q. When I checked his manuscripts in the Archive in Edinburgh, they are pretty well written, I mean, they are handwritten, and they are readable, and there are not many mistakes. The manuscripts of other writers are just horrible.

A. Well, I think with the manuscripts, Roland was on his best behaviour, and that was probably the second or third draft, and where it really shows was his letters, which were written much more casually, and he makes, I mean I know because I am dyslexic, and I didn't know that until we discovered that my son at the age of ten or something, that he was severely dyslexic. And only when I started to discover how he saw things and the whole measure of it, that I began to realise that yes, there are sort of mistakes that Roland was making with the kind of mistakes that dyslexic people make. And Roland also found it really difficult to read out loud. If he was reading something, if he was speaking, talking in a lecture, and reading from a script, it was hopeless. But if he talked just spontaneously, that was fantastic. He could really engage people and put the ideas across. But although he wrote well, he read badly, and that made some of his lectures really painful.

Q. When I started working on British Surrealism some four years ago, bibliography on the subject was really scant, not to say that primary sources were almost impossible to find. On many levels, it was dismissed as an unimportant and poorly organised movement.

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Nevertheless, I have recently encountered a book on *peripheral* Surrealism in which British Surrealism is again dismissed, and now for a different reason, as mainstream, as if everything had already been said about it. I have the feeling that, since its inception, British Surrealism has been misunderstood. Would you feel the same?

A. Yes, I would. One of the things that went against the British was that they didn't have cafés, and so there was not this immediate personal connection with them all. And I think the really important thing for the French and the Italians and everybody else, the Europeans, even the Scandinavians, was that they hung out together much more and that made automatically a more cohesive group. The Brits, some of them didn't realise, until 1936, that they were Surrealists, because the movement did not reach here, and then Roland and David Gascoyne went around grabbing people and looking at the work and saying "this is Surrealist" and they said "well, is it really? What does that mean?" and suddenly they found themselves part of the Exhibition. Some of them were pleased, others were bad-tempered about it, like Conroy Maddox, mainly because not so much of his stuff was chosen. But then, Eileen Agar, she writes very touchingly that she was just painting in a way and style that she thought was all of her own. And Roland came along and looked at her work and asked her to include it in the Surrealist Exhibition, and suddenly she found that she was a Surrealist, and that suited her rather well, because it brought her into contact with a lot of French people, a lot of exciting new ideas, things cultural coming in from Europe, which she would not have in the insularity of Britain.

Q. Now that you talk about Eileen Agar and Conroy Maddox, who do you think were Roland's closest allies within the British Surrealist Group?

A. Well, Eileen Agar was a very strong ally and supporter, and she was a really close friend and very closely allying with Roland in what they were trying to do, but she was never of a kind of a group personality and, curiously enough, it was the less productive guys who were very often the most vociferous in the Surrealist groups and, a lot of them, I think, were there for slightly different reasons, like Mesens, for example. I've never really understood why Roland tolerated Mesens to the degree that he did, because Mesens was very unkind, very kind of using of Roland, and in a really unfortunate way. But Roland put up with it, when he supposedly thought that the objective of bringing Surrealism to Britain was greater than the requirements of the friendships, so he tolerated Mesens, who was actually a pretty nasty character.

Q. Herbert Read?

A. Herbert Read was magnificent. He actually was a very important intellectual and that, in a way, was his downfall, because he was too intellectual, and there was an aridity, there was a

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dryness about what he was doing. It was like the British endangered, they put Surrealism in danger of being made boring by people like Herbert Read. Sometimes, Read wrote really well, sometimes when he was less self-conscious, the stuff that he wrote was very powerful, and sometimes quite funny and he had, for me, what was the essence of Surrealism, which was challenging and provoking. But when he really started thinking about what he was doing, god, he was boring!

Q. Humphrey Jennings?

A. Humphrey Jennings, again, he was, I think he was brilliant, and what Jennings did was to take Surrealism into film-making during the war, and it was like suddenly the Crown Film Unit were paying Jennings to make the kind of films that Jennings wanted, and he just managed to make them acceptable to the government, but it was a pretty a close-round thing, and when you start to look at his films, some of them have this amazingly Surreal sequences in them, but he dressed them up to be like regular documentaries, and in this way he was very subversive, and had this fantastic talent for passing off regular documentaries for actually being this wonderful Surrealistic works.

Q. So they were close with Roland as well, Read and Jennings?

A. Yes, Jennings was very close. I think the most important person in Roland's life, apart from Herbert Read, was David Gascoyne, because if you remember Gascoyne wrote *A Short Survey of Surrealism* (1935), and that was actually about the first time the movement hit the print in this country, but not many people took notice of it because Gascoyne, temperamentally, was a poet, and he wasn't a kind of a curator or a showman, and Roland had the showman in him. He knew, in his own way, how to make other people look good, and how to get attention for them. He was hopeless about getting attention for himself, he didn't think that was the right thing to do, but he was very good at getting other people to come to recognition, and that was why he and Gascoyne were such good compounder in this, because Gascoyne had done so much of the research and he had such an intellectual and a really sincere and wonderful passion about the whole thing. Roland, on the other hand, was the guy with the money, and the connections and the flair to make it visible. The two worked really well together, a really good connection. And then Herbert Read, he was the kind of intellectual and the critique brains, about the whole thing, and yes, he was older.

Q. Its official inception was in 1936, although Hugh Sykes Davies had already published...

A. Hugh Sykes Davies was significant, and there were a lot of people working way at it, Ruthven Todd and people like that who were significant. I think Michel Remy has really

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examined this very closely and very well in his *Surrealism in Britain* (1999), and I think that's a brilliant book. He is also writing a bit about Roland's poetry at the moment.

Q. Since its official inception in 1936, Surrealism in Britain saw several desertions and expulsions. 1939 marks the beginning of a new era in which the names that predominated in the thirties were substituted by new members, but Roland was the only one to stay from beginning to end, was he the English Breton?

A. Well, I would have seen him as the British Éluard. But Roland was very, very smart in the way that he refused to be drawn into Communist politics. Roland was very left wing, but he never joined the Communist Party, and that meant that he didn't have the split that Breton and Éluard had in their allegiances and people, including Roland, could never understand Éluard's fascination with Stalin and, particularly, as in Britain it was more evident to those in France what a dreadful murderer Stalin was, what a dictator, on a level with Hitler. People don't talk about it much now, but he was as brutal and as destructive and as hideous as Hitler was in many ways, but he was our ally so everybody was nice about it. But Roland was more cynical and more understanding, I think. The key to understanding Roland is to understand about Quakers, and Quakers are non-conformists, they won't conform to anybody else's ideals, even though they might agree with them, they won't sign up, so Roland would never sign up as being a Labour Party member, he would never sign up as being of the Communist Party of Great Britain or whatever. He associated with them, that's how he got to Barcelona. You see, the reason that Roland didn't fall out with people was because he was very good at negotiating a non-confrontational line.

Q. Now, moving on to Spain and the Spanish Civil War. Breton described Roland as "Surréaliste dans l'amitié" and you have told me about his friendships in England, and we all know about his friendships in France. Who were his connections in Spain?

A. Well, he had to make them up. Through knowing Picasso, he had an *entrée* there. This is really interesting because sometimes I come across areas where both Lee and Roland have had to cover their tracks. What I mean by that is not reveal the source of their connections, and this happened quite a lot with Lee in the war. Obviously, particularly when she was in Romania in post-war times, she is very coded about what she says, she never says how she's got the information, who she met up with, because she knew that that would put those people under threat. Now, Roland, I am sure, made a lot of connections through Picasso. Both Picasso's nephews, Fin and Javier Vilató were actually in Republican Spain in 1936. Also, I think Roland made significant connections through guys from Picasso. That's how he met up with Juan Prats and other people who were significant people who were well connected, and what Roland had

to do was to go and see Harry Pollitt of the British Communist Party, get the papers, safe-conduct passes, get into Barcelona, and when he was in there, yes of course, he went to see the official people, watch the parades and meet the P.O.U.M.'s soldiers and all that kind of stuff, but at the same time, he had an inside track, because he went to see Picasso's mother, you know, he visited friends like that. And so, I am sure that he had a lot better connections than he ever recorded, because he didn't want it to go badly with those who he met, should things turn against them, which they did. I don't know if you've ever had personal experiences like this, but sometimes in places that you go that are occupied by dictators or by oppressive regimes, totalitarian regimes, you are so careful who you meet, because you don't want to get that person, you know, we can go, but they can't. We have to be careful, and I think Roland was very, very cognisant of that.

Q. I have gone through several texts in the Archive in which he describes this trip and it seems that it had a strong impact on him.

A. It changed him, yes, it changed him, because he was conscious of coming from a privileged background. He had money, he had a position in society, not a lofty one, but he had enough money to get by on without actually having to work for it. And I think there was this kind of thing in his mind that that sense of privilege carried with it the responsibility to take care of people who were less fortunate than he was, and I know that that's something that his parents held importance. They regarded it as important that, if you were lucky and privileged, then you almost had an obligation to take care of those who were less privileged.

Q. And what impact did it have on his work?

A. It didn't show so much in his painting. Interestingly, the impact, as far as I know, does not show in his painting or his drawing, and it is almost, if you like, that in this moment he realised the importance of writing, because the first significant time that he was published was in Zervos's book on Catalan art, where he has that chapter. It was the first time that Roland was significantly published as a scholar. Then he would be published as a poet, but it was at this point that he suddenly realised that actually the written word has a lot of power. About that time, he also wrote "Bulldoze Your Dead", that poem, and it was like, for me, it was him in that moment recognising the importance of writing as a tool of communication.

Q. In the Archive there is an impressive poem about the fall of Barcelona, entitled "Mentiras", which is from roughly the same date as *The Road is Wider than Long* (1939). Do you think the Spanish conflict is somehow part of the latent content in *The Road*?

A. Yes, yes, absolutely. By the time Roland got to go to Romania with Lee, first of all, the situation in Spain had deteriorated badly, and the Republicans were being pushed back, if not

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annihilated, and at that moment the rise of the Nazis was seen absolutely unstoppable, Chamberlain was on his appeasement routine, and Roland and Lee were cruising in Romania. Now, anybody with any intelligence realised that places like Romania had oil and the minute the conflict started all of this was going to be very valuable, and so it was only a matter of minutes before, sure enough, the Germans walked into Romania, well they walked all over the place to just take everything. And Roland and Lee knew that what they were looking at was this way of life that continued uninterrupted for thousands of years. These guys were part of this soil, they had their own rituals, Christianity had come, been assimilated into their culture, they still had a lot of their old traditions as well. And they were watching something which they knew was going to inevitably be destroyed by the war. And the way they went about it was they were deliberately documenting. Lee's photographs were very deliberate documentations at that moment because she was very close with Harri Brauner, who was Victor Brauner's brother, and Harri Brauner was a musicologist at Bucharest University and he was their guide and she was his photographer and that's why they went to all this continuous succession of fantastic, amazing rituals and dances and stuff like that, because he knew where to go. He could also get access to things like, there's a funeral of a girl who is dying and Roland writes so touchingly about this, and again it's like coding. And *The Road is Wider than Long* contains these coded messages of how all this area, all this way of life, all this innocent people are going to be destroyed.

Q. Which in a way is paralleled with what was happening in Spain.

A. Absolutely. The Spanish conflict, as you so rightly suggest, that ignited, that crystallised his interest and passion for this. And he always, and Lee, they had this tremendous compassion and fascination for people who were living in a kind of pre-civilisation moment, pre-modern-civilisation mode.

Q. Elaborating a little bit more on this, *The Road is Wider than Long* contains all these references to the Mediterranean landscape and culture that inevitably bring about images of Spain: the peasants make you think of Miró's peasants, and there is also a reference to a bullring... Also, in *The Road*, Roland inevitably transmits a sense of impending war. Was not the Spanish conflict the presage of what was to happen to Europe?

A. Exactly, it left no doubt in their minds as to which direction the world was going to go in, and they weren't at all happy about it.

Q. We talked before about Roland's relationship with Catalonia, which was explored in the 2007 Barcelona Exhibition. Still, I have the feeling that there is a lot more to explore on the

relationship between Roland and the Surrealist Group in Tenerife: Óscar Domínguez, Eduardo Westerdahl...

A. Yes, yes, oh, that's fascinating! If you have not already done so, we must put you in touch with the guy who runs TEA (Tenerife Espacio de Arte), he is really interested in all this, and I had not understood it until I was in Tenerife, I had not understood how, again, code. The Surrealist stuff was too hot for Domínguez and for Westerdahl to be open about, so they made it, first of all, they disguised it, and then, you know, to make it a little less confrontational, but underneath, they were still as revolutionary and as free-thinking and as intellectually challenging as all the others, but they just had to keep their heads down, because otherwise Franco would have, Franco's police would have had them.

Q. Well, some of them even got killed.

A. Yes, Lorca, everybody knew what happened to him.

Q. Yes, also some of the Surrealists from Tenerife...

A. Well, everybody knew that Franco had a secret police who were ruthless and they were really afraid. The one thing that terrifies totalitarian regimes is people who think freely and they'd go at any lengths to destroy that.

Q. Was Roland close to the Tenerife artists?

A. Yes, he'd known Domínguez in Paris before. He didn't lose touch with Domínguez because in more modern times, when I was a kid, I remember Domínguez living in a chateau in France. Domínguez and Roland, they were... You know, like a fool I sold them, but we had a lot of paintings by Domínguez, and Roland and he were close.

Q. On occasion of the 2009 Exhibition in Tenerife, Looking Sideways: Roland Penrose and Surrealism, you said in the Spanish press that Westerdahl had played an important role in Roland's life and that they even shared a similar conception of art...

A. Very much so, they were kindred spirits in a way, and Roland really recognised that Westerdahl was working under very oppressive conditions that Roland had not had to experience for himself. Later on in life, when things lightened up a bit, they were able to make much more connections, but Roland went to Tenerife... Roland once and Valentine went and hung out there for quite a long period.

Q. And she has some poems about Tenerife...

A. Yes, and she was very fond of Tenerife.

Q. Regarding Roland's political stance, you said before that he never joined the Communist Party, and that he joined the Independent Labour Party in order to go to Barcelona, due to the connections between the I.L.P. and the P.O.U.M in Catalonia. Now, the British Surrealists

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oscillated between Communism and Anarchism, to which side did Roland lean? What was he, a Communist or an Anarchist?

A. Neither, he was a Surrealist. This is something that is very important because it applies both to Lee and Roland. People ask me whether Lee was a feminist, and I say that no, she wasn't an –ist of any kind except a Surrealist, and that was enough. They both regarded Surrealism as being what they wanted it to be, they really did not want to associate with any political party. Both of them had a deep-seated mistrust of politics.

Q. In *The Friendly Surrealist* (2001), you say that, during their visit to Barcelona, Roland and Gascoyne were especially drawn to the Catalonian Anarchists.

A. Yes, they were.

Q. And that they were appalled by the way in which they were being suppressed by Stalinist Communism...

A. This is again what made Roland terribly disillusioned about party politics, was the way the Stalinists were beating up everybody else, and there was this internal warfare among the different fractions of Communism, including the P.O.U.M., who... they got practically wiped out. When you start thinking about it, god, if they hadn't divided their strength by fighting each other, they would have hilled up and possibly made a major impact, but no, you see, this is the idiocy of this kind of politics, it's that it's always constantly dividing among itself rather than focusing on getting the job done.

Q. Breton's final rupture with Stalinist Communism through his alliance with Trotsky, and the fact that Éluard remained pro-Stalin must have placed Roland in a difficult position.

A. It did put Roland in a very difficult position, because Roland was very, very much opposed to Stalin. But, for Roland, friendship was more important than anything, and he really had such an affection and respect for Éluard that he wasn't going to allow that to destroy their friendship, so he, in a way, just had to turn a blind eye to Éluard's politics. And I don't know what happened towards the end of Éluard's life, when he could no longer ignore the dreadful things that Stalin was doing. I don't know whether he became disillusioned or not, but certainly Roland, who had a better understanding of these things than Éluard and most other people, Roland could see very quickly where Stalin's totalitarian regime was going. You've already made the point that becoming involved in Spain informed Roland about Romania, and becoming involved in Spain and Romania informed him, and having gone through two wars, informed him very much about... He could see through Stalin, he could see through all that Soviet stuff. And he could also see through the stupidities of the British politicians, but that was another story.

Q. In several texts, Roland defends pacifism and other non-violent means as more effective than war in the revolutionary process. Whereas the urgency of the political situation in Europe made many British authors abandon their previous pacifist positions, this did not happen to Roland, in spite of his close experience of war.

A. Well, it did to an extent, because you saw a picture of Roland in a British Army uniform with the rank of captain.

Q. I was going to ask you about that.

A. I talked to him a lot about this and it was very interesting because he said that yes, he was a pacifist, and at the same time he realised that the threat of the Nazi regime was so intense that he really had to put aside his pacifist feelings because he realised that it had gone beyond the point where any kind of peaceful demonstration wasn't going to make any difference, because these people were not rational, and they were not listening, and there's not much you can do in the face of that. There does come a point where, in order to defend the values that you love and that you really aspire to, you may have to take up arms, it's the option of last resort.

Q. When do you think that happened?

A. Well, it happened when the war broke up in September 1939. Roland was on his way back from France, and he started to discuss with other friends like Julian Trevelyan what they were going to do and they all decided that they were not going to be much good at shooting people because he was 39 at this moment and that's considered to be old, older than 39 is today, so he thought he was not going to be a soldier and run around and shoot guns, and eventually, as a civilian, he came up with the idea and the art of camouflage with a bunch of other guys, and then he was very successful in it. I said before he was a showman, and apparently his lectures on camouflage were really something, and he knew how to communicate, and that's a skill he took into curating later. But, in the war, he suddenly developed a flair for, not only creating camouflage, but for communicating it to other people, and that made him really put an active stake in warfare, albeit in a non-combatant way, but he was not going to sit by and let Éluard and all his friends in France, all the ideals that he stood for, he was not going to let that stuff run to the Nazi chequebook, and he knew no argument would prevail with the Nazis, so there was only one thing to do.

Q. So, it was his own decision to go into...

A. It was his own decision, he needed to volunteer. He would have been too old to be in the Army under normal circumstances.

Q. Regarding the relationship between politics and art, what was Roland's position as a Surrealist? In one of his speeches from about 1938, "Attitude to politics", his position does not seem clear, for although he defends the freedom of the artist, he also states that "intervention in politics is an emergency measure necessary at the present time".

A. Ostensibly, Surrealism was a very political movement, they really wanted to change the world so I think that followed naturally that Roland should want to make whatever contribution he could to the brave new world, and if that was defending values, that was a contribution in itself.

Q. I wanted to discuss the role of woman in Roland's poetics. As opposed to other Surrealists, for whom woman was objectified (in many cases presented as the object of violence or depicted as a castrating being), Roland creates images of female fertility, maternity and purity, which is atypical for a Surrealist. Was it because of Lee?

A. No, he was like that before he met her. I agree he is atypical of the Surrealists. They weren't all monsters though. I think it is just down to personal qualities, but Roland based his decisions in his life, this actually is the key: Roland was very guided by an instinctive respect of other people, of their rights, they have a right to exist, they have a right to be different, they have a right to be an individual, and Roland applied that to women as well as men, and so he did not see any reason why a woman should be subordinated to a man, or to anybody else, anything else, unless they chose to be, they had a right to choose as well. So, I think this automatically in a way made him different to some of the other people who were much more inclined to use women and, like you say, to objectify them, and that's a very polite way of saying treating them not very well for their own ends, which is what happened an awful lot. I'm ashamed to say that Max Ernst was, particularly in his early days, was like that. He was unkind to women. Éluard had a reputation for being very charming and very kind, but I think that he saw women mostly as sex objects rather than intellectual people, and certainly he loved Nusch very much but I don't think he encouraged her much as an artist and helped her with her career because she was like his beautiful adornment. I'm being very unkind but that's, you know... This is interesting the way the Surrealists were so revolutionary and they failed to reconstruct sexuality. Yes, most of them were men, most of them were highly sexed and mostly heterosexual –interesting that Breton did not have much tolerance for homosexuality, particularly among men-. The interesting thing was that Valentine became a lesbian, and she had an affair with very many women including Alice Paalen and Nusch Éluard and so son, and the men thought this was rather nice but they were very mistrustful, they disliked male homosexuality and that is one of the reasons Cocteau never got along very well with them all.

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Q. In *The Road is Wider than Long*, woman is portrayed as a healing being.

A. Yes, the feminine thing of giving, of abundance, of, in a way, nurturing, protecting people that are weaker than them, and I think that was Roland's view, idealisation of women. Roland was very unable to resist the charms of beautiful women, he was quite sexually, I wouldn't say predatory, but he certainly had very strong sex drives towards women, but at the same time, unlike many others, he rather charmingly respected women. I'll always remember, if I brought my girlfriends home, here, how they always fell in love with him. [laughs]

Q. Well, I'm not surprised. [laughs] And he also sees a kind of connection between woman and the elements, nature, the universe...

A. Yes, yes, this is not just a Romantic... it's something that he really believed, and I think it was significant that he knew the value of intuition, and that's a very feminine quality, and much of his painting, much of his poetry, much of his life, was guided by intuition.

Q. The French Surrealists were known for their spiritist séances. What is the role of magic and the esoteric in Roland's work?

A. Roland was always open to these things but with a slight air of cynicism about it, he wasn't easily impressed by that sort of stuff. He was very impressed and respectful of Valentine's tarot cards, he really recognised that she had some very unusual abilities, and so he was often in times of stress, in difficult moments, he would ask her to read the cards and he would be often quite comforted by what she would say. I'm not saying that she deliberately told him things that he wanted to hear, but for example, when the paintings were stolen from London in the sixties, we went for months without any news of what was happening whether they were going to be found and recovered or not. And Roland would, at regular intervals, quite often, ask Valentine her opinion, and she would say that yes, he'd get them all back, a little damaged, but he would get them back. And this would happen quite regularly, and yes, we got them all back, they were all recovered. Some were damaged, but none were damaged irreparably, so Valentine was right. Valentine was very right about a lot of things, sometimes she was so enigmatic that you couldn't quite work out what was going to happen, and sometimes she was right on, she would say beware of this, take care of that. And Roland was very intuitive and he valued the arcane, and the esoteric in all these people, particularly he saw that women have a more automatic connection to these things than men do, it was basic nature, and he really respected that, and understood it and valued it, and I think in some ways he was slightly envious of it, he would have liked to have been that way.

Q. Well, I see him as being very down to earth in many ways, but also he believes in this kind of connection with the universe in all his references to the elements, astronomy...

A. One of the artists that he loved particularly was Miró, and you know that Miró had a series of drawings of people with very big feet, and in the early times there was the drawing of the farmer's wife with these massive great feet, and Roland talked to him about it, and Miró said that if you are going to jump as high as the stars you need to first have your feet firmly on the ground. And I thought that was a wonderful Miró saying, but it also applied to Roland because he was actually very practical, he was very grounded, he was a farmer! He did not actually go out there and milk the cows himself but he knew a lot about it, and that gave him a kind of an earthy quality and it was a good base for making his leaps into the stars.

Q. And all the references that you mentioned about the fireplace in the house to the Long Man of Wilmington, the sun and the planets and the cornucopias...

A. Well, that's almost a feminine concept, when you think about the way he was looking at the wholeness, the totality of it all: the crops, the land, the stars... and actually, what's interesting is that the Long Man, people make fun of him because he hasn't got a penis, but actually it's very obvious that he is facing the hill and the hill is like a pubic mound between two thighs, and he's there, and he's got his hands on the sides of the doorway, and this is the entrance to another world. You have to think way out of the normal track of things and then suddenly it makes sense.

Q. Well, that would sum it all up: how Surrealism, with all its irrational arcane images, can actually *make sense*, how it has a very direct connection with reality, with consciousness, being, as you said, a code through which to interpret reality. Thank you very much, Antony, for your very interesting commentaries on Roland's life and work, it has been a real pleasure.

A. Thank *you.*

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