

‘Where are the War Poets?’

As with all forms of contribution to *Horizon*, the poems that appeared, even in the years delineated by the war, are far too numerous to explore fully in any one project. Many types of verse appeared in its pages, from those that celebrated the changing of the seasons to those that lamented the passing of painters, writers of fiction, and, of course, other poets. Names familiar from the accepted canon are common, in particular W.H. Auden and Dylan Thomas, but contributions from lesser-known poets found a way in as well; some would become famous in their own right, while many others sank deep into obscurity. All of *Horizon*'s poetry is worthy of analysis, both as individual works written in a period of crisis and as vital attributes of the periodical itself. This chapter, though, will limit itself to a selection of those poems that deal with wartime in a more direct fashion, offering insight into the poetic responses to war that Cyril Connolly chose to include. The war-related ideas these poems provide are numerous and varied, in line with Connolly's pledge to look for quality of expression, rather than judgement based merely of what was expressed. Some are by established poets of the period, such as Cecil Day Lewis and Stephen Spender; others, such as those by Kathleen Raine and Alun Lewis, demonstrate the ability of talented newcomers who would later make names for themselves. At least one, by Geoffrey Matthews, shows that a poet's ability can be formed, and informed, by special circumstances, in this case the war, even if that poet never publishes again once those circumstances end.

Despite limiting itself to those poems that deal directly with the war, this chapter attempts to demonstrate the breadth of poetry offered by *Horizon*. Contrary to popular belief during the period and well after that the Second World War was a silent war, particularly in poetry, the

Second World War might be seen as better represented poetically than the First, and by many more poets. As early as 1944 M. J. Tambimuttu pointed out in his own magazine, *Poetry (London)*, that ‘there are more interesting poets writing to-day in war-time than last time’.¹ Partly this was due to the generalised nature of the conflict, which affected all Britons, not just those engaged in military action. As Sebastian Knowles states, Second World War ‘literature comes from those fighting at home’ and ‘the literature of the home front is directly engaged in war in a way it could never be in the First World War’.² Every facet of British life was touched, in everything from shortages of food and materials, the horrors of the Blitz, and bombing raids that destroyed largely parts of Britain and terrorised many who were not directly attacked. The poetry of this war did not need to espouse the Brookesian patriotic ethos to be utterly relevant to the conflict. Angus Calder makes the claim that, ‘In fact, the most violent verse of professional standard which was published during the war was written by civilians [...] it was civilians now who proclaimed their sufferings’.³ Service poetry, too, was relevant, but its subjects and themes were also different from those of the previous conflict.

In order to demonstrate that the answer to the question posed in the January 1941 edition of *Horizon*, where were the war poets, was ‘under your nose,’ Connolly included two examples: Dylan Thomas’s ‘Deaths and Entrances’ and Alun Lewis’s ‘All Day it has Rained...’ The second of these challenged any heroic myth of warfare by depicting ‘army life as it really is,’ Connolly adding that it brings ‘out something of the sad monotony which is distilled from the routine movements of vast masses of men’ (III:13 5). This issue was not the first appearances of war related writing, however; Connolly had spoken of the war as the enemy of literary endeavour in the first issue, and it was already very present in many of the literary contributions in that first issue. Not surprisingly, it remained an issue throughout the war. In *Horizon’s* first year, literary

reactions varied according to contemporaneous events. During the Phony War, usually held to have lasted until the Nazi invasion of Belgium, The Netherlands and Luxembourg in May of 1940, *Horizon's* literary contributions explore the outbreak of war and the varied responses it provoked, the nature of totalitarianism, the idea of war itself, and post-war possibilities. Predictions of the course of the war itself are understandably nebulous. Despite escalation of the war on the continent and British action in Norway and, later, the Low Countries and France during April, May and June, the war had yet to reach British soil. The fall of France and the evacuation of the British Expeditionary Force during this period were the prominent subjects in all areas of discourse, including literature.⁴ The Battle of Britain and the Blitz occupied the final months of 1940, beginning in July, and drastically changed the British wartime experience and its literary expression.⁵

The war gets surprisingly substantial coverage in the first issue, even in the midst of the Phony War. Louis MacNeice's poem 'Cushendun' evokes a coastal cottage on a calm night, lit by the moon and full of homey, comforting odours. The first three stanzas all emphasise notions of safety and familiarity, the archetypal home and hearth, by telescoping in from the surrounding landscape, to the cottage's exterior, and finally inside. The outside environment illustrated in the first stanza is peaceful and idyllic: 'Fuchsia and ragweed and the distant hills/Made as it were out of clouds and sea:/All night the bay is plashing and the moon/ Marks the break of the waves'.⁶ The night described is clear, moonlit, and calm, and the landscape is itself tranquil, a perfect mixture of 'clouds and sea' rather than rock and scrub. The second stanza evokes the same theme: 'Limestone and basalt and a whitewashed house/With passages of great stone flags/And a walled garden with plums on the wall/ And a bird piping in the night'.⁷ The immediate vicinity of the cottage, as well as the cottage itself, continue to exude normality and calmness, but the

phrasing, in its lack of distinct independent clauses, gives a sense of breathlessness and hurried description. The 'bird piping' in the final line is, while supposedly normal, out of kilter with the pacific nature of the rest of the stanza's descriptions.

The third stanza continues the description of the cottage, and explicitly names one of the themes that the descriptions are meant to evoke, 'forgetfulness,' at the very start: 'Forgetfulness: brass lamps and copper jugs/And home-made bread and the smell of turf or flax/And the air a glove and the water lathering easy/ And convolvulus in the hedge'.⁸ The smells, and even the feel of the air, continue to emphasise warmth and comfort, yet the breathlessness of the second stanza is continued in the third, and the position of the word 'forgetfulness' at the beginning of the stanza, separated by a colon, seems to label the purpose and intended effect of the lulling descriptions. The breathlessness may be foreshadowing the revelation of the fourth stanza; the description certainly seems to grow more desperate, listing more details, without contextual modifiers, even mentioning morning glories outside without specifying whether their visual, olfactory or tactile appeal is what makes them worthy of inclusion. It is only in the fourth and final stanza that the sense of safety 'Cushendun's' setting embodies is explicitly dispelled: 'In the dark green room beside the fire/ With the curtains drawn against the winds and waves/ There is a little box with a well-bred voice;/ What a place to talk of War'.⁹ MacNeice wrote the poem in August 1939, before the official declaration of war the following month, but its appearance in the first issue of *Horizon* makes the disruption of the 'talk of War' all the more powerful in hindsight, and the tranquillity it pierces even more temporally remote. In the wartime context, such disruption of the private world is inevitable, and talk of war, exemplified in the sense of impending doom so often discussed throughout the previous decade, can be as disruptive as falling bombs and actual hostilities. Nostalgia was a common form of escape.

Poetic contributions to *Horizon* during the first year of the war did not all involve pessimistic themes. The February 1940 issue opens with George Barker's poem, 'Austrian Requiem,' which begins ominously enough: the first three stanzas of the five stanza poem all serve to convey the idea of Vienna, and Austria as a whole, as a victim of aggression and corrupt occupation, '[g]elded by Nazi march'.¹⁰ The images he uses are numerous: Barker alludes to the great wounding of art, learning and culture that the Nazis perform, connecting the recent passing of Sigmund Freud with his official denigration by the Nazi regime: 'the sickbed of Freud is carried into the streets'.¹¹ 'Who now in the mountains with the music of Mozart,' the poet asks, 'Gazes now with eyeballs needled, making not sweeter/ But falser the music that festoons the mountains,' describing a form of corruption to which nothing, no matter its beauty, is immune.¹² 'The Danube is obstructed with the bodies of suicide' is how Barker concludes the three stanzas that convey his poetic rendering of a raped city and country, and of beauty eclipsed by brutality.

The last two stanzas of the poem are quite different, however, as the speaker conveys the idea that this unnatural state cannot be permanent, but must eventually be set aright, that inevitably the Viennese Samson, an 'Austrian strong man pinioned among the pillars,' must pull 'down around him the column of subjugation'.¹³ 'The crocus breaks the rock,' according to the speaker, and because of proof of the doom of unnatural situations:

Not here the howitzer shall assume permanent dominion.—

But the sweet syringa shall burst from the corner

Where a brute buried it; the lyrical opinions

Of the dove murmur again, the summertime comer:

The avalanche disappear, and Love appear

Like Venus from clouds, and where a misery was
 The ridiculous city of music shimmer there.¹⁴

This emphasis, at the end of the poem, on the inability of such incomprehensible barbarity to last, is quite different from the sense of foreboding conveyed by most other poems submitted to *Horizon* during the first months of the war, when subjects were often either grounded in the fear of invasion, totalitarian rule, and the death of culture, or, in a few cases, based on the enduring idea of all war as folly. Indeed, the hope ‘Austrian Requiem’ offers is an interesting anomaly among all contributions, poetry or otherwise, in the *Horizon* issues appearing during the Phony War, before the beginning of the Battle of Britain and the Blitz. Then, the public attitude underwent significant change.

Three poetic treatments of the war appear in the April 1940 issue of *Horizon*. William R. Rodgers’s ‘War-time’, Laurie Lee’s ‘A Moment of War’ and Adam Drinan’s ‘The Gulls’ appear in sequence at the beginning of the issue. The subjects of the poems are similar, and their themes converge, so it is obviously not accidental that Connolly chose to publish them together. The first, ‘War-time’ by William R. Rodgers, consists of a single stanza:

Now all our hurries that hung up on hooks,
 And all our heels that idly kicked in halls,
 And all our angers that at anchor swung,
 And all our youth long tethered to dole-lines,
 And all our roots that rotted deep in dump,
 Are recollected. In country places

Old men gather the children round them now,
 As an old tree, when lopped of every bough,
 Gathers the young leaves into itself, a frilled stump.¹⁵

Rodgers' quick succession of impressions of past indolence, and hints of the accompanying liberty to express, albeit ineffectually, idealistic fancies and intellectual diatribes, are cut short by the simile of the old men gathering children like a pruned aged tree's new leaves. The effect obviously simulates what Rodgers sees as the cessation of interesting, unruly discourse in favour of duller conversation due to the effects of war, hence the title of the poem.

Unlike Barker's 'Austrian Requiem,' Laurie Lee's 'A Moment of War' conveys confusion and terror. The fear is produced by the prospect of what is to come, rather than commenting solely on what has already passed as in Rodgers' poem. Like 'War-time,' it offers a depiction of the pre-war atmosphere, but Lee uses more violent imagery, as evidenced by the poem's opening lines: 'It is night like a red rag/drawn across the eyes,/the flesh is bitterly pinned to desperate vigilance,/ and blood is stuttering with fear'.¹⁶ The last word of the stanza, 'fear,' is the theme of the poem, developed by suggesting that any other existence would be an improvement: 'O praise the security of worms/and cool crumbs of soil,/flatter the hidden sap/and the lost unfertilized spawn of fish!'.¹⁷ Only in these unattainable, lowly states is safety a possibility, and they are thus enviable, according to the speaker. A response of resignation then is put forth: 'The hands melt with weakness/into the gun's hot iron,/the body melts with pity,/the face is braced for wounds,/the odour and the kiss of final pain'.¹⁸ There is no escape, and even a gun is incapable of providing a sense of control or the ability to avoid 'final pain,' instead being another vessel of 'weakness,' causing 'the body' to melt 'with pity'.¹⁹

The next section, sharing a symmetry with the second, which dealt with the enviable state of worms and fish roe, looks to the creative abilities of women: 'O envy the peace of women/giving birth and love like toys/into the hands of men!'.²⁰ The unspoken corollary is that the male speaker's state, and that of men in general, lacks peace and necessarily involves destruction. Destruction might seem like a power that provides control, but what follows further depicts terror and lack of self-control, showing that this destructive aspect is untameable and something to be feared: 'The mouth festers with pale curses/the bowels struggle like a nest of rats,/the feet wish they were grass/spaced quietly'.²¹ Upset bowels and curses like lesions demonstrate no control, over fear or anything else, and the most basic, bodily fear possible, the kind only inevitable, uncontrolled violence can bring. The section following is meant to parallel the two others that begin with the plaintive 'O,' but is much shorter, demonstrating the ineffectualness of describing enviable states. It is a cry for help, or even a basic lamentation of what is to come, but as these, too, it is of no use: 'O Christ and Mother!'.²² The poem ends by reinforcing this ineffectualness, and the inevitability of what is to come: 'But darkness opens like a knife for you/and you are marked down by your pulsing brain/and isolated,/and your breathing,/your breathing is the blast, the bullet,/and the final sky'.²³ Lee's poem was written almost three years previously, during the Spanish Civil War, but its inclusion beside Rodgers' poem can be seen as evidence for its concurrent relevance in Connolly's opinion, and its submission in 1940 indicates Lee's similar view. While each war is distinctive, there are certain qualities they share. Give the close historical proximity of the Spanish Civil War and the Second World War, there appears a depressing continuity, as though the early war made the later one a certainty.

Adam Drinan's 'The Gulls,' the third of the April 1940 poems, is a parable of sorts, offering an extended simile: 'Learn you from the gulls that squabble on the garbled beach/ for offal in sea-rope, sea-straps, sea-tangle sanded:—;' ironically, 'Pacific are they also, not a gull wants to fight/ but with a kind of gurgle strangled on one note they bluff/ fierce beaks agape, like stilted tanks they lurch/ turn by turn, each at each that has'.²⁴ Even the most prestigious of their number are not above grabbing at scraps, 'Especially/the big proud blackback lords with their arrogant good looks/who snarl so unaristocratically when it's a matter of having,/in a flash as venomously vigilant to assert their rights/as things stunted, subnormal'.²⁵ Because of this tension, 'One peck, one feinted peck' is 'enough/ in economic war,' and chaos is unleashed: 'First threat gives first title. All scream./Next threat dispossesses first. All scream. Each to grab/draws the guts a yard in public scream till dispossessed./The guts have been dragged all over the screaming beach./ None, time to eat;/but public war all morning has been maintained successfully'.²⁶ The implied parallels with the wartime behaviour of nations and their leaders are unmistakable. The poem emphasises the point that although there is much posturing and grabbing, no one attains anything substantial. The offal is dragged all over the beach in the fracas before time is up, and the gulls inexplicably flee: 'Then, causeless, public panic. All swirl to sea,/all float/in public silence. Even the timid ones that stood by and did/ nothing/take to wing, flee, though now they might have safely fed./For all there was plenty, yet none had anything at all/and entrails shrivel on hot pebbles under the sun'.²⁷ The message is heavy-handed didacticism, but it provides further evidence of the attitudes regarding the war and its pointlessness, in particular the pacifist criticisms of its causes. These perspectives are enhanced by its juxtaposition with Lee's 'A Moment of War' and Rodgers' 'War-time'. Each poem has

something to say in its own right, but published together in *Horizon*, they offer readers different ways of comprehending or responding to a conflict whose main effects had yet to be felt.

A different perspective again is provided in Francis Scarfe's 'Conscript,' a war-related poetic contribution to the May 1940 issue of *Horizon*. Innocence lost is an obvious theme, evoked by the contrasts inherent in the first stanza: 'Delicate ingenuous his quivering blue eye/Miniatures the *Horizon* of the condemned sky/Where burns all history in the bones of children/And fall the tears of remorse and breaks the heart of heaven'.²⁸ The conscript is poised at the edge of the unalterable change from youth to murderous wartime manhood. He is not meant for this, and has been groomed for other, non-violent ideals, as illustrated in the second stanza: 'Mothered for pitted dunes and these livid grasses/He stands on the edge of murder motionless/As the green statues that to his fame shall moulder/With love's and death's stone wings touching his shoulder'.²⁹ 'The edge of murder' further emphasises the line he is about to cross, and the description of the monument that will be his conveys the eventual inconsequentiality of this transgression. The contradiction of the hopes he embodies and his current state is also the theme of the third stanza: 'While all he meant to live for hides behind/The click of hell released by his unskilled finger,/ Index of Europe's hand dyed red with honour/ Which wields the boy a puppet of its anger'.³⁰ The conscript does not become an agent of death for any personal, understandable reason, but is merely an instrument of governments and failed statecraft. Yet his act will have very personal consequences. The fourth and final stanza completes the theme of loss of innocence by intimating the corruption the previous action has caused, and its effect on the ideal of home and hearth: 'Tranquil the thrush sings on the twisted pylon/ Its song unwinding the unbearable pattern/ Of loss, fear, blood, night's aching empty arms,/ Back to the heat of love and the smell of home'.³¹ Ostensibly, the poem is similar to

Barker's 'Austrian Requiem' in that it is more forward looking in its approach (in this case by depicting the effects of war) than most others in the first six issues of *Horizon*. But its imagery and theme in general hark back to First World War concerns and experiences. It is, yet again, an expression of one of the many fears, that of wasted youth, circulating in the first half of 1940, before the war had truly arrived in Britain.

Laurie Lee's 'Poem' in the July 1940 issue deals more directly with recent events. In the first stanza Lee describes a state of pre-war innocence, coloured by springtime:

The evening, the heather,
 The unsecretive cuckoo
 And butterflies in their disorder;
 Not a word of war as we lie,
 Our mouths in a hot nest
 And the flowers advancing.³²

This innocence, however, is suspect, and the atmosphere accusatory. The war is not unknown, but it is not spoken about intentionally, the preference being to enjoy the present without concern for other places or coming times. The second stanza makes this implied accusation clear:

Does a hill defend itself,
 does a river run to earth
 to hide its quaint neutrality?
 A boy is shot with England in his brain,

But she lies brazen beneath the sun,
 she has no honour and she has no fear.³³

The use of the term ‘neutrality,’ appearing as it does in this issue, would almost certainly evoke the military stances of Finland prior to invasion by the Soviet Union, and Norway, Denmark, Belgium and The Netherlands prior to invasion by the Nazis. England, too, was often seen as complicit with France in the sacrifice of Czechoslovakia and, as a result, for not declaring war in time to defend Poland, all due to a now untenable neutral stance in the year before the war. This poem’s indictment, however, seems to be of the concurrent forgetfulness and/or lack of interest in continental events, despite the fact that substantial numbers of British troops were already engaged with the enemy. War had been declared for months, but it seemed all but non-existent and forgotten at home, as evidenced by the popular Phony War label for the period.

In contrast to these varied poetic portrayals of the early wartime atmosphere, a letter from J. A. Spender to his nephew, Stephen Spender, is included in the April 1940 issue, its main purpose being to provide a viewpoint from the previous generation regarding current poetic trends. But its wartime relevance can be found in a paragraph late in the letter: ‘You ask me whether I think politics a good subject for poetry[...]that depends on the poet and what he means by politics[...]no political poetry really survives unless it has got beyond the politics of the hour and expressed emotions—exaltations, agonies—of which politics are symptoms[...]so beware of sectarian political poetry[...]“left wing” poetry, Marxist poetry is on a par with Nazi poetry, Nazi science, Nazi art[...]it is a characteristic totalitarian idea’.³⁴ It seems highly likely that this section, despite the interesting perspective of late Nineteenth Century literature that accompanies it, in particular made the letter attractive enough to be published. J. A. Spender’s statement is

very much in line with Connolly's own comments regarding the literary trends of the previous decade, especially in the face of war, and his often repeated desire for *Horizon* to rise above polemical, faceless ideology. The fear of this possible outcome for arts and literature is just as real as the fear of purposeless violence and death, evoked in much of the other contributions during the Phony War. Its placement at the beginning of an issue including three poems that explore fear of war in general, and that indict the current predicament as a result, demonstrates something of Connolly's belief in what was at stake, and what was most precious and deserving of protection.

Alun Lewis's 'All Day it has Rained...', which appeared poetry in the January 1941 issue, offers a different account of war, illustrating the endless waiting, boredom, and melancholy of the average soldier during the early years of the conflict: 'All day it has rained, and we on the edge of the moors/Have sprawled in our bell-tents, moody and dull as boors'.³⁵ These first two lines of the poem introduce the theme of uselessness, inaction, and dulled wits, enhanced by the imagery of 'skirmishing fine rain' that 'glided, wave and mist and dream,/Drenching the gorse and heather, a gossamer stream,' and 'wind that made the canvas heave and flap/And the taut wet guy ropes ravel out and snap'.³⁶ The subtle misery these descriptions imply enhance the sense of monotony and listlessness, providing a macrocosmic echo of the poem's 'we.' Descriptions of attempts to make time pass follow:

And we stretched out, unbuttoning our braces,
 Smoking a woodbine, darning dirty socks,
 Reading the Sunday papers—I saw a fox
 And mentioned it in the note I scribbled home;

And we talked of girls and dropping bombs on Rome
 And thought of the quiet dead and the loud celebrities
 Exhorting us to slaughter and the herded refugees;
 Yet thought softly, morosely of them, and as indifferently
 As of ourselves and those whom we for years
 Have loved and will again³⁷

Many of these activities are civilian and commonplace, while some are indicative of wartime, but all continue the poem's emphasis on the depressive setting and the soldiers' boredom. The rhythm is rapid-fire yet monotonous in its delivery, furthering the effect of the imagery, as does the loose rhyme scheme, which also evokes a listless, indifferent attitude. The final couplet reiterates the theme: 'To-morrow maybe love; but now it is the rain/Possesses us entirely, the twilight and the rain'.³⁸ An entirely different image is offered by the last stanza of the poem, in which the speaker recalls children 'shaking down burning chestnuts for the school-yard's merry/play,' and 'the shaggy patient dog who followed me,' scenes of which the speaker states, 'I can remember nothing dearer or more to my heart'.³⁹ This progression of descriptions is suddenly cut short: 'To the Shoulder o' Mutton where Edward Thomas brooded/long/On death and beauty—till a bullet stopped his song'.⁴⁰ This final line, juxtaposed with the 'grey awakening' of the first stanza and the sentimentality of the preceding lines in the second, seems to force an actual awakening, a realisation that there is violence happening, and the current inaction cannot fully mask it.⁴¹ Lewis's illustration of camp life was the first poetic rendering of current military experience by a soldier to appear in *Horizon*, and was painfully accurate. 'All Day it has Rained...' offers a vivid account of the reality of military life, and *Horizon's* readers

would have undoubtedly noticed the contrast with their own, primarily civilian wartime realities. For readers, the poem develops an awareness of the distance of their experience from that of the soldiers, but it also shows that, given the nature of the conflict, in many ways their situations are closer than they might presume.

The May 1941 issue's inclusion of 'The Soldier' is the second appearance of Alun Lewis in *Horizon*, and the theme of this poem corresponds with that of his earlier contribution, although the balance is shifted. Rather than a detailed look at the experience the speaker shares with his fellow soldiers, with a brief demonstration of his separateness and sense of being alone despite this grey fellowship, 'The Soldier' explicitly explores this sense of not belonging; it is worth quoting in its entirety to demonstrate this sense:

I within me holding
 Turbulence and Time—
 Volcanic fires deep beneath the glacier—
 Feel the dark cancer in my vitals
 Of impotent impatience grope its way
 Through daze and dream to throat and fingers
 To find its climax of disaster.
 The sunlight breaks its glittering wings
 Imprisoned in the Hall of Mirrors:
 Nightmare rides upon the headlines;
 While Summer leaves her green reflective woods
 And flashes momentarily on peaks of madness.

But leisurely my fellow soldiers stroll among the trees

The cheapest dance song utters all they feel.⁴²

The first noticeable contrast with ‘All Day it has Rained...’ is the setting: ‘The Soldier’ is a poem of summer, green rather than grey, and its energy is markedly more intense than in the former poem, emphasising the constrained power the speaker is experiencing. Despite the change in season, the mood is not more light-hearted; it is more energetic, but also more precarious, with overtones of danger. The speaker is trapped, and the observation that his fellows do not share this sense increases the poem’s intensity. Lewis’s description of this experience surely seemed familiar to many highly educated conscripts, and is valuable because it illustrates this perspective. Both of Lewis’s poems, despite their difference in theme, serve to illustrate the aspect of wartime that the call for ‘war poets’ would seem to request, but not in the manner that was traditionally hoped for. Rather than patriotism, or even the horrors of the front, Lewis describes the omnipresent boredom and low-level misery of military life, along with its inherent loneliness, even among fellow soldiers. This is the faithful representation, for the most part, of a soldier’s existence in the Second World War, something less heroic than many of the war poems of the previous conflict, but more honest about the nature of soldiering.

Similar themes appear in ‘Midwinter,’ a poem by the South African writer Uys Krige in the December 1942 issue of *Horizon*, but there is a major difference in perspective: according to the poem’s postscript, it was composed in ‘Prisoner of War Camp No. 78, Italy, 4 February 1942’.⁴³ The poem is highly descriptive, both of the surrounding countryside, the camp itself, and the depressing weather; it begins with a sense of loss: ‘Gone are the mountains, gone Il Gran Sasso, every peak, every cliff and/ outcrop, gaunt and black, craggy hard/swallowed by the

mist;/and gone the fresh little mole mounds, no sooner heaped up than beaded with/ frost,
 here in the prison yard/no bigger than my fist'.⁴⁴ This first stanza introduces, along with the
 reliance on description, the use of what would otherwise be considered minutiae, as with the
 molehills, at the same level as macroscopic images of the landscape. The loss of these little
 things is as pressing as that of the much larger details. The combination of losses both big and
 small continue in the second stanza: 'Gone too the country-roads like rods of ebony that cut these
 fields of snow/ into strict squares of black and white,/rigid rectangles;/and gone the tiny tracks
 of snails that looped themselves round a clean cobble-/ stone shining as beautiful and bright/as
 jingling bangles,/spooring the gutter's edge, crisscrossing the mess-kitchen steps, sparkling
 even/with the sheen of spangles./And from the eaves the long, sharp-pointed icicle—winter's
 dagger with/ hilt and shaft silver-chased—stabbing the sight/no longer dangles'.⁴⁵
 Consonance, and to a lesser extent assonance, are used extensively in this stanza: 'stone shining
 as beautiful and bright,' 'jingling bangles,' 'spangles,' 'dangles,' and the like all evoke the
 beauty inherent in the snail's trail, something that might otherwise seem inconsequential. Much
 more space is given to the snail's path than to the surrounding roads and fields, and the
 geometrical strength and rigidity of the first lines that describe these is quite different from the
 sparkle and shine of the snail's trail, which is also seemingly missed more than the icicle, which
 although 'silver-chased' is more terrible than beautiful. Whatever their comparative worth to the
 speaker, all are gone.

What is left is described in the third stanza, which is much shorter than the preceding
 two: 'We have come to the dead-end of all our days, all our nights: these four blank/ walls a
 drab red brown by day, pitch black by night. There is no turning/backward or forward from
 this./This is our life, our death-in-life; this gloom, this ghostly pallor above each/ cot at noon,

this cold at day's meridian, as cold as ice but burning, burning/even as war's embrace, the blazing battle's bitter kiss'.⁴⁶ The sense of inescapability and entrapment these lines evoke do not convey the passion such ideas would usually carry, and even resignation is too kinetic a descriptor for this motionlessness. The next stanza reinforces this inability to act, or even move, only characterised by banked but burning frustration and bitterness:

Through the chinks, the cracks in the wide wooden door, the shattered
 window, the mist seeps. Its wisps cluster, drift and veer
 above each wooden bed
 The floor is of cement. There is no stove or fire. In tow long rows we lie
 freezing under our blankets. In this grey whiteness lingering around us,
 drooping, drear,
 from which all speech, all sound has fled,
 no one speaks. All the old battles, desert scraps, dogfights, crashes on the
 desert's deck, swimming around in the cold, dark Med. before the slow
 red dawn, all the heroism and the gallantry, all the cowardice and the
 horror and the fear,
 nothing, nothing has been left unsaid.⁴⁷

The inability to act has become an incapacity to feel. The earlier images of the snail trail and the molehill, and the speaker's ability to find beauty and interest even in these small memories, emphasise the 'death-in-life' existence in the rows of cots.

The final two stanzas of Krige's poem are the shortest, and are separated from the remainder of the poem, and each other, by breaks. They both reiterate the silence that so much time and hostile, small space have conspired to create. The first continues to explore the idea that 'nothing has been left unsaid': 'We have come to the end of all our small talk, our tether, our high hopes,/ ambitions. We have exhausted even the bickerings, the stupid quarrels,/ the sneer, the snarl. We have foregone all that we loved, cherished, held/ most dear/and all our books are read'.⁴⁸ Surrender to the cold and the silence is complete; there is nothing else. The final stanza repeats the idea of living death: 'This is a dead world, a lost world and these are lost men, lost each in his own/ separate limbo, banished from his own memories, exiled even from/ himself. Here/even dreams are dead'.⁴⁹ If Alun Lewis's ennui, the low-level misery of cold misty rain, and the loneliness of being different and apart, intellectually, from one's comrades in arms are all characteristic of the typical British enlisted man's experience, Uys Krige's portrayal, despite containing similar basic emotions, takes these ideas to an extreme made possible only by the conditions of an unheated POW camp building in winter. Closer to death than limbo, this existence cannot be properly described using terms like boredom, miserable weather and loneliness, even though these are leading constituents in the situation. The difference between the average day of an enlisted man and a POW is made up only of degrees, but they are worlds apart nevertheless. Krige's poem offers a distinctive and unusual representation of wartime existence, one that could be added to an increasingly complex perspective on wartime presented to *Horizon's* readers. Its particular qualities contribute to the tenor of the issue in which it appeared, and to the larger context of *Horizon's* ongoing account of the war.

Stephen Spender's aptly titled 'Air Raid' appears in the February 1941 issue. It is one of the first literary contributions to *Horizon* to explore the effects of the Blitz, and in many ways

performs the same task as the many photographs of bombed out buildings that also appear in many issues, beginning in late 1940. The poem's structure is a basic linear narrative, beginning with scenes of domestic tranquillity in the first few stanzas, before abruptly shifting, in the latter half of the poem, to the destruction of the house, its occupants, and the symbiotic force of life and light they share and create. In the first stanza, the idea of light is emphatically evoked: 'In this room like a bowl of flowers filled with light/The family eyes look down on the white/Pages of a book, and the mild white ceiling,/Like a starched nurse, reflects a calm feeling'.⁵⁰ The repetition of the word 'white,' along with the direct description in the phrases 'filled with light' and 'a calm feeling,' build this emphasis on lightness and tranquillity. The following stanza continues to reinforce this sense, concentrating on its familial component: 'The daughter with hands outstretched to the fire/Transmits through her veins the peaceful desire/Of the family tree from which she was born/To push tendrils through nights to a promiseful dawn'.⁵¹ This sense of familial continuity, and connectedness to the house, carries on into the third stanza: 'In the gray stone house and the glass-and-steel flat/The vertical descendants of the bones that/Have sprung from the past, are supported on floors/And protected by walls from the wind outdoors'.⁵²

The protection the house provides, particularly of the life force it shares and co-creates with its inhabitants, and the reinforcement of the sense of interconnectedness between the two entities along with the gradual growing together described in the second and third lines foreshadow the somewhat obvious organism metaphor of the fourth stanza: 'In their complex surroundings, they act out the part/Of the flesh home of the human heart,/With limbs extending to chairs, tables, cups,/All the necessities and props'.⁵³ The relationship between structure and inhabitants having been established, the fifth stanza describes the activities that occur in this safe, separate and protected space: 'They wear the right clothes and acquire the safe ways,/Hear the

news, discuss golf, and fill out their days/With work, and meals brought from the kitchen range./And no one sees anything empty or strange'.⁵⁴ The speaker tentatively agrees with this sentiment, as can be seen in the continuation of the fifth stanza's thought in the first line of the sixth stanza, 'In all this. And perhaps that is right. Nothing is'.⁵⁵ This reservedly offered assurance is qualified abruptly; it is immediately followed by the line 'Until an unreasoning fury impinges,' the arrival of the bomb, an intruder from a 'different vision of life,' which ironically explodes 'on their hearth', the ancient symbol and literal centrepiece of what has been described throughout the preceding stanzas, 'and tears the place down to earth'.⁵⁶

What follows in the final stanzas of the poem is the inverse of the light, calm, organic images of the first half. The seventh stanza of Spender's poem begins the description of the aftermath: 'Then the inside made outside faces the street./Rubble decently buries the human meat./ Piled above it, a bath, cupboards, books, telephone./Though all who could answer its ringing have gone'.⁵⁷ This stanza is unique in its use of clipped, single-line sentences; the rambling, two-stanza long evocations of home, hearth and familial contentment in the previous part of the poem have given way to a simple series of images, these being enough to portray the horror and chaos of the inside-out home. The increased momentum the seventh stanza's structure provides is slowed in the eighth, which consists of two sentences, each two lines in length: 'Standing untouched is a solitary wall,/Half a floor attached, which failed to fall./Involved pink patterns and light blues line/That rectangle high up where they used to dine'.⁵⁸ The remnants of the previous order make the destruction all the more horrific for its incompleteness. This idea carries over into the ninth stanza, which calls forth the perspective of those outside and disconnected: 'Distressed passers by are bound to observe/The painted paper, like the polished curve/Salivaed with mother-o'-pearl, in a shell/ Where a living sensitive snail

did once dwell'.⁵⁹ The simile of the shell with its mollusc removed, in its comparison of the remaining wallpaper and mother of pearl, evokes beauty, but it is a beautiful remnant, sterile, serving no further purpose.

The final stanza of the poem reiterates the tragedy of the destruction of this home-organism, and the irrationality of its perpetration, by parties apart and aloof: 'But the home has been cracked by metallic claws,/Years of loving care ground to rubble in jaws,/And delicate squirming life thrown away/By the high-flying purpose of a foreign day'.⁶⁰ Although Spender's 'Air Raid' can be seen as heavy-handed in its approach, it portrays the horrors of the Blitz in a fashion that, despite its many similarities to post-war representations of civilian-targeted bombing, is unique because of this very emotional, raw reaction. What could be construed as ham-fisted is actually a symptom of immediate response, rather than reflection and passion cooled by the passing of less violent periods of time, and this unadulterated reaction, in poetic form, is made all the more powerful because of this quality. Other poems appearing early in *Horizon's* run, even before Spender's 'Air Raid,' may rely on more violent wording, imagery and themes, but the photographic effect of this poem, particularly the juxtaposition of the home before and after bombardment, has a more immediate, visceral effect because it is a reaction to the present, without the interference of hindsight, or of foresight.

Cecil Day Lewis's 'In the Shelter,' from the December 1944 issue, is another civilian perspective on the war. Despite taking place almost three years after the heavy bombardment that inspired Stephen Spender's 'Air Raid,' the new threat of the Nazi vengeance weapons, the V1 and V2, created a similar scene of instability, fear, and destruction. Lewis's setting is a shelter in the underground, where people of all different types huddled together to escape this chaos, which is evoked in the opening stanza: 'In a shelter one night, when death was taking the

air/Outside, I saw her seated apart—a child/Nursing her doll, to one man’s vision enisled/With radiance which might have shamed that beast to its lair’.⁶¹ These lines establish the girl with her doll, and what she symbolises in comparison to events outside, as the focus of the poem, rather than the setting of the shelter or the events themselves. Death is a ‘beast’ who should be ‘shamed[...]to its lair’ by the ‘radiance’ of the girl and her ministrations to her doll. The second stanza utilises a different image in order to create a simile which further emphasises the girl’s separateness from the ‘death[...]Outside’: ‘Then I thought of the Christmas roses again, those dark/Lanterns comforting us a winter through/With the same dusky flush, the same bold spark/Of confidence, O sheltering child, as you’.⁶² It is the confidence that the girl is the embodiment of that captivates the speaker/observer; her defiance, albeit unwitting, in the face of what transpires outside the shelter gives hope.

The third stanza of Lewis’s poem continues to juxtapose the tableau of the girl holding the doll despite the destruction raining down, but the focus becomes more specific: ‘Genius could never paint the maternal pose/More deftly than accident had roughed it there, Setting amidst our terrors. Against the glare/Of unshaded bulb and whitewashed brick, that rose’.⁶³ Not only is what the child represents wholly separate from the horror outside, the girl ‘rose’ also contrasts with the monochromatic shelter, with its ‘whitewashed brick’ and naked light bulbs. It is the maternal quality the girl holding her doll embodies that captivates the observer, and gives the girl her ‘radiance.’

The incongruence of the girl’s symbolic importance with the setting is further emphasised in the fourth stanza: ‘Instinct was hers, and an earthquake hour revealed it/In flesh—the meek-laid lashes, the glint in the eye/Defying wrath and reason, the arms that shielded/A plaster doll from an erupting sky’.⁶⁴ The maternal ‘instinct’ the girl demonstrates is further elucidated as the

focus of the speaker's attention; its importance does not merely lie in its apartness from the girl's surroundings, but in what it will mean after the bombing has ceased, as described in the fifth stanza: 'No argument for living could well sustain/These ills: it needs a faithful eye to have seen all/Love in the droop of a lash and tell it eternal/By one pure bead of its dew-dissolving chain'.⁶⁵ In the face of what transpires outside the shelter, logical reasons for sustaining life itself quickly lose meaning. This can be extrapolated to mean not only the immediate destruction the flying bombs and rockets bring, but also the motivations of those who send them, and the irrationality of war as a whole. But the girl, her protection of the doll, and the defiance they symbolise are based on faith rather than reason, and are far more powerful; they provide hope, according to the speaker, when all seems hopeless.

The sustained power that the girl and her doll are able to provide in the midst of such despair are reiterated in the final stanza: 'Dear sheltering child, if again misgivings grieve me/That love is only a respite, an opal bloom/Upon our snow-set fields, come back to revive me/Cradling your spark through blizzard, drift and tomb'.⁶⁶ Lewis's poem waxes lyrical, and has many romantic elements, but the overwhelming despair that threatens even the hope the girl symbolises is pervasive, and would seem to subvert the romantic undertones present. Most importantly, the poem gives an idea of how powerful this despair is, at the moment of hiding in a shelter from destruction, so powerful that even love itself seems 'only a respite.' Stephen Spender's 'Air Raid,' for all its familial love imagery, is still the perspective of a passer-by, whereas Lewis's speaker shares this experience with the girl who personifies love and hope in 'In the Shelter.' Both offer highly affected images of contemporary events, but this affectedness is not detrimental. Rather, it is a further elucidation of what transpires during a bombing, or in its immediate aftermath, and these poems offer valuable insight into these experiences.

Dylan Thomas's style is quite different from most poets who appear in *Horizon* and it follows that his attempt to treat wartime experience would also be different in important ways. Thomas's poem, 'A Refusal to Mourn the Death, by Fire, of a Child in London,' appears in the October 1945 issue of *Horizon*, well after the events it describes. Despite the apparent specificities of the title, the poem's subject matter is characteristically hard to determine from the first stanza, or even the second. The poem begins, 'Never until the mankind making/ Bird beast and flower/Fathering and all humbling darkness/Tells with silence the last light breaking/And the still hour/Is come of the sea tumbling in harness'.⁶⁷ This first stanza evokes the end of time, a condition that is further elaborated upon in the first three lines of the second stanza: 'And I must enter again the round/Zion of the water bead/And the synagogue of the ear of corn'.⁶⁸ The last light, still seas, final silence, and end to procreation, along with the Biblical references coupled with naturalistic themes of returning to constituent parts, all are merely the introduction of an elaborate announcement of the refusal of the title. The final three lines of the second stanza, following into the first line of the fourth, make this clear: 'Shall I let pray the shadow of a sound/Or sow my salt seed/In the least valley of sackcloth to mourn/The majesty and burning of the child's death'.⁶⁹ The reason the speaker refuses to mourn is not simplistic or necessarily selfish; the grandeur of the introductory stipulations indicate this, and the remainder of the fourth stanza further elucidates it: 'I shall not murder/The mankind of her going with a grave truth/Nor blaspheme down the stations of the breath/With any further/Elegy of innocence and youth'.⁷⁰ The speaker dispenses with familiar modes of poetic treatment, forgoing appeals of 'innocence and youth' or utilisation of the girl's death to sell some 'grave truth'. To do these things would be wrong; the speaker explicitly says this, and symbolises it as well in the act of refusing to mourn.

The first five lines of the fifth and final stanza of Thomas's poem is as descriptive as the first, but the tone is more sedate, and darker: 'Deep with the first dead lies London's daughter,/Robed in the long friends,/The grains beyond age, the dark veins of her mother,/Secret by the unmourning water/Of the riding Thames'.⁷¹ The girl is one of many, according to the speaker, and she joins a tradition of death. This is her birthright, as it is for children of London in general, and all mankind. That she lies with the 'first dead' would seem to indicate that her death is no different from any other. What the speaker never says explicitly is whether this makes the girl's death less tragic or not tragic at all, or all the more tragic because of its commonality; the latter would seem to be the implied message, however. It is not because there is no tragedy in the girl's death that the speaker will not mourn. The final, succinct reason is given in the last line: 'After the first death, there is no other'.⁷² Thomas's poem is thematically denser than most that appeared in *Horizon*, and these themes are more difficult to extract, as is generally the case with the poet's contributions to the magazine. His *Horizon* poems rarely engage the war in any concrete manner, but this poem does so, albeit in a circumspect way. Rather than describing wartime experience, as do the other war-related poems in *Horizon*, Thomas concentrates on the sensibility that wartime has forced, a diminishing ability to feel pain as innocence is lost in the face of nightly violence.

Louis MacNeice's poem 'Refugees,' which appears in the March 1941 issue, describes yet another aspect of the war, and attempts to give a sense of experiences somewhat foreign to many *Horizon* subscribers. The poem begins with a description of the subjects: 'With prune-dark eyes, thick lips, jostling each other/These, disinterred from Europe, throng the deck/To watch their hope heave up in steel and concrete,' before shifting to the refugees' perspective in the second and third stanzas: 'Thinking, each of them, the worst is over/And we do not want any

more to be prominent or rich,/Only to be ourselves, to be unmolested/And make ends meet—an ideal surely which/Here if anywhere is feasible'.⁷³ Their interest is not reciprocated: 'But these are mostly/Friendless and all they look to meet/Is a secretary who holds his levée among ledgers,/Tells them to take a chair and wait.../And meanwhile the city will go on, regardless/Of any new arrival'.⁷⁴ MacNeice's illustration is somewhat overly sentimental, particularly in the opening stanzas, but it is an attempt to understand the circumstances of the masses of refugees arriving in the United States (from where MacNeice had recently returned) during the early war years. The cold, methodical processing he describes seems accurate: 'Officialdom greets them blankly as they fumble/Their foreign-looking baggage; they still feel/The movement of the ship while through their imagination/The seen and the unheard-of constellations wheel'.⁷⁵ 'Prune-dark eyes, thick lips' and 'foreign-looking baggage' are unnecessary characterisations, but commonplace for the time period. Of more interest is MacNeice's attempt to illustrate the first impression New York might offer: 'Their glances/Like wavering antennæ feel/Around the sliding limber towers of Wall Street/And count the numbered docks,' along with 'trains like prayers/Radiating from stations haughty as cathedrals, Tableaux of spring in milliners' windows, great affairs/Being endorsed on a vulcanite table, lines of washing/Feebly garish among grimy brick and dour/Iron fire-escapes'.⁷⁶ MacNeice's observation is didactic and at times condescending, but it is an attempt to understand what the flood of refugees leaving Europe must have been experiencing, and is the first real poetic mention of this phenomenon in *Horizon*. The plight of refugees, their presence in Britain and the US during the war, and their contribution to the war effort, as well as the atmosphere of wartime London in particular, are mirrored by the contributions of refugees to the pages of *Horizon*. MacNeice's attempt to portray their perspective serves as a recognition of all this.

‘Seaside, 1942’ is another poem that utilises a subdued voice to convey a powerful theme. Poet Jocelyn Brooke, according to critic A. Banerjee, was sympathetic to that other Brooke’s type of patriotic poetry, so popular during the First World War, and himself enjoyed military service. Because of this, Banerjee states, ‘No wonder significant war poetry did not come from people like Jocelyn Brooke, who looked backwards’.⁷⁷ This poem, however, was considered good enough by Connolly to appear in the February 1945 issue of *Horizon*, and although it does in many ways look backwards, the poem also looks forwards, towards a vision of the future that few other poems had explored in the periodical. The setting is England, by the seaside, a once pleasant locale that has been marred by military necessity: ‘Barbed wire on the beaches/And soldiers watching the skyline/ From the ruined esplanade—/And inland, the abandoned huts,/ And the desolate reaches where/In peacetime summers/ The fruit-stalls and the cafés made/ A gay ephemeral village, and where now/ Only the tough maritime weeds/ — Horned poppy and samphire and the tree-mallow—/ Impose their austere and curious/ Patterns upon the scene’.⁷⁸ This opening description, in comparing the present to the past, ‘abandoned huts’ where once was ‘a gay ephemeral village,’ does indeed look back, in this case on peacetime, with the emphasis on it being a better time.

After illustrating this scene, with its ‘barbed wire on the beaches,’ the speaker introduces a soldier, who, after ‘watching the sea/ Turns landward to rest his distance-dazzled/ Eyes, and remarks the derelict huts, the deserted/ Street of grey houses beyond the shingle,/ And thinks: *I am fighting for this country*’.⁷⁹ The soldier dwells briefly on this disturbing thought, ‘Something seems to have gone wrong—/ The facts refuse to fit/ His neat and derivative preconceptions,’ but the revelation is short lived, and expires: ‘Turning back to the sea/ —Hungry and tired, and bored/ With the effort of thought—he gives it up’.⁸⁰ That the realisation has refused to take hold

of the soldier is made obvious shortly thereafter: 'The soldier wishes himself back again/ In his warm unreal dream of Civvy Street/ (*Roll on Christmas and let's have some nuts*):/ Being scarcely aware that Civvy Street/ Is the grey abandoned houses/ Behind the esplanade, the empty teashop,/ The bombed chapel and the shops boarded up'.⁸¹ The allusion to the popular song reiterates the impossibility of the 'warm unreal dream' the soldier harbours, even to the point of quickly dismissing the doubt that understandably creeps in when he surveys the shattered town behind him.

It is a good thing that the soldier does not explore his flash of insight further, according to the poem, because the ramifications are far more extensive than the present or the past. In the face of the devastation that surrounds him, the soldier's unrealistic expectations of 'Civvy Life' are not only untenable in the near term. The soldier has an 'indolent mind—/ Half-doped with Orders and the Forces Programme—', and therefore 'Cannot connect, is able to see only/ The small world lit by the flickering match,/ The discrete and unrelated fragments of/ An unperceived continuum'.⁸² The soldier fails to grasp this revelation of his future, and the fate of his land: he is 'Unable to recognize the insidious/ Future slowly impinging upon the present'.⁸³ Instead, he hums that popular song, and forgets: 'The shoulders twitch,/ The foot taps out a rhythm, the loose lips/ Frame a few syncopated bars'.⁸⁴ The soldier does not want to make the connections the poem alludes to, and is thus unable to see what is obvious: 'The eyes/ Fix their blank stare/ Once more on the grey distance, where/ The clouds sag, heavy with menace, over/ The darkened lands of Europe and/ The soldier's future'.⁸⁵

Because the title of Brooke's poem places it in 1942, despite its appearance in *Horizon* in early 1945, the forthcoming Allied invasion of Europe might be seen as the dark future alluded to in the last lines, the idea being that 'Civvy Street' is much farther off than the soldier is

willing, or able, to realise. The images of bombed out churches and abandoned towns could be read accordingly, as scenes similar to those that wait on the other side of the Channel. The poem goes further, however, by calling the soldier's fiercely held ideal of post-war existence an 'unreal dream,' indicating that this vision of 'Civvy Street' is not merely a longer time coming than the soldier is willing to anticipate, but will never exist again in the form it did before bombs ripped it apart. In conveying this sense of the future, that even if the war is won, the future will never again be like the past, or at least the 'warm unreal' version the soldier holds dear, Brooke's poem is different from much other wartime verse. 'Seaside, 1942' not only looks to the post-war future, it goes further, and foreshadows a world that, instead of being 'warm' and comforting, is 'heavy with menace'.⁸⁶

Kathleen Raine's 'New Year 1943' does not look to the future for trouble; it finds enough in the present. However, unlike other poems that deal with the immediate effects of death and destruction, Raine explores the gradual but inexorable changes that years at war have wrought, and in this, she finds some common ground with Jocelyn Brooke. Her poem, which appears in the February 1943 issue of *Horizon*, describes the streets of London at a time when the war is in full swing, but has become assimilated into everyday living, to the point where it is normal, particularly for the young. Raine begins the poem by describing the city, broken but still full of life: 'Stairways into space, and windows into sky,/ And the tear-wet streets, with cloud-torn moonlight shining,/ Ways underground are open, and the trains are running/ Oh to what end, in this dream-entangled city?'.⁸⁷ 'Stairways into space, and windows into sky' are references to the bombed out remnants of buildings, and sadness and injury are also implied in the use of the phrases 'tear-wet' and 'cloud-torn,' despite the seemingly innocuous streets and moonlight they

describe. Yet 'the trains are running' still, despite the destruction above ground, although the speaker is at a loss as 'to what end.'

The persistent vitality of the city is irrepressible, however, as the second stanza illustrates: 'The streets were full tonight/ With the dense human darkness—noisier/ With the talking of feet, of laughter, /Night-cries of "Taxi"''.⁸⁸ The speaker admits that 'the streets were full,' and that laughter fills the air, but the laughter is noise, and the people who fill the street are described as 'dense human darkness,' thus continuing the tragic atmosphere introduced in the first lines of the poem. From the end of the second and into the third stanzas, the revellers are depicted as figures who, instead of projecting life, reinforce the sense of loss: 'The flagging light/ Of men and women walking in their thought/ Like ghosts in overcoats and uniforms,/ Their bodies, grown invisible, scarcely felt,/ Alone, or mated, in the London night'.⁸⁹ The 'dense human darkness' are spectres even as they are human, 'like ghosts in overcoats and uniforms, who, for all their noise, are nevertheless 'grown invisible, scarcely felt'. The revellers are real, but their existence in such a place, so devastatingly changed by war, is unreal. Even though they act normal, that they do so in 'tear-wet streets' lined by the shells of bombed buildings that make them, in the eyes of the speaker, phantoms.

Having decided that the crowds in the streets are 'ghosts in overcoats and uniforms,' the speaker seems surprised that they are flesh and blood nevertheless, and that they persist: 'You meet them everywhere—their touching hands,/ Fingers made intricate with bones and nerves,/ Playing like birds; or hanging still in sleep/ Though eyes are open, while men's thoughts run deep'.⁹⁰ The actions described are normal, just as the actions of the crowd thronging the streets are normal, but this is what so unsettles the speaker. Even 'touching hands,' whether amorous or friendly, do nothing to dispel the inhumanness of the scene. Physical contact proves nothing.

The very existence of these figures mystifies the speaker, who in the fourth stanza ponders their origins: 'Oh where, into the night, into the underground/ Into the sky, into dark seas, do they go,/ The young boys who flash torches in the dark/ For their sweethearts in mimic dress, the counterpart/ Of war, the service-girl, the glamour-girl, the tart?'.⁹¹ Thus the youth of the revellers is established, as is their careless attitude for the ways of their time, with 'young boys who flash torches in the dark' breaking the blackout to signal their girlfriends, who still attempt to dress up, 'tart'-like, despite wartime rations and threadbare, utilitarian clothing. That they do these things, that they can be concerned with such triviality, that they make attempts at normality at all is what mystifies, even terrifies, the speaker. War surrounds them, and they are able, it seems, to ignore it, or at least assimilate it. In this, they are alien.

Their youth, and more specifically being young in such a place and time, is the only reason the speaker can provide for the ability these revellers possess, to live in such a way despite their surroundings: 'Girl's hair, like florists' flower, and coloured lips and eyes/ In farewell greet the RAF's young heroes,/ Gauche in the close-up of love, and close-up death—/ Never in meagre childhood taught how to die, and kiss'.⁹² Their childhoods have been cut off by war, and their attempts at normality seem unreal not only because of the surrounding death and destruction, but also because their actions, and reactions, are ill-formed, immature, and naive. They have not been 'taught how to die, and kiss,' and respond to both love and death inappropriately, not understanding the import of either. The revellers, thus, mimic real life, and act as they think they are supposed to, unaware that what they do is false, even terrifying, both because the acts themselves are less than human, and the attempt in itself, in such a setting, is unsettling. The final stanza again emphasises the unnatural state of the city itself: 'They stray, enchanted, in this crumbling city,/ Where the safe homes of childhood house the winds,/

Through whose uncertain present lies our way/ To love, to death, our certainty, our strangeness'.⁹³ The image of the 'crumbling city,' in which the houses, once 'safe homes of childhood,' now are open to the air, and contain only 'the winds,' conveys a sense not only of decay, but of impermanence. It is to this that the youthful revellers have grown bizarrely accustomed, so that their efforts at life, at emotion, at basic love and death are exaggerated, to compensate for the frenetic pace of change they have grown up with and the constant state of changeability that surrounds them. Thus, Raine's subject is the 'uncertain present,' rather than the past or the future. But the present pondered upon in 'New Year 1943' must imply curiosity, if not real concern, for what fruits such unreality in the present will bear once the war ends.

Geoffrey Matthews, in his 'Poem For a Friend Joining the R.A.F.,' which appeared in the January 1941 issue of *Horizon*, also deals with the present, but with an eye towards the future, in which he sees hope, but only if his war-bound friend, and indeed all of humanity, refuse to succumb to wartime experience. The poem is an injunction, and a plea, beginning with a simple command, 'Fly then,' which implies that the choice to fly has finally been accepted by the speaker, who goes on nevertheless to warn:

[...]but remember on your roaring pinnacle,
 Peter, the meek cities jilted by your wheels,
 Never let their littleness deceive you or silence slip
 Between your wrists and where the sirens wail,
 Or your gentleness be ravished by the cynical
 Histories, or soft cloud-beauties curl your lip.⁹⁴

The speaker thus asks that Peter remain unchanged by his experiences, or at least undamaged. The importance of keeping the right perspective is stressed, as is resistance of any urge to forget, or even undervalue, those below, who he will protect. Likewise, the speaker states that his friend should not lose his sense of beauty because he becomes inured to it, flying amongst the 'soft cloud-beauties,' and demands that he not let his 'gentleness be ravished' by military service, and the new traditions it will confront him with.

Having thus warned his friend about the dangers he will face, he offers remembrance as a guard against them in the second stanza, and it is here that Biblical allusions, specifically to the life, trial and death of Christ, begin to appear, references occurring in the fourth and fifth stanzas as well. The friend is not made into a Christ-figure, however, but warned to avoid the sin of being blind to the misfortune of others, and asked to 'Remember how many have stunned a private despair/Within the crusading circles, or been simply weak'. These are the type who were 'Part of the crowd who peeped at the crucifixion,' and are 'Bravely forgetful behind the grunting flak/ And the white faces of the guns'.⁹⁵ The friend must not forget the pain those guns cause, as he fires them, or watches them fired, at his enemies above London, or of the effects of the bombs he may drop on other 'meek cities,' lest he too find himself guilty of quashing his own guilt, 'a private despair,' or find himself amongst the weak, 'who peeped.'

'Follow your saint if you must,' the speaker intones in the third stanza, but he admonishes his friend to 'at least remember/ Those nights we spent drinking the death of wars'. These are fond memories, at least for the speaker, with 'our wheels unwinding the stinging roads of Cumnor/ When frost dripped off the trees and telegraph wires'.⁹⁶ These nights were 'A world in amber,/ With beer drawn from the wood and a map of Berkshire'.⁹⁷ Simpler times, the ideas shared possibly naive, but, according to the speaker, the camaraderie that filled them should not

be forgotten, nor should the toasts to ‘the death of wars,’ an ideal his friend should keep above all others. Doing so will keep his friend grounded even as he flies, and connected despite the distance flying will create between his life above and death below. To forget would be a death in its own right, at least of the ideals they drank to together. ‘Do not as the pharisees kill through pride,’ the speaker continues in the fourth stanza, for to forget those high-minded beliefs about the evil inherent in war would be to invite such pride.⁹⁸ As important, according to the speaker, is to avoid falling to far the other way, and succumbing to despair. He implores his friend not to ‘smile, tired with dismay, and betray the poor,’ particularly if this is brought on by his amorous experiences, which may be increased by his new role, ‘Because of a girl’s quietness or her severing words.’⁹⁹ If this happens, the speaker is afraid for what it may mean for those below, who would raise him and his ilk up as a false idol, amongst others, and lose their sense of truth: ‘Else we of this city cannot be wooed to hate/False coin, the brass stars winking in Cassiopeia’.¹⁰⁰

In the final stanza, the speaker begins by telling his friend to ‘keep faith,’ for things will inevitably change: it is here that the idea of hope is emphasised in the poem, colouring all the lines preceding it, for if the friend does ‘keep faith,’ and remember to be true to himself and his ideals, he will find himself able to

[...]stroll in one day and tear the blinds
 To make our Herod’s fires a star in the East,
 As after a night of storm some restless gipsy,
 Wakening under canvas wet as a dipper’s nest,
 Blinks haggardly, breaks open the flap and finds

Pure blue behind the tent-pole, a perfect sky.¹⁰¹

Thus the speaker implies that, if he can maintain his humanity, Peter will be one of those who allows the light to shine out, who converts 'Herod's fires' into a beacon of hope, 'a star in the East.' The simile he offers as illustration, of the tent flap opened to reveal 'a perfect sky,' emphasises the hopefulness this beacon will symbolise. 'Poem For a Friend Joining the R.A.F.' is dense with such allusions, but its Biblical imagery is meant to convey hope even as it enjoins the speaker's friend to avoid the fate of the Pharisees, or those who sought to watch the crucifixion. The poem was written in 1940, according to the postscript. Its inclusion of flak and the 'white faces of the guns' indicates that it was written later in the year, after these things would have become daily, and nightly, occurrences. That it is a poem of hope, even as it appears in *Horizon* at a time when the bombs were still falling, speaks to the mindset of people in general of the period. They were still wary, but determined in the face of strife, so that their fear was not uncontrolled, as seen in some poems from the months of the Phony War, nor is it characterised by the sense of unease about the future due to the unfamiliarity of the present found in later poems. If any class of Second World War poetry would satisfy the call for war poets, meaning verse that could lift spirits and embolden men for battle, that was so often voiced in the newspaper editorials Connolly disparaged, Matthews poem would fit, albeit in an unexpected manner.

The themes in the poems interpreted here are varied, but they share an important characteristic: they are all attempts, by people from all walks of life, to reflect on a war that was, in reality, too big to comprehend, particularly while in the middle of it. No one poem can explicate the Second World War, and indeed, none of these, or any of the others that appeared in

Horizon during the war years, try to. What they do, in their myriad ways, is respond to the different and changing aspects of the war, and this they do in a manner that is arresting, and important, because it is immediate. These poems are written only months, sometimes even days or hours, after the events they describe happened, or the emotions they convey were felt, and this immediacy, particularly given the circumstances, can make them compelling. Viewed from the perspective of this century, they individually and collectively offer a multifaceted portrait of a war in all its aspects, in all its moments, as it happened. Boredom, bombing, refugees, mourning, and the innumerable emotions and experiences of war are given form in *Horizon's* pages. This is not to say that the war in its entirety finds a place in the magazine. The war was universal, spread out, complicated and terrifying, but the fact that it was barely mentally graspable did not stop these poets from doing what poets, and indeed all writers, always must do: try and make sense of their world, even if only small bits of it, and share these responses with others. *Horizon* provided them the arena in which to present their findings, their analyses, their reactions. It also gave them an attentive audience, one itself eager to try and understand the almost overwhelming experience of the war. In publishing the work it did, *Horizon* went some of the way to answering the question 'Where are our War Poets?' The best of them were in its own pages.

Horizon's poetry offers a fascinating window on wartime experience across the years, but it would have also provided its wartime readers with otherwise unknowable accounts of the war. These poets, whether they were new or established, offered distinctive insights into the experience of war. The horrors of the Blitz, the juxtaposition of fear and boredom that characterised military life, and the mind-numbing isolation of a POW camp are only a small sample of the experiences *Horizon's* readers were able to share with its poets, and their own

wartime sensibilities were informed by the themes these writers conveyed. This is also the case with the poems of protest and politics in *Horizon*, and the concerns they explore in verse are another aspect of the magazine that demonstrates it was politically relevant. Shires's claim that *Horizon* did not encourage new poets to the same degree that Lehmann's *New Writing* or Tambimuttu's *Poetry (London)* misses an important point, one that Connolly often stressed in his 'Comments:' the magazine sought to publish the best writing it could find without regard to names. Her indictment of Connolly and the magazine as snobbish buys into the enduring myth that Connolly's choosiness made *Horizon* 'creatively cautious' and stagnant.¹⁰² As even this small selection of *Horizon*'s wartime poetic voices demonstrates, the opposite is true. These poems are engaged in the war, and along with the magazine's other contents, they prove that the magazine was entirely relevant in wartime.

¹ Quoted in Mark Rawlinson, *British Writing of the Second World War* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000) 3. This argument was only taken up again relatively recently, in Linda M. Shires's landmark *British Poetry of the Second World War*, in 1985 (London: Macmillan), but even as early as 1976 Vernon Scannell, in *Not Without Glory: Poets of the Second World War* (London: The Woburn Press), feels safe in claiming that the 'genuine poets of the Second World War [...] were certainly as plentiful as those of the Great War,' but he is careful to keep the two conflicts on equal literary footing, adding that he is 'not maintaining that the poetry of the Second World War is "better" than that of the previous World War, only that it should be taken as seriously' (170-71).

² Sebastian Knowles, *A Purgatorial Flame: Seven British Writers in the Second World War* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1990) xxiv.

³ Angus Calder, *The People's War: Britain 1939-1945* (London: Jonathan Cape Ltd, 1969) 519.

⁴ Alistair Horne, 'France, fall of,' *The Oxford Companion to World War II*, edited by I.C.B. Dear (New York: Oxford UP, 1995) 323-24.

⁵ Malcolm Smith, 'Britain, battle of,' *The Oxford Companion to World War II*, edited by I.C.B. Dear (New York: Oxford UP, 1995) 127.

⁶ Louis MacNeice, 'Cushendun,' *Horizon*, 1, No. 1 (January 1940) 13.

⁷ *Ibid.* 13.

⁸ *Ibid.* 13.

⁹ *Ibid.* 13.

¹⁰ George Barker, 'Austrian Requiem,' *Horizon*, 1, No. 2 (February 1940) 73.

¹¹ *Ibid.* 72.

¹² *Ibid.* 72.

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- ¹³ Ibid. 73.
- ¹⁴ Ibid. 72-73.
- ¹⁵ William R. Rodgers, 'War-time,' *Horizon*, 1, No. 4 (April 1940) 244.
- ¹⁶ Laurie Lee, 'A Moment of War,' *Horizon*, 1, No. 4 (April 1940) 245.
- ¹⁷ Ibid. 245.
- ¹⁸ Ibid. 245.
- ¹⁹ Ibid. 245.
- ²⁰ Ibid. 245.
- ²¹ Ibid. 245.
- ²² Ibid. 246.
- ²³ Ibid. 246.
- ²⁴ Adam Drinan, 'The Gulls,' *Horizon*, 1, No. 4 (April 1940) 247.
- ²⁵ Ibid. 247.
- ²⁶ Ibid. 247.
- ²⁷ Ibid. 247.
- ²⁸ Francis Scarfe, 'Conscript,' *Horizon*, 1, No. 5 (May 1940) 319.
- ²⁹ Ibid. 319.
- ³⁰ Ibid. 319.
- ³¹ Ibid. 319.
- ³² Laurie Lee, 'Poem,' *Horizon*, 1, No. 7 (July 1940) 531.
- ³³ Ibid. 531.
- ³⁴ J.A. Spender, 'Letter to a Nephew,' *Horizon*, 1, No. 4 (April 1940) 243.
- ³⁵ Alun Lewis, 'All Day it has Rained....,' *Horizon*, 3, No. 13 (January 1941) 9.
- ³⁶ Ibid. 9.
- ³⁷ Ibid. 9.
- ³⁸ Ibid. 9.
- ³⁹ Ibid. 9.
- ⁴⁰ Ibid. 9.
- ⁴¹ Ibid. 9.
- ⁴² Alun Lewis, 'The Soldier,' *Horizon*, 3, No. 17 (May 1941) 305.
- ⁴³ Uys Krige, 'Midwinter,' *Horizon*, 6, No. 36 (December 1942) 375. Krige was a writer, in both Afrikaans and English (and a professional Rugby player in Europe), who, as a war correspondent, was captured by the Germans and incarcerated in Italy. His 1946 memoir *The Way Out* (London: Collins, 1946) describes his successful escape in 1943, in the year after his appearance in *Horizon*, from the Fonte d'Amore POW camp noted as 'Camp No. 78' at the end of the poem.
- ⁴⁴ Ibid. 375.
- ⁴⁵ Ibid. 375.
- ⁴⁶ Ibid. 376.
- ⁴⁷ Ibid. 376.
- ⁴⁸ Ibid. 376.
- ⁴⁹ Ibid. 376.
- ⁵⁰ Stephen Spender, 'Air Raid,' *Horizon*, 3, No. 14 (February 1941) 93.
- ⁵¹ Ibid. 93.
- ⁵² Ibid. 94.
- ⁵³ Ibid. 94.
- ⁵⁴ Ibid. 94.
- ⁵⁵ Ibid. 94.
- ⁵⁶ Ibid. 94.
- ⁵⁷ Ibid. 94.
- ⁵⁸ Ibid. 94.
- ⁵⁹ Ibid. 94.
- ⁶⁰ Ibid. 94.
- ⁶¹ Cecil Day Lewis, 'In the Shelter,' *Horizon*, 10, No. 60 (December 1944) 374.
- ⁶² Ibid. 374.
- ⁶³ Ibid. 375.

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- ⁶⁴ Ibid. 375.
⁶⁵ Ibid. 375.
⁶⁶ Ibid. 375.
⁶⁷ Dylan Thomas, 'A Refusal to Mourn the Death, by Fire, of a Child in London,' *Horizon*, 12, No. 70 (October 1945) 223.
⁶⁸ Ibid. 223.
⁶⁹ Ibid. 223.
⁷⁰ Ibid. 223.
⁷¹ Ibid. 223.
⁷² Ibid. 223.
⁷³ Louis MacNeice, 'Refugees,' *Horizon*, 3, No. 15 (March 1941) 164.
⁷⁴ Ibid. 164.
⁷⁵ Ibid. 165.
⁷⁶ Ibid. 164.
⁷⁷ A. Banerjee, *Spirit Above Wars: A Study of the English Poetry of the Two World Wars* (London: Macmillan, 1976) 87.
⁷⁸ Jocelyn Brooke, 'Seaside, 1942,' *Horizon*, 11, No 62 (February 1945) 88.
⁷⁹ Ibid. 88.
⁸⁰ Ibid. 88.
⁸¹ Ibid. 88.
⁸² Ibid. 89.
⁸³ Ibid. 89.
⁸⁴ Ibid. 89.
⁸⁵ Ibid. 89.
⁸⁶ Ibid. 89.
⁸⁷ Kathleen Raine, 'New Year 1943,' *Horizon*, 7, No. 38 (February 1943) 76.
⁸⁸ Ibid. 76.
⁸⁹ Ibid. 76.
⁹⁰ Ibid. 76.
⁹¹ Ibid. 76.
⁹² Ibid. 76.
⁹³ Ibid. 76.
⁹⁴ Geoffrey Matthews, 'Poem For a Friend Joining the R.A.F.,' *Horizon*, 3, No. 13 (January 1941) 14.
⁹⁵ Ibid. 14.
⁹⁶ Ibid. 14.
⁹⁷ Ibid. 14.
⁹⁸ Ibid. 14.
⁹⁹ Ibid. 14.
¹⁰⁰ Ibid. 14.
¹⁰¹ Ibid. 14.
¹⁰² Linda M. Shires, *British Poetry of the Second World War* (London: Macmillan, 1985) 16-17.