

ISAAC ROSENBERG: GLIMPSES
OF A PLAN TERRIFIC

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A PLAN TERRIFIC

By
CHRISTOPHER R. SEARLE, B.A.

A Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies
in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements
for the Degree
Master of Arts

McMaster University
August 1967

Never have I reached
The halfway of the purpose I have planned.

ISAAC ROSENBERG

MASTER OF ARTS (1967)

(English)

McMASTER UNIVERSITY

Hamilton, Ontario

TITLE: Isaac Rosenberg: Glimpses of a
Plan Terrific

AUTHOR: Christopher Richard Searle, B.A. (Leeds)

SUPERVISOR: Dr. B. W. Jackson

NUMBER OF PAGES: 121

SCOPE AND CONTENT: An attempt to trace the controlling
idea behind the poetry of Isaac
Rosenberg.

My sincere thanks are offered to Dr. B. W. Jackson
for the extension of his valuable criticism, and
also to the Rabbi Bernard Baskin, for certain
reassurances.

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INTRODUCTION

Thus human hunger nourisheth
 The plan terrific - true design -
 Makes music with the bones of death
 And soul knows soul to shine.

Isaac Rosenberg.

The world of the private voice, and the musings of the personal poet, will always refuse to accomodate themselves to the impersonal demands of critical detachment, and the judging mind that veers towards categories. It is ideally right that critical objectivity should not compromise itself by attempting sympathetic and mobile perambulations through the poet's mind. This will confound its necessary stability, but it is something different to sympathise, to meet the poet from a position of critical strength and assurance. Isaac Rosenberg declared the direction of his particular advocacy some six years before Eliot was to write his famous essay on Blake, Rosenberg's arch-master. For Eliot, it was the 'hallucinated vision'¹ of Blake's personal genius; (for others, it has proved a most impersonal genius), that spoke too rebelliously for a critical tradition that was constrained to exclude him. Rosenberg's own declaration of critical faith was rather different.

¹

J. Hayward (Ed.) 'Blake', T.S. Eliot's Selected Prose.
 (Harmondsworth, 1965) P. 162.

When he speaks of a visionary, a rebel, he is inclined to embrace him merely as a pure-bred poet, an authentic voice.

In a letter to Edward Marsh:

I believe that all poets who are personal - see things genuinely, have their place. One needn't be a Shakespeare and yet be quite as interesting --- and I am sure that I have enjoyed some things of Francis Thompson more than the best of Shakespeare --²

To read this as a defensive personal apology and to see Rosenberg as a poet whose work merely involves dalliance in the byways of unorthodox genius, is effectively to execute the worst sort of injustice on an artist whose career evinces a design to always write, as well as paint, within the 'sharp contours'³ of poetic clarity. But Rosenberg was both a Jew, and a poet who applauded poetic rebellion and used language in an unusual enough way, it seems, to warrant only a desultory critical response in the first five decades of his posterity and consequently weave the myth of a noxious obscurity around his output.

It is possibly legitimate to be reticent before an alien culture, to defer commitment on a Jewish writer when one is not aligned to the thought processes and frame

² G. Bottomley and D.W. Harding, The Collected Works of Isaac Rosenberg. (London, 1937) P. 294.

³ Works, P. 253.

of reference of Judaism. However, the present writer is not a Jew, and does not feel he is either culturally embarrassed when he reads the poetry of Rosenberg, or considering a poet who is either desperately or self-consciously Jewish in his utterance. I am not denying the man's Jewish allegiances: his last request to fight with the Jewish Regiment in Mesopotamia, or his promises to compose 'a battle hymn for the Judains',⁴ but his poetry objectifies itself in a highly purposeful way, from a subjective involvement in the processes of a particular, minority culture or an esoteric code of belief.

Rosenberg's prose recurrently demonstrates a preoccupation with the problems of clarity. Obscurity becomes his greatest anathema:

I think with you (Marsh), that poetry should be definite thought and clear expression, however subtle. I don't think there should be any vagueness at all ---⁵

He makes use and demands of his culture, very rarely does it use him, or bully him towards general obscurity. It gives him a whole basis of symbolism and metaphor that partakes of themes that may have Jewish significance and overtones, but are in essence universal, and as such, common to other non-Jewish dimensions of culture and experience. His verse

⁴
Works, P. 322.

⁵
Works, P. 319.

embodies a poetic sensibility born into a culture whose vast, controlling images emanate from Biblical and scriptural myths and the 'ten immutable rules'⁶ on which the entire western world, Gentile and Jewish, finds itself established. His poem, The Jew, is a direct plea to be treated with normal sympathies, without exception or reservation, with the 'blonde and bronze and ruddy',⁶ in criticism and evaluation, as well as in society. He asks for no new rules, no new standards for his Jewishness, but merely the 'ten immutable rules' that European man has generally, and it seems, casually adopted. To interpret his life and work as a peculiar instance, a special Judaistic case, is to 'sneer',⁶ patronise and misjudge both critically and culturally. Rosenberg needed patrons to enable him consistently to write and paint, but he can do without them as readers and critics.

Criticism that justifies or emphasises his Jewishness offers no service to an artist who strove for clarity and universality in his poetry. Jon Silkin for example, identifies and connects the recurring images of suspension and rootlessness in Rosenberg's poetry with an 'awareness of the rootless condition of Jewry.'⁷ He consequently argues

⁶
Ed. G. Bottomley and D.W. Harding, Collected Poems of Isaac Rosenberg. (London, 1949) P. 71.

⁷
Silkin, Jon, 'Isaac Rosenberg: The War, the Class and the Jews'. Stand Vol. 4. No. 3. P. 35.

that the poet is both product and spokesman of the particular, the racial, rather than the universal. A part of the intention behind the present criticism aims at relating the expression of similar sentiments to those articulated by Rosenberg, by other artists trapped, and reacting to similar potentially symbolic environments, particularly those of the battlefield. A sensation of rootlessness is neither particularly Jewish, or forced peculiarly by a Judaistic culture or frame of reference. Rosenberg may use the emblem of a suspended Absalom in Chagrin⁸ to suggest a young man's feeling of emotional rootlessness, but the image itself depersonalizes, and moves away from the specifically ethnic. And when Rosenberg in the Trench Poems extends his poetical idea to include the entire world 'swinging in chemic smoke,'⁹ or the disintegration and falling away of the 'earthmen's earth,'¹⁰ he is similarly objectifying the human and universal responses, not obscuring them, or suggesting they are a product of his Judaism. A Canadian, for example, can suggest something very similar, using similar images of roots, earth and sea, that constitute such persistent patterns in Rosenberg's expression:

-- it seemed to him that he had been deatched
from his roots and borne on to the waves of a
very deep and dangerous sea.¹¹

⁸
Poems. P. 65.

¹⁰
Poems, P. 86.

⁹
Poems. P. 82.

¹¹
Child, Philip, God's Sparrows
(London, 1937). P. 248.

Thus, the present author feels entirely justified in consistently introducing relevant, varied and often cosmopolitan comparisons to emphasise that the poet was not writing as a Jew, but as a poetic and delicate sensibility, who, with such other and traditional sensibilities, strove, in the face of confusion and, for a period, war, for clarity and objectivity. To illuminate the utterance of a poet concerned in war, dividing his humanity from his poetic identity, yet undergoing experiences similar in time and place to millions of others, the testaments of some of these other voices will often serve to align Rosenberg with the greatest traditions of poetic response and expression rather than mark him as an interesting, yet somehow dispensible side genius, a phenomenon who wrote himself away to a tangent of abnormal utterance.

Silkin's bias, for example, is based on preconception: that Rosenberg, as a poet, was a conscious, practising Jew. This becomes as finally misleading as a bias founded on anticipation or hindsight, that Rosenberg was to become a 'war poet.' After all, it may easily be conceived that Chagrin and the later imagery of rootlessness, is 'war poetry' before the event. The supposition could emerge, and the conjecture manifest, that the theme anticipates dead soldiers 'hanging on the old barbed wire,'¹² or the suspended bodies caught on the

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Ed. Gardner B. Up the Line to Death: The War Poets, 1914-18. (London, 1964.) P. 79. Robert Service, another Canadian, wrote a poem, On the Wire on this theme, making with it's war symbolism a relevant comparison with Rosenberg's pre-war Chagrin see Service, R. Rhymes of a Red Cross Man. (Toronto, 1917). P. 84.

trees and undergrowth of Mametz Wood, during the Somme Offensive of July 1916. Private Frank Richards tells of a German soldier suspended, like Absalom, in a tree, 'blown up by a large shell, -- he looked like a man who had been hung up on a hook and left there.'¹³ Both the ethnic and the military biases are plainly misconceived, and both lead to the assumption that Rosenberg fits into one of the dubious categories of either the ethnic artist, or the 'soldier' poet. Such categories lead to preconceptions, more misconceptions, inaccuracies and myths, and these have been commonly woven around a critical response to the poetry of Rosenberg.

If Rosenberg has a strange voice, a more private, peculiar sound, and to Gosse he sounded like a Dane,¹⁴ strident and bardic, the reason is more likely to lie within his poetic language, and the 'fixing'¹⁵ of half-grasped ideas, with the accommodation within language of truths and ideas 'understandable yet still ungraspable.'¹⁶ This dictates his unusually high pitch and the suggestion of unorthodox form. It may also frighten his readers, but obstructions that resemble either 'hallucinated visions' or ethnic indulgences simply do not exist in his poetry.

¹³

Richards F. Old Soldiers Never Die. (New York, 1966) P. 137.

¹⁴Hassall C. A Biography of Edward Marsh. (New York, 1959) P.434.

¹⁵Works, P. 216.

¹⁶Works, P. 371.

My main thesis is that Rosenberg's work evinces a central idea, a certain cyclical design and adherence to a conscious theme that evolves from the confusion of the early poems, through the apocalypse of the trench verse to the final preoccupation with mythopoeic form. It is an idea that involves tyranny and the rebellion against tyranny, revelation and final reward, and it has of course, its stereotype in Blake; and for Rosenberg the 'reign of Blake was yet to begin.'¹⁷ There has been a common tendency to justify those labelled 'soldier poets' as mere lyrical artists whose condition and environment force them into a defensive creative position where the only disciplined, formal outlet flows in the lyric, the brief objective statement of the sensations rising from war. Yeats' much quoted objections to 'war' poetry¹⁸ plainly emanate from here, and Blunden, in his pamphlet on the 'War Poets,' declares that 'it is much lamented that his (Rosenberg's) poems are not more numerous: and he is not the only instance of this.'¹⁹ The comment implies that Rosenberg's response to war separates itself into various fragmented, unconnected lyrical statements that constitute the Trench Poems, (itself, of course, an

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¹⁸ Works, P. 250.

Yeats W.B. 'Introduction' The Oxford Book of Modern Verse (New York, 1936)

¹⁹ Blunden E. War Poets 1914-18. (London, 1958) P. 36.

editorial division), and that to label an artist a 'war poet' is effectively to limit his utterance to lyricism. Plainly, a poet in such exigencies, constrained to write on toilet paper, conditioned to synchronise his poetic utterance with the last inch of a burning candle, whose work is subjected to, and violated by, the suspicious army censorship of the military mind, or who can so easily lose his grubby manuscripts in the mud of trench activity, can find little time for concentration on vast ideas of thematic design. Short, lyrical bursts would appear the only possible form for a poet who spent twenty almost consecutive months in the trenches. Rosenberg's letters are full of sad comments on the utilitarian, ruthless squashing of his separate poetic identity, or the wasting away of his poetical powers, beneath such crushing pressure:

-- all the poetry has quite gone out of me.
I seem to forget words, and I believe if I
met anyone with ideas I'd be dumb.²⁰

or

It is quite impossible to write, or think of
writing stuff now, so I can only hope for
hospital, or the end of the war, if I want to
write.²¹

²⁰

Works, P. 378.

²¹

Works, P. 359.

or again,

It is only when we get a bit of rest and the others might be gambling or squabbling I add a line or two, and continue this way.²²

Such confessions are very poignant, but they should indicate that Rosenberg is not a 'War Poet,' not a categorised soldier amongst soldiers, or a man amongst men, with the one message of human pity that has characterised the image of Owen ever since criticism has pounced uncompromisingly on what Blunden himself refers to as 'a hastily written and obscurely amended Preface and contents found among his papers.'²³ 'The true poets must be truthful,'²⁴ said Owen, but Rosenberg's stance of truth was very different. It is in no way a documentary truth, or a truth to enlighten those ignorant of the human depravity and suffering of the Western Front. It may even prove to be an immoral species of truth. 'I like to think of myself as a POET,'²⁵ Rosenberg wrote to Bottomley some three weeks before his death, and with some exceptions, his aspect of truth was the truth that the artist distils from a symbolical, amoral world, not the human truths that a disillusioned and morally responsible soldier sees in the world of men turned sickly and wicked.

²²

Works, P. 317.

²³

Ed. E. Blunden, 'Memoir' The Poems of Wilfred Owen. (London 1963). P. 40.

²⁴

Ibid., P. 41.

²⁵Works, P. 379.

So to call Rosenberg a 'soldier poet' is to mis-categorise and place a wrong emphasis on one aspect of his artistic vision. Despite Blunden's disappointment over the small quantity of his poetic output from the trenches, he wrote quite enough about war. Then he must move on to continue and to complete the idea. These apparent separate poetic statements themselves are dovetailed into the idea, a part of one form:

-- the only way I can write, in scraps, and then join them together - I have the ONE IDEA in mind--²⁶

For the poet's pragmatism, war was another item, a convenient symbolical and metaphorical manifestation of his apocalypse. But art and life were so distinct, so different. In a fragment before the war, he had said:

It is a vain belief that art and life go hand in hand. Art is, as it were another planet--²⁷

When Rosenberg writes as a man, with his poetic identity non-existent, he writes with convictions, as a soldier, unpoetically, unrhetorically, taking a firm moral stance:

I never joined the army from patriotic reasons. Nothing can justify war. I suppose we must all fight to get the trouble over.²⁸

But his real soldiering, his 'blood and tears',²⁹

²⁶ Works, P. 290.

²⁸ Works, P. 305.

²⁷ Works, P. 263.

²⁹ Works, P. 335.

was art, and as a poet, the war became the 'malign kiss,'³⁰ of the powerful Providence behind his designing idea that was to destroy the moulded, uncreative, and dull Earth, and all

this pettifogging, mercantile, moneyloving age, that is deaf, deaf as their idol gold, and dead as that to all higher ennobling influences.³¹

But from this destruction, to Rosenberg came revelation, and the forceful idea to finally restore and re-animate a new 'pristine bloom;'³⁰ an objective Zion.

The Trench Poems themselves, are often, particularly the latter ones, ('Through These Pale Cold Days,' The Burning of the Temple) concerned with relief and escape from war, through the organic evolution of the poet's controlling idea, rather than a conventional lyrical response to it, or an indulgence in its physical or immoral tremors. The final effort of Rosenberg's poetic career, and also one of the final efforts of his life, was the draftwork of The Unicorn. This evinces a sensibility and poetic personality struggling to transcend wartime lyricism, and achieve a mythopoeic form that completely overrides the indulgence in a single thought, sensation or mood. Three weeks before

³⁰ 'On receiving News of the War.' Poems. P. 124.

³¹ Works, P. 332.

his death, and coinciding with the monstrous onslaught of the enemy's Kaiserschlacht, Rosenberg was conceiving The Unicorn, and developing in fragmentary form a poem with far vaster formal aspirations than the lyric and the stereotyped medium of the 'war' or 'soldier' poet. He was using his response to war to objectify something far wider, 'abstract'³² or metaphysical;

I want it to symbolise the war and all the
devastating forces let loose by an ambitious
and unscrupulous will ---³³

Far from depending on an attitude, and finding 'begloried'³² embellishments to express it, Rosenberg was fulfilling his own concept of what the experience of war should teach the poet. The 'million feelings everybody feels'¹ about war, and the lyrical response were subject to his own vast idea, expressed through the impersonal mythopaeic technique, and there 'concentrated in one distinguished emotion.'³²

So the 'war' utterance was not the apotheosis of his expression, but merely a stage in a design, a part of a cycle that continued into certain further reaches in Moses and The Unicorn fragments. But the war, and its symbolical utilisation by the poet in the Trench Poems like

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Works, P. 348. See the reference to Brooke.

³³Works, P. 379.

Dead Man's Dump radiates a sense of crisis in a poetic sensibility, and a certain climax in the process of poetical development. It becomes the period of poetical truth for Rosenberg, the time when the tyranny appears to grip its firmest stranglehold, and the time when the gesture of rebellion, the 'weak scream'³⁴ of protest, seems at its most hopeless. But this is also the crisis of revelation, the substance and fulfillment of the 'malign kiss,'³⁵ and the continuation of the idea towards the new birth and reward of the pristine vision of 'Lebanon's summer slope.'³⁶ Of course, the continuation is fragmentary, only an intimation of what was to come after the 'saturation' of the crisis of war, but to do the poet any justice at all, and attempt to perceive his direction and idea in its fullness and complexity, the final intimations must be assessed as an organic extension of Rosenberg's theme.

The experience of war, it seems, invites the dead-end of lyricism, the cul-de-sac, the brief response adversely conditioned for expression through a higher form. An exceptional 'war poem' like Owen's Strange Meeting achieves

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³⁵ Dead Man's Dump, Poems. P. 84.

³⁵ Ibid., 'On Receiving News of the War.' P. 124.

³⁶ Ibid., 'Through these pale cold days.' P. 91.

its distinction because within its brevity lies the condensation of an entire cycle, - the 'hunt'³⁷ for beauty, revelation through the apocalyptical experiences of war, and the resolution taking fruition from the vision beneath the ground, in the 'dull profound tunnel'³⁷ of war. In Faulkner's short story Crevasse, soldiers stumble through a complete immersion in a physical, broken tunnel of war, a collapsed sap, and after the journey through the earth see the seasonal and cyclical development and evolution of their experience, like Rosenberg and his journey towards the 'summer slope.'

On his hands and knees like a beast, the captain breathes, his breath making a hoarse sound. 'Soon it will be summer,' he thinks --- 'Soon it will be summer, and the long days.'³⁸

Substitute the symbolism of war and an infernal trench for that of an unreal city and an 'infernal'³⁹ subway, and we approach Frye's cyclical reading of The Waste Land, - the subterranean journey through limbo and the final release from the underworld. In this way, the 'war' utterance of both Owen and Faulkner leave the specific areas of 'war literature' and can be seen within the main traditions of

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Ed. E. Blunden, 'Strange Meeting' Collected Poems of Wilfred Owen (London, 1963). P. 116-117.

³⁸

Faulkner W. 'Crevasse,' Those Thirteen. (London, 1963) P. 192.

³⁹

Frye N. T.S. Eliot. (London, 1963) P. 64-5.

poetry from Dante to Eliot.⁴⁰

The poetry of Isaac Rosenberg also partakes of this tradition and species of development. For a period war becomes his metaphor, is utilised and forms a whole reservoir of images, but is never grasped as reality or seen as an imaginative end in itself. As the poet moves deeper into his idea the metaphor of war is discarded, and what evolves is malformed, incomplete, only the gist of an idea. But the 'living eyes'⁴¹ of the rewarded, can see it clearly, and the sharp lines of its shape. The critic cannot, and should not try to conjecture or anticipate the idea, but to see the direction of images, thematic intimations and patterns can reduce the floundering, and drive towards a comprehension of the poet's whole meaning.

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For some poets involved in war, their surroundings were one symbolical face of the Inferno. 'Trees in the Battlefield' said Blunden, 'are already described by Dante'.

Quoted in Marshal S.L.A. The American Heritage History of World War I. (New York, 1966). P. 234.

41

Poems, P. 124.

2

EARLY VISIONS.

-- Words break out like smothered fire through
dense and smouldering wrong.¹
Isaac Rosenberg.

Keats gave himself ten years to fully grasp his own
vast Idea. Isaac Rosenberg could declare in 1916 that
emphatically, form itself was 'just a question of time'.²
For him, the artist was the epitome of a monumental patience,
waiting for the harbinger of an idea, feeling its radiance,
and then, as the moment passed, pouncing:

You know how earnestly one must wait on ideas,
(you cannot coax real ones to you) and let as
it were a skin grow naturally round and through
them.³

The fixing of ideas to him was violent, sudden; a thrust after
an agonising vigil, the only chance to capture 'that holy,
amorous instant'.⁴ The poet himself expresses his moment of
capture in terms of a fisherman with a monstrous catch:

And I have tried to hold in net like silver fish
the sweet starbeams,
But all these things are shadowed gleams of things
beyond the firmament.⁵

¹Poems, P. 44.

²Works, P. 372.

³Works, P. 310.

⁴Works, P. 320.

⁵Poems, P. 16 2.

The process of poetry becomes, initially, the directing of expedients to trap the elusive, devices to corner the fleeting. The fisher of ideas must prepare and gird himself to an attitude of vigilance, for the 'absolute necessity of fixing an idea before it is lost because of the situation it is conceived in'.⁶ There is no relaxation for this poet. He watches, tense, with all senses sharp for just a 'glimpse'⁷ of the Idea for which he singlemindedly yearns. And the sensation of craving that ravishes the artist is the will yearning desperately to fix his rootless emotion in form. Creation becomes completely dynamic. The artist forges his opportunity simultaneously with the fixing of his Idea in an act of the will, the manifestation of an upsurge of violent energy. When God himself created, it was because 'the will grew'.⁸ When the poet captures the Idea he becomes himself all-powerful, his will grows divine. But of course, complete, even partial grasp is impossible, unthinkable; and such boasts are hollow:

Time will show
I could draw down the Heavens, I could bend
Yon hoar age-scorning column with my hand
I feel such power.⁹

But for Rosenberg, it seems, these flaunted successes were rare. His prose and letters are obsessed with his

⁶ Works, P. 317.

⁸ 'Creation' Poems, P. 158.

⁷ 'The Poet I' Poems, P. 177.

⁹ 'Raphael' Poems, P. 165.

repeated failures to fix his own Idea in all its fullness. For him, the great poets were those with one complete and huge Idea, and the test of their greatness was the clarity with which they could articulate it. Poetry itself was 'an infinite idea, expressed coherently, in a definite texture'.¹⁰ Of course, much of this theorising rises from the abstracting mind of a very young poet/artist, and one who is struggling to express a sense of the organic wholeness of his own poetic life and utterance. 'I believe that I am a poet',¹¹ he had declared in a letter to R.C. Trevellyan, and this was an assertion itself of Rosenberg's wish to make all his output dependent on, and rising from the one 'dominating idea'.¹² The Idea itself was the basis of the large design, the 'plan terrific'¹³ that the poet could see stretching before him in brief, visionary glimpses. The glimpse was the seed of an organic idea that would evolve, grow to fruition.

It may be but a thought, the nursling seed
Of many thoughts, of many high desire.¹⁴

a

A poet does not write a paraphrase of a 'plan terrific', his entire utterance becomes his theme, but in that poem, Creation (1913), there are certain images that do intimate the

¹⁰Works, P. 290.

¹¹Works, P. 352.

¹²Works, P. 371.

¹³'Creation' Poems, P. 159.

¹⁴'My Days' Poems, P. 194.

fulfilment of the archetypal cycle, an idea of death and re-birth upon which Rosenberg, through personal vision, was to base the fundamental evolution of his utterance. He talks of 'the seed' that must be burned 'to live to green',¹⁵ that Moses 'must die to live in Christ', and that 'the green plant yearns for its yellow fruit', - the yearning itself re-emphasising the craving organic will of the artist to create. For Rosenberg this vastness of vision was a necessary pre-requisite. Every utterance must be a component of this larger design, the one Idea; and the haunting repetition of this central, formative assertion makes much of his prose tedious, if not neurotic with aspiration, dismay, or the persistent worries about his own inability to 'look at things in the simple, large way that great poets do',¹⁶ But the apparent phobia manifests a highly earnest poetic sensibility that struck forward almost monomaniacally for a large design. It is not the obsession of a poet who is content with the fragmentary and isolated designs of the lyricist. Rosenberg was seeking one Idea, and he knew what he wanted from it. It was another effort however, to effectively capture, articulate and objectify something so 'terrific', that the poet must stand before it in absolute awe.

¹⁵'Creation', Poems, P. 158-160.

¹⁶Works, P. 363.

With his preoccupation for the absolute necessity of clear poetic utterance haunting him, Rosenberg may justifiably resent, with as much indignation as he can manage in a letter to one of his early patronesses, an 'injustice, when my Idea is not grasped, and is ignored'.¹⁷ This frustration was plainly as much a worry to himself as it would be an irritation to any prospective reader who could only perceive a malformed, unfinished wisp of an idea from his poetry, - the sort of intimation received from a reading of the Unicorn fragments, that is ignorant of his earlier work. To Rosenberg the poet craved for the expression of 'some unfathomable, preponderating idea', which was only 'hovering on the borderland of revelation'.¹⁸ It seemed that even if the poet succeeds in capturing his Idea, it will never be the full expression, and the poet is left, deprived and disappointed, his only expedient to 'suggest'.¹⁹ Of course, this, as a poetical premise may well be seized upon as merely an excuse for the lazy or obscure expression of a poet incapable of finding the exact or appropriate word or phrase to say accurately what he means. Declarations and assumptions like this:

-- genuine poetry, where the words lose all their interest as words, and only a beautiful idea remains-¹⁹

¹⁷Works, P. 372.

¹⁸Works, P. 246.

¹⁹Works, P. 262.

invite a mode of utterance that may be nebulous, undisciplined and generally forgetful of the word itself as the instrument with which to fully grasp the Idea. In a 1914 poem called The Poet, Rosenberg describes the process of trapping the Idea through the senses, in the transient moment before it vanishes, in this form, forever:

Yon bright and moving vapour
In a moment fades --,²⁰

but the eye itself has 'anchored' the image, tethered the component of the idea, and the poem itself becomes constructed in this way, through 'the rapid succession of images and thoughts'.²¹

Rosenberg writes persistently in such terms with very little reference to the actual 'word' as the component of the poem. He by - passes the word to the thought and Idea behind it, there is no suggestion that the 'word' must actually accommodate or dilute the Idea in any way. The 'word' is almost irrelevant to him, such terminology would sully the pristine Idea, compromise the glimpse of perfection, and this may be the self - deception of an idealist. Strangely, he has much to say about the 'lines'²² cutting into his consciousness when he is painting, but not the 'words' when he is writing. When he turns to other poets, he concedes that he 'seldom

²⁰'The Poet', III Poems, P. 140.

²¹Works, P. 245.

²²Works, P. 251

remembers the words of any poem²³ he reads. But this is a response to F.S. Flint, and is essentially a response to the image, to which he reacts with his customary relish and craving, the 'strange longing for an indefinite ideal, the reach of hands'.²⁴ Of course, a claim that Rosenberg was generically an imagist stands little chance of substantiation against the extant evidence of the diffuse nature of his imagery, and his own powerful inclinations towards an indulgence in rhetoric. Odd fragments may exhibit an obvious experimental imagist dabble:

Amber eyes with ever such little red fires
Face as vague and white as a swan in shadow --²⁵

but there is a tendency in Rosenberg's poetry not to concentrate the poem as one particular, heavy - laden image. His poetry involves either the ingenuity of a central extended conceit, or the dovetailing of a group of recurrent images, synthesized in what he called the 'crucible'²⁶ of art. When the crucible becomes the symbolical environment of war, the heat becomes almost too intense; the emotion itself burning away the disciplines of objectivity.

But Rosenberg's poetry demonstrates a form that does surrender itself uncompromisingly to the Idea, or to the image.

²⁴Works, P. 326.

²⁵'Fragment XVII', Poems, P. 218.

²⁶Works, P. 243.

which becomes the glimpse or component of the Idea. Doing this, it must necessarily, like the poetry of Blake, sacrifice the clarity of reason, although to the poet this is hardly a sacrifice; as Rosenberg points out, his poetry is 'ungraspable by the intellect',²⁷ but still very 'understandable' as direct poetic thinking, the metaphor completely snubbing the intellect. D.W. Harding's Scrutiny essay suggests that Rosenberg 'brought language to bear on the incipient thought at an earlier stage of its development'.²⁸ than the direct thought in words, and this may be the result of the poet's frustration rather than design. If the poet could never actually and satisfactorily grasp the Idea, but only an intimation, then that to him becomes only an idea perpetually embryonic, in fact a not - quite idea, petrified in its incompleteness. It is only on the 'borderland of revelation',²⁹ and it remains there, to be gradually ossified by the industry of the poet. To articulate it in its incompleteness as a mere harbinger, a permanent presage, is to do something very strange and difficult with language. It is to attempt to completely express an incompleteness, and not necessarily to incompletely express a completeness. Consequently, we must judge Rosenberg on his capability to express perfectly an incomplete Idea. We

²⁷Works, P. 248.

²⁸Harding D.W. 'Aspects of the poetry of Isaac Rosenberg', Scrutiny III No. 4. (1935) P. 365.

²⁹Works, P. 246

must judge him on his powers of expression, rather than his powers of perception, frustrated as they were by an unfinished picture. When this is seen in relation to the additional difficulty of approaching Rosenberg, - and I mean his own failure, through circumstance, to finish an expression of an idea that was itself necessarily incomplete, - the reasons for the slow and often misconceived critical appraisal of the poet begin to make themselves very apparent.

His remarks on Emerson may serve to clarify. He saw the poet only 'near the brink of some impalpable idea', with just 'a rumour of endlessness' or a 'faint savour of primordial being'.³⁰ Again, the common suggestion of the images is elusiveness, the poet runs only in the wake of the Idea, he does not achieve the necessary control to effect a finished expression. At the most he is only allowed the most fleeting moments of vision, and these are taunting, torturous moments that appear solely to be designed for frustration. The momentary vision of the Idea itself appears quite intransigent, staving away expression. It will slip and slide around the poet, avoid both his glance, and his poetic lunge for capture and crystallisation. This is poetically expressed in Significance. The Idea flirts, the poet craves, and instead of trapping the idea, the poet finds a complete reversal. He himself is caught within the power that the Idea exerts, wriggles behind the retreating image, never beholding the whole vast shape:

³⁰Works, P. 254.

The cunning moment curves its claws
 Round the body of our curious wish,
 But push a shoulder through its straitened laws-
 Then you are hooked to wriggle like a fish.³¹

This poem deflates any poetic vision of glory or wild success. The poet must humiliate himself before the image, before the glimpse. In Raphael, a dramatic monologue, the 'dazzling visions'³² of the artist turn around and mock him. They can afford to because they are in complete control. The Idea will always defeat the purpose of the poet. Consequently

-- Never have I reached
 The halfway of the purpose I have planned.³³

So the poet becomes victimised by a double - sided pressure, itself a relative form of tyranny. He is tantalised by the Idea which plays games, engineers machinations and exerts any expedient to avoid displaying itself in its organic completeness. It persistently 'balks'³⁴ the poet's urge to perceive a whole shape. It lives on in the mind of the poet as something 'incomplete and imperfect, maimed',³⁵ and consequently its expression, ^{risks} being vague or indefinite, as the poet struggles to make a complete shape of a mere intimation. From the other side, the poet contends with the verbal accommodation of the glimpse. However much he may immerse himself in the image, he must find words to express the

³¹Poems, P. 116.

³²Poems, P. 164.

³³Poems, P. 166.

³⁴'Art', Poems, P. 213.

³⁵Works, P. 261.

intimated Idea, the abortive grasp of the eternal and ungraspable, the vague shadow of the 'limitless',³⁶ which is all that he sees. For Lascelles Abercrombie, reading Rosenberg's poetry,

-- the concealed power in words came
flashing out.³⁷

This declaration accommodates itself perfectly with the concealed nature of the idea that the poet glimpses. If he can find those words which conceal in themselves the Idea they express: if he can choose words that within their latent power intimate a vaster shape, the shape of the whole Idea, then the mystery of the word itself permeates and neutralises the mystery of the Idea. The word becomes the means to see the whole Idea, to grasp, control and articulate it. Then the responsibilities of the poet to find the correct, exact word with the right latency, to avoid any looseness or gesture, become enormous. In the light of this, it is not difficult to understand Rosenberg's obsessive attitude towards clarity. It was a phobia necessary for the slightest success with an aesthetic that was highly precarious:

³⁶Works, P. 245.

³⁷Quoted in a letter of Rosenberg to Marsh: Works P. 302.

If you do find time to read my poems, and I sent them because I think them worth reading, for God's Sake! don't say they're obscure.³⁸

When Rosenberg was fifteen he gave a poem to a helpful librarian of Whitechapel Public Library, as a gesture of gratitude for various encouragements. The poem was called an Ode to David's Harp,³⁹ and within this first item of juvenilia, the poet sees the protagonist, - in this case, an ecstatic image of himself, rising in bardic and prophetic fury to re - animate his sleeping, lethargic and docile people. Of course, this was also the controlling Idea behind the rebellious Moses, one of his last creations, and re-affirms that similar themes and designs preoccupied his poetic mind from the initial to the final lines of his utterance. The stance of the ecstatic prophet, with his visionary 'gleams of the soul'⁴⁰ looking through the world to the core of truth, and having no eyes for the superficies, is a common attitude adopted by Rosenberg in his early and less mature poetry. Not that it is justifiable to emphasise the poet's occasional more dubious use of attitudinisation. He rarely indulges out of swank or sulkiness. If he casts himself in a stance, he is utterly consistent with it as an extension of his poetical self, and utilises it as a means of exposition of his poetical direction or inclination. He will even legitimately prelude an attitudinised poem with a warning to the reader: so honest

³⁸Works, P. 298.

³⁹Poems, P. 205.

⁴⁰'When I went Forth', Poems, P. 23.

and earnest as to be unsubtle:

I said, I have been having some fits of despondency
lately; this is what they generally end in, some
Byronic sublimity of plaintive caterwauling:⁴¹

And then he will sally forward into declamation and apostrophe
with the most arrant and obvious pose:

God! God! If thou art pity, look on me
God! if thou art forgiveness, turn and see
The dark within, the anguish on my brow --

The poem of course, is very bad, filled as it is, with the
worst abuses of rhetoric and the poseur, and demonstrating one
hypothetical direction of Rosenberg's latent decadence. But
the preface shows an acute awareness of the problems of attitude
and tone, problems that were to take more intense significance
with the later war experience and humanitarian attraction
towards protest. The anti-war attitude may well have been a
terrible temptation for a poet so much aware, and concerned
with a prophetic stance, and the experiences of 1916 may well
legitimately change 'plaintive caterwauling' to the sensitive
voice of necessary human protest. But the over-earnestness
and consequent unsubtlety motivating the early verbal blasts
of the young poet, do tend to prohibit any domination of a
consciously ironic form of expression, undercutting the open
and excited nature of the prophetic attitude. Neither does
he, with significant later exceptions, manipulate his prophetic
stance to stand at odds and create a tension with the words

⁴¹'Fragment LVII', Poems, P. 232.

that flow so enthusiastically. He is fiercely behind the prophetic earnestness and inspiration of his words, unaware of those literary devices that forge a disparity between a poet's tone and his diction. He is rarely above his utterance laughing or nail-paring; he is more commonly behind it, desperately urging its validity, persuading of its truth and not pointing to it ironically. For Rosenberg, the necessary clarity of his Idea could not risk the obscuring effects of ambiguity and irony. The message of the prophet, and his urge to rebellion must not be misinterpreted. Consequently the articulation of his poetic stand for rebellion seemed to demand the ferociously direct: there was neither room nor time for the oblique. Plainly, at this stage, the control of the prophetic tone, the discipline of the sense of direct, over-earnest and undiluted prophetic commission, was proving to be the poet's primary formal problem. The Idea of the cycle, and the movement toward the 'summer slope', in fact the entire, objective 'plan terrific', was the essence of his prophecy, the substance of his message, and it needed to be articulated clearly, impersonally, freed from the various juvenile ecstatic excitations, excrescences and confusions.

Rosenberg's conception of the poet recalls, in at least one of its ambiguities, that of Shelley. His identity is divided when he speaks from his poetic self; like the prophet he calls and sings the story of Earth's wrongs,⁴¹

⁴¹ 'The Poet', I Poems, P. 177.

and in 'glimpses' of inspiration sees the ultimate order, and 'the glory of the Heavens'. Then he becomes the re-animating force, preaching with rebellious energy, a rebirth for,

A dead world, since ourselves are dead --⁴²

As prophet/leader/rebel, he poetically instals and supervises the 'shedding' of the old world, to herald the

Strange winds, new skies, and rivers which flow
Illumined on the hill --

He uses the idea of the bird of God, (like Shelley's rhetorical nightingale in the Defence,) singing to the soul of the poet 'God's fervent music'.⁴³ The inevitability of this inspiration behind the bird's plenitude of song, and its endless pursuit, not unlike that of the Hound of Heaven, contrasts with the poet's own desperation in finding his own Idea:

Because the song flew in unmasked --
I could not hide --⁴⁴

The stance of the seer, with ears attuned to the inevitable music of God, is the reverse of that of the craving poet lunging after an inevitably fading idea. When the seer adopts the pose of the ecstatic prophet, girding himself into a self-induced mood of poetic receptivity, he passes

⁴²'The Poet' II, Poems, P. 155.

⁴³'God looked at me through Her Eyes', Poems, P. 190.

⁴⁴'A Bird trilling it's Gay Heart Out', Poems, P. 129.

Deep into the great heart of things
 -- one with the vasty whisperings
 That breathe the pure ineffable name,⁴⁵

and it becomes seemingly apparent that there is a sharp distinction between the message of God, so radiant and available, and the truths of the 'plan terrific', which remain so elusive. From one stance the inspiration is inevitable, like the ceaseless trilling of the bird it 'flows in unasked', and comes like every 'sunlight'.⁴⁴ From the other it seems almost impossible, requiring a monumental force and exorcism. The prophet can pass 'into the secret God, behind the mask of man',⁴⁶ but the poet cannot approach or violate the sanctity and secrecy of his vast Idea. When the relationship between the poet, the God and the Idea is examined, the apparent confusion, but final reconciliation in ambiguity, becomes the only possible resolution. When a God is essentially hostile, the poet may find in the deity a dubious source of beauty. It seems he must trace an alternative God of perfection to settle and comfort him: But, 'perfection must begin from worst',⁴⁷ from the apparent divine intransigence, and perfection actually is that 'root' for which the poet searches.

Apart from this beauty - in - ferocity, Rosenberg's

⁴⁵'My Songs', Poems, P. 176.

⁴⁴Poems, P. 129.

⁴⁶'The Poet' III, Poems, P. 140.

⁴⁷'Creation' Poems, P. 159.

God is a deity with some other alarming ambiguities. Of course, there is only one source of beauty and perfection, and that is God:

Striving after the perfect - God, we attain
nearer to perfection than before--,⁴⁸

and in a poem called Beauty (11), the poet identifies the biblical symbol of God's presence - the burning bush, with Beauty itself, and associates it with the new Eden. It seems that the pursuit of Beauty recovers Eden, the 'summer slope', and this becomes the direction of the poet. Frye's comment on Blake makes itself very relevant here:

The end of art is the recovery of Paradise.⁴⁹

So Beauty, God and the Idea of perfection appear vitally associated within the apparent mesh of images of the early poetry. But if the recovery of Eden is to be effected through the agency of Beauty, it is a beauty of a ferocious, ruthless kind, and the poem carries through the idea of the flame to indicate a dynamic purge of the 'clay walls'⁵⁰ of the present life. These are burned away, by Beauty, to discover a pristine world:

Purged of the flames that loved the wind
Is the pure glow that has not sinned⁵⁰

⁴⁸Argument to 'Night and Day', Poems, P. 5.

⁴⁹Frye, Northrop. Fearful Symmetry (Boston, 1965) P. 41.

⁵⁰'Beauty' II, Poems, P. 123.

The poem anticipates On Receiving News of the War, written in the same year, 1914, where the argument follows a similar pattern with different symbols. Now the burning bush of Beauty becomes the war, the 'crimson curse' that will

Corrode, consume.
Give back this universe
Its pristine bloom.⁵¹

The burning beauty will consume the 'pale cold'⁵² world of snow, fixed in an icy mould of the retrogressive and commonplace. The kiss of love in Beauty II that set the world burning with Beauty, freed by the artist's genius and sanity, becomes in the other poem a 'malign', insidious kiss that has frozen the world in its mould. Beauty becomes the instrument of rebellion, to break the mould, and the war itself is the beautiful, violent and ferocious agent of perfection, and extension of God. As such it becomes a vade-mecum of beautiful symbols. Sassoon speaks with a similar emblematical sense of the violence of Beauty in another pre-combat poem. Addressing his bayonet he says,

Sweet sister, grant your soldier this:
That in good fury he may feel
The body where he sets his heel
Quail from your downward thrusting kiss.⁵³

The 'kiss' itself will often be associated with death and violence in the Trench Poems: it is the sign of a pact, a

⁵¹Poems, P. 124.

⁵²'Through these Pale Cold Days', Poems, P. 91.

⁵³Sassoon, Siegfried. 'The Kiss', Collected Poems (London, 1947) P. 16.

covenant with violence and beauty. In Rosenberg's poem, The Dead Heroes, God's kiss is the kiss of death, the harbinger of eternity, secured through the beauty of violence. It needs to be emphasised that all this does constitute pre-war utterance. Even Rosenberg's artistic pragmatism was destined to soften in the face of the most 'terrific' stage of his Idea, but it was always to dominate.

I have used these illustrations at this point to demonstrate one aspect of Rosenberg's God. When Beauty is the 'voice of God'⁵⁴ the pitch is stern and ruthless, to earthly eyes completely immoral, but to those eyes that know the 'plan terrific' the violence is the necessary purge in the cycle to recover and redeem the pristine bloom, and the new Eden. The artist who selects the war as a symbolic substitute for the burning bush is one who is supremely, and to ignorant eyes immorally, impersonal in his utterance. He is like the prophet who sees the justice of God rolling down like waters on his people, and that justice^{as} the consequence of God's great love for his people. He stands aside and aloof with his prophecy. The voice of pity, at this stage, is completely irrelevant and puny within the wider scope of the providential 'plan terrific'.

But Rosenberg's God has other faces. He is whimsical

⁵⁴ Night and Day, Poems, P. 18.

and changeable:

-- For an idle whim.
God's dream, God's whim.⁵⁵

and violently moody:

And in God's glad mood he is⁵⁶ glad, and in
God's petulance has pain --
Gradually, in fact, God becomes allied with the tyrannical
elusiveness of the 'plan terrific'. The inexorable pursuit
by the deity in Thompson's Hound of Heaven reverses itself
to be the poet's chase for a glimpse of God, just as he seeks
for a glimpse of the Idea. Like the complete Idea, it eludes
him purposely and tormentingly:

My Maker shunneth me.
Yea! he hath fled as far as the uttermost star,
Beyond the unperturbed fastnesses of night --⁵⁷

The point is universal enough. There is nothing specifically
idiosyncratic about such a relentless, single-minded pursuit.
Ten years later it received perhaps its most critically ac-
claimed articulation:

It eluded us then, but that's no matter - tomorrow
we will run faster, stretch out our arms farther --
And one fine morning --⁵⁸

So it is not surprising that the poet's attitude to
such a tormenting and violent deity should often stiffen and
change. Even the poet can forget the reason behind the necessary

⁵⁵'Fragment XLII', Poems, P. 227.

⁵⁶'O'er the Celestial Pathways', Poems, P. 178.

⁵⁷'Spiritual Isolation', Poems, P. 26.

⁵⁸Fitzgerald, F. Scott. The Great Gatsby (New York, 1925) P. 182.

discomforts contained within the process and evolution of the 'plan terrific'. God, to the unknowing, the unprophetic and also to the man when he emerges from his poetic identity to human normality, can take on the aspect of a 'bullying hulk',⁵⁹ a 'rotting miasma', completely decadent and tyrannical, squashing rebellion and applauding obsequiousness. But these of course, are the misconceptions of the commonplace mind, the mind without poetic sanity or discovery. The poem God presents a tyrant, a vision of a syphilitic, leprous, diabolical potentate, a monstrous apparition of the antithesis of providence. And this is the uninitiated's perception of God, those who only see the narrow vision of violence, and do not discern the reason for it, and the ultimate evolution to love and bliss. After such a cycle:

God's mercy shines.
And my full heart hath made record of this,
Of grief that burst from out its dark confines
Into strange sunlit bliss.⁶⁰

Rosenberg is obviously trying his best not to sound like Dr. Pangloss, and his dilemma will continue to exacerbate alarmingly as the particular terror gradually becomes the experience of war. But the 'plan terrific' is providential, God - inspired, and of course, for the best.

But while the vision is ignorant, false and human, in

⁵⁹'God', Poems, P. 63.

⁶⁰'A Ballad of Whitechapel', Poems, P. 202.

fact, unprophetic, commonplace and necessarily imperfect, it will turn to devices of 'God-guiling',⁶¹ to cheat God by growing towards God through human joy, which grows, rather syllogistically, into divine love. Rosenberg gives the ingenious argument of God Made Blind in a letter to Marsh:

Then we find another way of cheating God. Now through the very joy itself. For by this time we have grown into love, which is the rays of that Eternity of which God is the sun. We have become God Himself. Can God hate and do wrong with himself?⁶²

Rosenberg had been reading Donne avidly at this time (1915), and the whimsical similarity to poems like The Flea and their basic lack of seriousness are quite plain. But what is even clearer is the mythological association that the narrator has with Adam, who tried to mislead God in the Garden of Eden, of Cain who tried to cheat him after the crime. The poem is a light banter; a featherweight and clever exercise in ingenuity. The attitude of the narrator is plainly ironic, quite at odds with the design of the 'plan terrific'. The ingenious anthropomorphism has its precedent in Genesis, and Rosenberg does something very similar in 'My Soul is Robbed'. Here the poet steals his soul from God, who is sleeping in a drunken stupor, to give it to his sweetheart. The central lack of seriousness undercutting the usual earnestness is again evident,

⁶¹ 'God Made Blind', Poems, P. 41.

⁶² Works, P. 298-9.

⁶³ Poems, P. 134.

and the metaphysical image, the central ingenuity does run through the poetry of Rosenberg, and reaches a tightly competent standard in Break of Day in the Trenches. The tensions between ingenuity and prophetic seriousness, the slick conceit and the burning synthesis of recurrent images are the cause of more irony in Rosenberg's poetry than is actually apparent.

In 1914 the poet was declaiming:

I have lived in the underworld too long -- ,⁶⁴
and the next stage in the cycle was plainly close. Rebellion itself, if it is necessarily violent, if it involves an 'ancient crimson curse' is easily caricatured. Thomas Mann's Naphta, the earnest Jew of the rarefied atmosphere of The Magic Mountain (1924), sees in the prospect of the ritualistic, sacrificial 1914-18 blood-bath a precursor of another 'pristine bloom', and the attitude exists as a fictional, hindsighted exaggeration of the sort held by Rosenberg in On Receiving News of the War. But the terrific plan of Rosenberg dictates that, however particularly evil or immoral the rebellion may seem, universally and ultimately it becomes the instrument of a great beauty. In Rosenberg's only, rather desultory attempt at fiction, a short story called Rudolph, and one that appears heavily autobiographical, a

⁶⁴ 'I have lived in the Underworld too Long', Poems, P. 128.

maturing woman announces:

We are born with wings, but we find our feet
the safest --⁶⁵

The young artist characteristically rejects this. Experience has no ascendancy over youthful vision. It is merely age:

-- senile sneering, drug to truth,
The feigned rampart of bleak ignorance,⁶⁶

and can discover nothing. In Blakian terms, the visionary can strip the gyves of commonplace experience, for the rebellion of truth:

Last night I stripped my soul of all alloy
Of earth that did ensphere and fetter it --⁶⁷

The present existence becomes subservient, subject to tyranny, in 'a cage of Earth' where the prisoner only weeps.⁶⁸ As in On Receiving News of the War, snow and 'bleak wintriness' become the mould in The Exile, and the exile himself, heading towards the sun, ('that eternity of which God is the Sun',)⁶⁹ becomes the most audacious rebel. Milton's personification of release and regeneration in Areopagitica, shaking off the emblems of dullness and incarceration, has a strong sense of rebellious similarity with:

But when I started up at last,
I shook the fetters to the floor--⁷⁰

⁶⁵Works, P. 274.

⁶⁶'Of Any Old Man', Poems, P. 143.

⁶⁷'Night and Day', Poems, P. 10.

⁶⁸'The Cage', Poems, P. 184.

⁶⁹Works, P. 298-9.

⁷⁰'So Innocent, you spread your Net', Poems, P. 181.

and in Break In By Subtler Ways, he incites the revolt against the commonplaceness of 'dulled closeness'. Again the 'plan terrific' is evoked, as the rebellious energy gains visions of the 'perfect new chime', the toll from the prophet's own symbolical Jerusalem.

The ambiguous visions of the city, the symbolical city of the fallen, and the prophetic city of the regenerated, constitute a recurrent cross-patterning in Rosenberg's imagery. His actual environment, the pre - 1914 East End of London, is epitomised by H.M. Tomlinson in All Our Yesterdays. See what happens to the rebellious in this dark world:

Those marshes, canal banks, and wharves were dismal
with tales of what had happened to the disobedient
children of near streets, and the characters who
haunted the forbidden land were darker by all
accounts than the treacherous mud of its channels.⁷²

Rosenberg himself appears to move between at least three visions of his city. He sees the dark sea of the city, the 'tidal streets',⁷³ in a way that recalls The Secret Agent, and the city of 'lucre',⁷⁴ the unreal, phantasmagoric city of Eliot, the 'wide desolation' of faceless people

making up the pageant as they flow
In reeking passage to the house of death--⁷⁵

⁷¹'Break In By Subtler Ways', Poems, P. 39.

⁷²Tomlinson H.M. All Our Yesterdays, (Toronto, 1930) P. 75

⁷³'The Cloister', Poems, P. 43.

⁷⁴'Night and Day', Poems, P. 10.

⁷⁵Ibid., P. 7.

In addition, he takes his own prophetic attitude, sees a Sodom and Gomorrah of

Hell's harsh lurid tale
For perilous loads of sin,⁷⁶

or the chaos, the 'shrieking vortex'⁷⁷ of Fleet Street. Then he can see a city transfigured before him by sunfire, the tumult exacerbated by the light of noon, and made more intense by its glare:

But buildings glorified
Whose windows shine
And show the Heaven--⁷⁸

Out of the many faces of this fallen city, the poet distills a vision of his personal Zion. He refers to 'promised lands',⁷⁹ he himself 'stands upon the shore of a strange land',⁸⁰ and in his prose he promises rewards when 'the doors of the new religion have been opened to our knocking'.⁸¹ The promised city itself stands as a visionary embodiment of the 'plan terrific'. Even as an apprentice artist of sixteen, Rosenberg had seen his citadel in terms of turrets, sun and steeples, more like the conventional spires of El Dorado, or the pleasure dome, than the glum grandeur of the Jewish temple:

The gates of morning opened wide
On sunny dome and steeple

⁷⁶'A Ballad of Whitechapel', Poems, P. 200.

⁷⁷'Fleet Street', Poems, P. 179.

⁷⁸'Night and Day', Poems, P. 11.

⁷⁹'Wistfully in Pallid Splendour', Poems, P. 139.

⁸⁰'To J.H. Amschewitz', Poems, P. 21.

⁸¹Works, P. 286.

Noon gleamed upon the mountain-side
Throng'd with a happy people.⁸²

Again the vision blazes directly through his poetical career: the boy who dreams of the city of 'eternal summer' on the 'mountain-side', is the same soldier who gropes in his last poem towards 'Lebanon's summer slope'⁸³ from out of the battle-mist.

In A Ballad of Time, Life and Memory, Rosenberg sees his cycle in terms of a quotidian passage:

From dawn through day to dawn.⁸⁴

The poem continues to argue that time controls the evolution of life, which it leads through symbolical underworlds, and

Many waste places
And dreams and shapes of death --⁸⁴

Then the summer slope is evoked, and through the agency of memory, the 'voice of summer is not dumb'. Rosenberg's first published poem, Night and Day (1912), preoccupies itself with a similar passage through night, day and finally a personified twilight, who speaks to the poet the truths that he craves to hear.⁸⁵ Throughout the poetry these images persistently re-appear. Night means comfort to the poet, and not terror. It is the 'shadow of the soul'⁸⁶, and radiates warmth and maternal comfort,⁸⁷ as well as bestowing erotic caresses.⁸⁸ Night

⁸²'Zion', Poems, P. 204

⁸³'Through These Pale, Cold Days', Poems, P. 91.

⁸⁴Poems, P. 198-9.

⁸⁵Ibid., P. 19.

⁸⁶'A Ballad of Whitechapel', Poems, P. 202.

⁸⁷'Fragment XXX', Poems, P. 222.

⁸⁸'Night', Poems, P. 133.

embraces me warm;
 All is purple and closed
 Round by night's arm.⁸⁹

There is the suggestion that night is a sensuous, often rapturous indulgence, a form of the mould that restrains the energy and rebelliousness of the poet. It is too comforting, too warm. Day may be the time of the sun, the radiation of eternity, but this is violent beauty. To the man it is reckless, formidable, sheer menace, a time of 'fiery trampling hoofs'⁹⁰ and apocalyptic intimations. It stands in the attitude of war, and apparent ostentation:

Day's banners flame on high
 In gaudy disarray.⁹¹

Between these two extremes is Twilight. In Night and Day twilight was the window of God, the casement through which God saw, and pronounced his truths to the poet. In the very early Zion, it is through the eyes of twilight that the poet gains his vision, and the dawn, the breaking of night and day, the fleeting, ephemeral moment of visionary potency, is the period to catch the Idea, to fix the transient and elusive image. The time of inspiration, 'consecration' of the moment, is

-- the gate
 Of long-wished night, while day rides down the west.⁹²

⁸⁹'At Night', Poems, P. 141.

⁹⁰'Night and Day', Poems, P. 9.

⁹¹'Fragment XLV', Poems, P. 216.

⁹²'Love to Be', Poems, P. 173.

The poet has three poems entitled Twilight,⁹³ and the idea patterns itself throughout his utterance. He waits for the dawn in the same way that he waits for his Idea, in hope and trepidation, to grab the truth as it passes from night towards the formidable menace of day, where the poet bows to the awe, fears to follow. The truth there merges with eternity and the sun, and the poet waits for the next dawn:

Ah! Who of us shall wait for the dawn, while the
shadows of night disappear.⁹⁴

Dawn effectively is the metaphor for the present, the moment when time is neither past or future, but the opportunity for fixing the Idea. When the Idea is fixed in that one moment, and that is the poet's desperate wish, then the present itself roars defiantly to fate and time, in its 'freedom' from their tyranny:

The loud roar
Of life around me is thy voice to fate
And time--⁹⁵

All these themes synthesize in Dawn Behind Night.⁹⁶ The poet, speaking inclusively and prophetically in the first person plural, is subject to 'soul crushing scourges' associated with wealth and capital. He sees the world as a 'prison' enslaved by these powers in the extremes of both day and night.

In the golden glare of the morning, in the solemn
serene of the night.⁹⁶

⁹³Poems, pp. 153, 162, 171.

⁹⁴'Twilight' I, Poems, P. 171.

⁹⁵'The Present', Poems, P. 187.

⁹⁶Poems, P. 203.

The release, the rebellion for freedom lies in the ship of the dawn, with just the visionary 'glimpse of Heaven'⁹⁶ behind it. The dawn becomes the vessel of freedom, the fleeting period of passage to a far less menacing day, where the 'sun' of eternity shines on the summer slopes:

That will find us and free us, and take us
where its portals are opened wide.⁹⁶

The space that I have devoted to Rosenberg's early work does not constitute an effort to forge out a coherent aesthetic from the multifarious fragments, scraps and poetry of a greater design. But it is intended to show directions and incipient themes that were to mature to a fragmentary fruition. His first lyrics for example, published as Youth, partook of a 'scheme'⁹⁷ explained in a letter to Marsh. This was a growth from the 'faith and fear' of a youth to the 'cynic's lamp' of bitter experience, through to the 'spiritualising' behind the 'change and sunfire'. This ends in love, when the discoveries of the imagination explode all illusions. Such a scheme may be rather trite, popularly overworked or suspiciously oversimplified by a poet's paraphrase, but it associates itself with something archetypal. The movement towards the sun and eternity through a thematic utterance evinces an apprentice poet who is grasping something organically vast, and turning away from the separately - wrought sentiments of his period's lyricism.

⁹⁷Works, P. 292.

What appeared to be the second part of the artistic process, Rosenberg plainly found as difficult as the first capture of the Idea. When the Idea was grasped, it was grasped with the dross, with unwanted excrescences that violate the clarity and resonance of the pristine Idea. It came deformed and damaged:

You can only, when the ideas come hot, seize them
with the skin in tatters raw, crude, in some parts
beautiful in others monstrous --⁹⁸

And the early poems are often like this : hybrid and cluttered, the predominating Idea immersed amongst scattered indulgences in what Yeats arbitrarily labelled 'windy rhetoric'.⁹⁹ But 'all windy rhetoric'⁹⁹ with no acknowledgement to the central cyclical core beneath, is completely unfounded. Similarly Graham Hough's dictum that Rosenberg was 'killed before he had anything to say except about war',¹⁰⁰ is quite ludicrous when war happens to fit inside as an image participating in the very life of the truth of the 'plan terrific', the preconceived design that accommodated war yet never let war accommodate it. Of course, the early verse points towards the Trench Poems, just as the Trench Poems point toward the later mythopoeic forms. They grow organically, and to ignore the early work

⁹⁸Works, P. 310.

⁹⁹Quoted in Parsons I.M. 'Introduction', Men Who March Away. (London, 1965). P. 26.

¹⁰⁰Ibid., P. 22.

is to emasculate the poet's theme, to sever vital appendages, and to approach the war utterance in a thematic vacuum. With certain established modes of expression behind them, the Trench Poems begin to lose that mythical obscurity which the sparing criticism devoted to Rosenberg has tended to attribute to them.

WAR: THE CRIMSON CURSE

Only putrefaction is free
 And I, Freedom, am not.
 Isaac Rosenberg

To make oneself beloved one need only show pity.
 I show little pity, or I hide it. -- all was at
 war with pity, friendship, memories --
 Antoine de Saint-Exupery
 (Trans. Stuart Gilbert)

i

A poet who could see the 'true design' behind his poetic commission 'making music with the bones of death,'¹ will look further for his truth than to immerse himself in a quest for either moral standards in a period of war, or human - and necessarily erroneous - reasoning with a divine Idea. Both, to the impersonal vision of the artist, will be blindness, mere sentimentality. The 'bones of death' will become the instruments of the 'iron' of war, and the music the discordant frenzy that sounds through poems like Déad Man's Dump, with all the cacophonous crashing of an eschatological universe. The poet's craving to manifest the 'plan terrific' will by-pass the apparent relative truths of human morality, to achieve the absolute truth established by design and form. This is the poet's Jerusalem, the real world where 'sould knows soul to shine.'

It was Rosenberg's contention that 'the artist can see² beauty everywhere --,' without making any concessions to

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² 'Creation,' Poems. P. 159
Works. P. 364

morality. When other poets introduce reservations questioning the artistic or moral propriety of the potential symbolic media, of the instruments of twentieth century warfare, - and this is Jones:

It is not easy in considering a trench-mortar barrage to give praise for the action proper to chemicals - full though it may be of beauty. We feel a rubicon has been passed between striking with a hand weapon as men used to do, and loosing poison from the sky as we do ourselves --,³

Rosenberg merely writes his poetry, without justification of symbols or metaphor that to him, are utilised not despite their possible immoral nature, but because they participate in his vast Idea and are formally relevant. When Herbert Read said in retrospect that 'war appealed to the imagination',⁴ he was tacitly suggesting that war provided within itself modes of expression that the pragmatism of the impersonal artist may, or may not, seize to articulate his controlling idea or plan. It presented itself as yet another means of relief, another reservoir of metaphor to ease the poet's struggle for expression. The poet could grasp war as a huge metaphor that was universal enough to aid the clarification of his utterance. In the face of the horror of twentieth century warfare, the truth may be difficult enough for any humane mind to accept, but the poet's impersonality, his prophetic distancing, makes it clear.

Read, for example, declares his business as a poet is

³
⁴D. Jones, 'Preface' In Parenthesis. (London, 1963), P. xiv
 Read, Herbert, 'The Impact of War' Annals of Innocence and Experience. (London, 1946), P. 138

not to condemn war:

I only wish to present the universal aspects of a particular event. Judgment may follow, but should never precede or become embroiled with the act of poetry. It is for this reason that Milton's attitude to his Satan has so often been misunderstood.⁵

And Rosenberg too, has been misunderstood in a very similar way. J. H. Johnston for example, in his attempt to demonstrate the 'evolution of the lyric form' in his English Poetry of the First World War, sees the genius of separated, lyric utterances in Rosenberg's poetry, but misses the 'plan terrific,' the ultimate indication of the poet's impersonality and objectivity. For Johnston, Rosenberg is a poet of 'pity' and 'compassion.'⁶ This is effectively a misleading slant on a poet whose commission was filled with the apprehension of symbolical truths from the 'crucible', the burning images of war, as a particularly exuberant aspect of the symbolical world that the artist perceives around him. The Letters are so fretted with Rosenberg's concern with art, or himself as an artist, that the fact he is a fighting man, a soldier who will only occasionally refer to the other men around him - some, he tells, in fits of diarrhoea, - becomes almost dalliance in comparison with his concern for his art, or his artistic mentors, Bottomley or Abercrombie. His preoccupation is with the world of art, not with the world of men, and as the Trench Poems tell, the men in his poems are not simply

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Read, Herbert, 'The End of a War' Poems 1914-1934. (London, 1935), P. 74

⁶ Johnston, J. H., English Poetry of the First World War. (Princeton, 1964), P. 211

human projections of suffering soldiers, but impersonal components of his Idea and his Jerusalem.

From a poet who perceives form in a time of the energies of apparent chaos, - itself generated by such 'inventive enginery'⁷ that sunk the Lusitania, - it becomes clear that a part of the 'everywhere' of access to beauty is chaos and war itself. This is not the beauty behind fragmented or random lyrical moments: - Blunden's apprehension of a robin in war,⁸ while outside of his wayward pastoral imagination 'men were killed from time to time,'⁹ or Aldington's momentary slice of beauty in a world of 'carrion':

More beautiful than one can tell,
More subtly coloured than a perfect Goya
And more austere and lovely in repose
Than Angelo's hand could ever carve in stone,¹⁰

-but the form behind a whole Idea that will accommodate certain aspects of war within its expression, and pick what it chooses. The conditions, the war itself and its moments, do not compromise the Idea which will select, even from the morally unacceptable.

Another of Marsh's correspondents, Francis Ledwidge, wrote from the front that the war was 'like the end of a beautiful world.'¹¹ For Rosenberg, seeing the beauty and design in iron, but also the beauty to come, it was like the beautiful end of a beautiful world, and the poet-prophet was stand-

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⁸ 'Lusitania,' Poems. P. 71

⁹ Blunden, E., Undertones of War. (London, 1962), P. 97

¹⁰ Ibid. P. 147

¹¹ Ed. Parsons, I. M., 'Soliloquy 2,' Richard Aldington, Men Who March Away. (London, 1965), P. 158

¹² Hassall, C., A Biography of Edward Marsh. (New York, 1959), P. 421

ing back, with a huge, impersonal vision, to tell. C. K. Stead's acceptable dictum, that 'the soldier poets stood too close to their subject,'¹² that 'art' was not their life, unconsciously points to the antithetical and purely artistic preoccupations of Rosenberg, himself of course, no member of the 'soldier' genre of poets. His soldiering was not his life, but the contortions of what to him was a lesser identity. His letters show he was a poet, and his poems confirm he was a poet in a highly poetical environment. As a fighting man amongst other fighting men with the humanistic 'inalienable sympathy of man for man,'¹³ he hardly exists, until the moment of crisis in Dead Man's Dump.

One of the more common attitudes of the author who writes as a soldier, a man amongst men, evincing the standards of humanity, is to rebuke his particular deity for creating or tolerating such terrible events that fall within the passage of war. The soldier will be most concerned when he discovers that his accepted providence is disinterested, impersonal, apathetic or uncommitted to his responsibility:

- - it wasn't that I minded about those men being wiped out, but I wanted Deity - if it was Deity, - to mind.¹⁴

He will also anticipate certain divine intervention, manipulation, or at least active concern, - an expectation which, when exploded, will be accepted, in its dissipated state with certain disillusionment. Frank Richards' soldier/seer/sage, -

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¹³ C. K. Stead, The New Poetic. (London, 1964), P. 40

¹⁴ Manning, Frederic, Her Privates We. (London, 1964), P. 12

¹⁴ Child, Philip, God's Sparrows. (London, 1937), P. 149

terror, and the soldier may say, as Hemingway's hero says:

-- it kills the very good and very gentle and the very brave impartially.¹⁷

And this is very often the response of the 'soldier poet,' the man of sentiment, that associates itself repeatedly with the poetry of war as a lyrical form, full of amazement, stupefaction or protest at the particular occurrence that revolts the humane.

Rosenberg, in Marching, remains impersonal, inhuman, standing aside from the soldier's response, and commenting on it ironically. The power, the deity may be 'blind'¹⁶ to the soldier, but not to the poet who knows what comes before, and what comes after, and how the war is the rubicon, the apocalypse, forged in iron through the 'inventive enginery'⁷ of the providence behind the 'plan terrific.' And again in Lusitania¹⁸ the ostensible 'chaos,' that ironically has enough order to 'help,' 'give,' reason and create, is associated with 'dynamite and iron.' The particular moment of chaos becomes a part of the universal design, and Pangloss again contemplates the Portuguese Earthquake. But it is poetically apt that this plan is one of 'iron,' that it does not bend to accommodate the particular instance or the human exception. When the exception is the sinking of the Lusitania, and the Idea remains inflexible, unconcerned, then it is morally completely unsound and misconceived, but poetically, and ideally, it retains its detached and impersonal integrity.

¹⁷ Hemingway, Ernest, A Farewell to Arms. (Middlesex, 1961), p. 193.

¹⁸ Poems. P. 71.

Iron itself, and fire, are common enough images within the corpus of literature that concerns itself with the Great War, but for Rosenberg such images normally point to the presence of something greater than war. August 1914¹⁹ is a poem that unites the ingenious and central metaphor with the 'crucible' of burning thematic images, brought together and synthesized through the ferocious energy of the poet's Idea. The war is 'fire,'¹⁹ consuming that inflammable portion of humanity, including the victuals of life, and the reserves, the 'ripe fields' 'granaries.' Of the elements of life, the 'gold' is gone, melted away in the temple.²⁰ The sweetness, the 'honey' is also gone, drained by the 'iron burning bee,'²¹ that has executed such a formidable power. But the iron remains the one, inflexible, stern element

Left is the hard and cold,
that now becomes the entire constitution of life. After August 1914 and the immersion in war, the world is a world of iron, and the sweetness and visible glory evaporate to leave the jagged edges of iron, parallelling the exacerbation of the 'broken tooth'²² at the expense of all other beauties of the mouth. In Rosenberg's war, the iron is all, controls all,

Iron are our lives
Molten right through our youth --²²

The molten iron pouring into the overflowing mould, with no regard to the control and lethargic order of the fallen world,

¹⁹

Poems. P. 70

²⁰'The Burning of the Temple,' Poems. P. 89

²¹'Dead Man's Dump,' Poems. P. 82

²²'August 1914,' Poems. P. 70

is of course, the iron of the Idea that cuts forward impersonally, inexorably, right through the world of men, morality and the 'ripe fields'²² of their own subjective standards. So through August 1914, it becomes clear that the 'iron cloud' of Marching is, ironically, the 'iron love' of Dead Man's Dump, with the same 'jagged fire'²³ as its executor. The poet, like the prophet standing above, can see a love so absolute that it will consume in order to re-generate, will beat out in order to re-work. The impersonal vision lifts the obscure, sees through the cloud and glimpses the love: the soldier still flounders through impressions that are nebulous, seeing only the immediately and particularly apparent.

This distinction between poet and soldier, visionary and man, is essentially the cause of the ambiguities that surround Rosenberg's idea of the soldier. It is also the cause of much of the conscious irony, - and all this, coming from a poet of whom Harding said, he could 'do without irony.'²⁴ The mock-heroic 'titanic'²⁵ aspect of the twentieth-century soldier, and his organic relationship with past heroes 'husbanding the ancient glory',²⁶ contrasts in stature with the more realistic:

Grotesque and queerly huddled
Contortionists --²⁷

who lie in such unmartial attitudes aboard a troop ship. They

²³

²⁴ 'Dead Man's Dump,' Poems. P. 82

Harding, D.W., 'Aspects of the Poetry of Isaac Rosenberg,' Scrutiny V III No. 4. (March, 1935)

²⁵ 'Soldier, Twentieth Century,' Poems. P. 87

²⁶ 'Marching,' Poems. P. 66

²⁷ 'The Troop Ship,' Poems. P. 70

'smile'²⁸ not with triumph or glory, but like Owen's soldiers,²⁹ with symbolic intensity intimating a stoical and sacrificial suffering.

The soldier's image is unsentimentally deflated and debunked. in The Immortals, where with zealous energy the soldier carries through his martial commission:

I killed and killed with slaughter mad;
I killed till all my strength was gone.³⁰

He appears engaged in an epic contest with an immortal foe. His hands are red with the 'gore' of the enemy, a beast of mythical powers of multiplication:

-- for faster than I slew
They rose more cruel than before.

That this ostensible monumental force should in fact be a 'dirty louse,' puts the soldier within a twentieth century perspective, away from illusions of personal glory, as well as demonstrating that even the lice fall within the confines of the 'plan terrific.' This itself forges an ironic truth within the poem, as the soldier himself sees the louse in terms of a hostile and unprovidential Satanic agent. Similarly it is the 'wizard vermin' of the poem Louse Hunting³¹ that cause the 'revel' and ritual of

Nudes - stark and glistening
Yelling in lurid glee.³¹

Such ecstatic movement and rapture caused by lice, seen again as devilish tormentors, may deflate the soldierly glories, but

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29 'Home Thoughts From France,' Poems. P. 74

Blunden, E., (Ed.), 'Smile, Smile, Smile,' The Poems of Wilfred Owen. 'London, 1963), P. 114

30 'The Immortals,' Poems. P. 78

31 'Louse Hunting,' Poems. P. 79

it indicates a certain indefinite joy; a dance that follows and celebrates a cathartic or tragic experience that itself suggests regeneration rather than an end. There is cause for joy, ecstasy and not lamentation. This sense of joy in Louse Hunting, and the wild, untamed gestures, appear to be verbal parallels to those in Rosenberg's graphic piece of 1912, Hark, Hark, the Lark,³² where nude figures in ecstatic attitudes, and 'raging,' frenzied limbs, appear to be engaged in some primitive rite. The lark itself of course, will cause further joy,³³ but the radiance of joy in despair, celebration in apparent torment, shines from the obscure faces as it does from the gestures of Louse Hunting. These figures, with this aspect, cease to have merely the nature of soldiers. They even take off and discard their uniforms, losing their soldierly identities in symbolic movements, and adopt a role, a dance which celebrates some cause of joy.

The cause itself; - rebellion, becomes clearer from the two closely related poems, Soldier: Twentieth Century³⁴ and Girl to Soldier on Leave.³⁵ In the former the soldier speaks. He refers to the 'pallid days' of tyranny, a despotic control that curtails freedom, exercised by 'cruel men' who have

stolen the sun's power
With their feet on your shoulders worn.

In the second poem the girl speaks to her soldier lover. She is fearful: the 'pallid days, arid and wan'³⁵ may have been

³²

Silkin, J., and De Sausmarez, M. A Catalogue of An Exhibition Held at Leeds University. (Leeds, 1959), opp. P. 32

³³ 'Returning, We Hear the Larks,' Poems. P. 80

³⁴ Poems. P. 87

³⁵ Poems. P. 88

tyrannical, sterile and miserable, but the 'gyves' of such an existence were secure and safe, and the man was controlled by the woman, she may restrict his freedom. Even at the apex of the tyranny - the Somme, and 60,000 dead in a day, - the soldier's ties to her, and the shackles of military authority were still 'firm.' But in an act of discovery, she reluctantly recognises a 'splended rebel,' a transfiguration of the soldier to a formidable and dislodging force that works to topple that 'cold Prometheus' who

Wanes like a ghost before your power --35

The previous oppressive existence which 'tied the soul,' and the hostile, fallen cities which 'pressed upon' the soldier's growth, have been destroyed by this rebellion as the last gyve 'loosens.' The woman fears in the man such a wild and perfect freedom. She loses her conventionally and unproductively structured security. When the man was a soldier, he was subjected to both the oppressive military, and the oppressive feminine power, two authorities. Now he is no longer a soldier or a subjected lover, but a rebel, a free agent, and the war has been his crisis and revelation, his moment of fiercest oppression and his moment of release. So the overriding sense is the one of joy that follows a catharsis.

Ford Madox Ford says something very similar in his Parade's End. Tietjens, the protagonist, releases himself from another double-sided tyranny. He breaks from the dynamic power of his wife Sylvia, and finally ends any subjection to the military mind:

Gone -- Napoo finny! No -- more -- parades.³⁶

Of course, Tietjens himself, in the process of a new beginning, finds another life, a freedom, where a man is allowed, symbolically and archetypally to stand up on a hill.³⁷ This, plainly, has its biblical and universal precedent:

And it shall come to pass in the last days, that
the mountain of the Lord's house shall be estab-
lished in the top of the mountains, and shall be
exalted above the hills; and all nations shall
flow unto it.³⁸

-Rosenberg's soldiers who have had their visions of Zion, their
'summer slope' obscured by tyranny and noxious authority

In endless hosts which darkened
The bright-Heavened Lebanon,³⁹

who have changed the paradisaical pools of their dreams, the
'pools of Hebron'⁴⁰ for flooded shell-holes

They washed their grime in pools
Where laughing girls forgot
The wiles they used for Solomon,³⁹

have, after the act of rebellion, the notion of release and
freedom coming through the apocalypse of the war. This reve-
lation, coming through the visionary eye of the poet/prophet
and his glimpses of the 'plan terrific', gives the soldiers an
enlightened new sight, a fresh objectivity. In the last
'Trench Poem,' Through These Pale Cold Days, they in fact

see with living eyes
How long they have been dead.⁴⁰

They have been released from a subjective, obscure immersion

³⁶

Ford, F. M., No More Parades, (Toronto, 1965), P. 311

³⁷Ford, F. M., A Man Could Stand Up, (Toronto, 1965), P. 73

³⁸Isaiah. II, 2

³⁹'The Destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonian Hordes,'

Poems. P. 90

⁴⁰Poems. P. 91

in the 'iron' cloud, and the future, the organic and cyclic direction of the idea has been revealed to them. The three thousand years⁴⁰ of Jewish history, an accommodating effort of the poet to place his eternal idea in time, are working towards regeneration. They, the men, the past soldiers have transcended the world, the war and tyranny to be the components of the new world, a new Jerusalem. In the terms of Blake, the past soldiers are those who take up the string and wind towards the Jerusalem. There is nothing specifically Jewish here. Amongst the debris of France the American sees

The arch in the cold glow of the light, yawning empty, profound, silent, like the gate to another city, another world.⁴¹

The Canadian sees

on the horizon a dream city appearing with an unshelled church spire and toy houses: the promised land,⁴²

and the Englishman applies the dream, provides for it politically, seeing his own Republic:

I used to imagine an international party of excombatants, united by their common suffering, who would turn against the politicians and the profiteers in every country, and create a society based on respect for the individual human being --⁴³

That such thoughts are wildly idealistic, in practical terms untrue, the historical repetitions of twenty years later were to prove. For Read, disappointingly 'no such party came into existence,'⁴³ and for Sidney Keyes, who died in

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Faulkner, W., 'Ad Astra,' Those Thirteen. (London, 1958),

⁴² P. 146

⁴³ Child, P., God's Sparrows. (London, 1937), P. 309

⁴³ Read, H., 'The Impact of War,' Annals of Innocence and Experience. (London, 1946), P. 146

Tunisia, 1943, the development towards the promised city was apparent, tempting, but misconceived. It was falsely euphoric, and its testament from the voices of Rosenberg's generation was made unreal by events:

You'll find perhaps, the dream under the Hill,
But never Canaan, not any golden mountain.⁴⁴

The 'plan terrific' does not work to reduce this argument, neither does it diminish in any way the standards and laws of practicality. It is not cognizant of them, and it emerges independently, poetically, creating its own standards of form. Its shapes are not the shapes of morality or history, but they retain their own truth, and not despite events, but above events they prove their own truth.

11

Returning, We Hear the Larks is both a very vital part of Rosenberg's 'plan terrific' and a confirmation that his utterance was universal enough to contain, and assimilate within itself multifarious elements of traditional expression. Rosenberg's Larks, as visions and resonant agents of the Real world of the poet's Idea, emphasise their organic relationship with Keats' Nightingale or Shelley's Skylark, as well as form another dimension of the visionary bird of the trenches, which for authors concerned with the Great War, held a varied, profound and often oracular significance.

For Tietjens in Ford's Parade's End it is the supernatural agent carolling the message of the new pristine world named through 'Bemerton.'⁴⁵ For Tomlinson, and the pessimist sol-

⁴⁴Gardner, B.(Ed.), 'Advice for a Journey,' by Sidney Keyes, The Terrible Rain. (London, 1966), P. 30

⁴⁵Ford, F.M., A Man Could Stand Up. (Toronto, 1965), P. 133

dier of All Our Yesterdays, the nightingale's song represents the foolish twittering of an 'idiot bird'⁴⁶ accepting insensitively the lowest conditions of depravity and misery. For Robert Graves the Lark takes sides, 'hanging' over his own trench, swearing and screaming abuse at the Germans,⁴⁷ and to Read it is the Lark that is as 'real'⁴⁸ to him as his own fate and environment are unreal:

-- a lark, a dot, a lark that was always singing.⁴⁸
Even to Frank Richards, the complete non-aesthete, the professional soldier

No shells coming over, no reports of rifles, and
the larks were up, singing beautifully,⁴⁹

and finally to Rosenberg himself, the lark is the messenger of his own real world, the world of the 'plan terrific.'

There are aspects of Rosenberg's expression that plainly owe a great deal to other poets. The poet's rapturous line:

Lo! Heights of night ringing with the sound of un-
seen larks⁵⁰

is very much like Francis Thompson's own

Hushed with the cooing of an unseen dove,⁵¹
in Manus Animam Pinxit. The metaphor of dangerous tides and the elemental menace of the sea, is an image commonly grasped in war,⁵² but it had been previously and rather similarly

⁴⁶Tomlinson, H.M., All Our Yesterdays. (Toronto, 1930), P. 440
⁴⁷Letter in: Hassall, C., A Biography of Edward Marsh. (New York, 1959), P. 345

⁴⁸Read, H., 'The Raid,' Annals of Innocence and Experience. (London, 1946), P. 151

⁴⁹Richards. P. 112

⁵⁰Poems. P. 80

⁵¹Thompson, Francis, 'Manus Animam Pinxit,' The Poems of Francis Thompson. (London, 1938), P. 71

⁵²For Example: David Jones is thinking of similar menaces with his::

--the next wave came up slowly, as successive surfs
creep in to dissipate on flat shore. Jones. P. 165

utilised in Flint's Chrysanthemums,⁵³ and metamorphosed to joy, closely anticipating Rosenberg's surge of the larks. With Rosenberg's own partiality to Flint's poetry in mind,⁵⁴ and the latter's infectious sense of joyousness:

my love who comes

will wave wide ripples of disquiet there
and a great tide of the eternal sea
will rise at her approach
and surge to song,⁵⁵

this becomes the poem that takes Rosenberg nearest to the Imagist movement.

With this awareness of Rosenberg's tendency towards assimilation, the originality of his poem as a part of his controlling Idea focusses itself. As in Louse Hunting the tired soldier is attracted, and tempted by sleep. He 'drags' his limbs up a track that anticipates Dead Man's Dump, and is a part of the floundering, inarticulate portion of humanity, with all facilities dulled, that characterised Owen's soldiers under gas attack.⁵⁵ The night itself, with Rosenberg normally a period of comfort and indulgence, to the soldier, paradoxically only shows menace and danger. To the soldier it is sleep that is 'safe' and secure, a period of rest and inactivity. But then, instead of sleep, or the disturbing aspect of the lice, there is the disturbance in the rapture of the birds, the source of the joy, 'strange' and sudden, which

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Ed. Pratt, W., 'Chrysanthemums,' F. S. Flint. The Imagist Poem. (New York, 1966), P. 46
54 Works. P. 326

55 Blunden, E., (Ed.). 'Dulce et Decorum Est', The Poems of Wilfred Owen. (London, 1963), P. 66

in Louse Hunting had manifested itself in the dance. The application of the image, the moment of vision, through a double poetical hypothesis follows. Death may follow with a similar suddenness to the song, and to the 'blind' man, insensitive to the poet's controlling idea, the song itself will be like a sop for fear and an illusion that even outside of blindness would only reveal itself as the terrible and formidable menace of the sea. The image emphasises two degrees of the commonplace mind's ignorance of the divine Idea. The word 'blind' here associates itself with its previous inclusion in God Made Blind or Marching, when it was used, ironically, to suggest a narrow attitude that sees no farther than the particular discomfort. The second comparison evokes another woman, (compare Girl to Soldier on Leave), who unconsciously longs for security, and carries within herself the instruments not of release, like the Daughters of War, but suspicious, devilish powers whose efficacy gives her a certain potential control over the male. Her dreams are as poetically and as truthfully illegitimate as those of the blind man, because she wants only safety, control and the trapping of a manly, rebellious freedom with her gyves, 'kisses' and devices. This, of course, points to the more ironical use of a similar idea in Daughters of War, and the function of the female Lilit in the Unicorn fragments. She holds the serpent in her hair. With this she competes with the huge compulsive powers of the Daughters of War, to steal away the young warrior/rebels with the decisive and menacing 'kiss.' Beside these perversions, illusions and the misunderstandings of

blindness and the female self-will, all misinterpreting the song of the Larks, the soldier, the would-be rebel, dynamically 'listens,' concentrates and absorbs the vision of the Idea, associating his own joy with the rapture of the song that destroys his urge to sleep, overcomes the soft, safe indulgence of relaxation, and urges wakefulness, tension and rebellion. This is a vigilance that reflects the poet's own attitude as he waits to grasp the elusive Idea. The Lark, 'unseen' but heard, 'strange' as an unworldly essence, is an exuberant glimpse of the poet's controlling Idea, struggling to articulate itself.

After the louse and the bird comes the rat, and Break of Day in the Trenches,⁵⁶ Rosenberg's most well known, commonly anthologised, and possibly, second to Dead Man's Dump, most graphic piece. Frank Richards tells the story of a giant rat, that appeared to a soldier who was so tormented, by what seemed to be an apparition that he prophesied that at his moment of death, the rat, like death's usher, would re-appear. Sure enough, this was fulfilled, and even to the placid Richards this was 'a weird experience.' To Rosenberg, the rat gave a visionary experience that was similarly wierd, and the rodent itself radiates a certain grotesquerie whenever it is evoked in the literature of the Great War. In this poem the rat is the central image, flexible and mobile, like Donne's Flea moving in turn from one party to another, establishing as the core of the poem a central, ingenious skeletal unity.

⁵⁶Poems. P. 73

The rat is 'smiling,' 'droll' and 'sardonic,' and is attributed flattering 'cosmopolitan sympathies' that hardly become its more modest position in the scale of being. Such a lack of seriousness again reflects Donne,⁵⁷ one of Rosenberg's great poets. The rat crosses the heavily ironic 'sleeping green', that is, in fact, the 'torn fields,' mangled and devoid of any such serenity. The sense of disparity between the vision of the soldier and that of the poet again re-emerges, (as in The Immortals), as the physical situation of the soldier in his squalid trench, trapped and overcome by the spreading conditions of stagnation and attrition, is juxtaposed against those youthful and dynamic movements of 'fine limbs' and 'athletes.'

Rosenberg's poem begins in paradox. The darkness 'crumbling away'⁵⁶ seems like a phrase from Bottomley's prophetic End of the World, 'the air was crumbling.'⁵⁸ The powerfully disturbing qualities that Rosenberg saw⁵⁹ in Bottomley's very eschatological piece are here transferred to front line experience. That he should juxtapose this sense of the Earth's dissipation with Druidism, according to Frye, the period when

⁵⁷ Philip Child was to take the mock-levity even further. In his Brother Newt to Brother Fly a conversation is fabricated between a trench fly and a trench newt as a commentary on the 'twisted ways of men.' Says the newt:

I see the curious way the creatures die --

Thank God we have no souls to justify,
Let's dine on worms.

Child, P., God's Sparrows. (London, 1937), P. 220

⁵⁸ Bottomly, Gordon, 'The End of the World,' Poems of Thirty Years. (London, 1927), P. 8

⁵⁹ Works. P. 370

man was objectifying himself, becoming aware of the shapes of his universe,⁶⁰ hints that the poem's tensions will vary from the semi-serious to the deadly earnest. So after the rat's movements and the mock-heroics comes the thematic, metaphorical intensity of poems such as August 1914, and Rosenberg's 'crucible:' -- the burning synthesis of images. The ingenuity temporarily vanishes and the indignation tightens: the 'bowels' anticipate the female appetite of the Daughters of War as the 'torn fields' anticipate the jagged edges of war that refer back to August 1914:

Bonds to the whims of murder,
Sprawled in the bowels of the earth,
The torn fields of France.

Then comes the 'iron,' the inflexible element, the lack of compromise with no ear to the soldier's indignation. This is the stern and frenzied apocalyptical 'hurling' of 'shrieking iron and flame,' that points directly to Dead Man's Dump. As the proud indignation behind the soldier's highly-pitched moral interrogation passes into more ingenuity, the poem appears to relax, the ferrous elements softening to poppies.

At this point in the discussion, certain questions arise. Why has the poet used the 'break of day' for the fixed moment of his poem? This is the half-light, the twilight, the dusk of dawn, the only fleeting time that avails to catch the Idea, when the poet must necessarily be at his most vigilant. This has become clear from the earlier poems, where the ephemeral twilight became the one transient opportunity for crystallising

⁶⁰Frye, N., Fearful Symmetry. (Boston, 1947), P. 129.

the poet's vision. In Break of Day in the Trenches, the poet utilises the morning stand-to, when the soldier watches, tense and alert in the half-light, vigilant for the dawn attack, in the same way that the poet waits for one glimpse of his Idea. The onslaught and attack comes in the hour of half-light, the weird and puzzling light of dawn, with all its potential illusions. David Jones explains:

Shortly before daybreak all troops in the line stood in their appointed places, their rifles in their hands -- with bayonets fixed, ready for any dawn action on the part of the enemy. When it was fully day and the dangerous half-light past, the order would come to 'stand down and clean rifles.' The same routine was observed at dusk. So that hour occurring twice in the twenty-four, of 'stand-to,' was one of a peculiar significance, and there was attaching to it a degree of solemnity --⁶¹

In the light of this, the poet and the soldier suddenly elide into an idea of vigilance. But the concluding apparent relaxation from the mood of violent, tense and nervous expectation indicates the end of the stand-to, and the period of dynamic watchfulness questioning every horizon. The light brightens and the 'solemnity' decreases. The mock-complacency and talk of 'safety' with the oncoming day, however, become heavily ironic. Rosenberg's 'day' as the corpus of his early work has indicated, means menace, visible brightness, overwhelming violence, the antithesis of 'safety' and the period of rebellious and huge energies. It corresponds to that 'day' of Read's in The End of a War:

Why must my day

⁶¹Jones, 'General Notes' to In Parenthesis. P. 202

Kill my dreams? Days of hate.⁶²

And he hears a bell, a mad tolling of Revelation:

But yes a bell
beats really on this air, a mad bell.⁶²

The roots of the poppies themselves grow fast in the manure of human flesh that is strewn over the earth, but they drop as fast as the men who fertilise them. Ironically enough, as an earlier draft of the poem was to indicate, they are as 'rootless' as the soldiers:

What rootless poppies dropping --^{62A}

The dust, be it from the 'crumbling' darkness, the 'torn' earth or the soldier's own body, is particularly ominous for the soldier who sees only the particular. For Rosenberg the moment of dust had been the moment of truth and revelation:

-- all things seem,
And what they seem like man shall know
when man beneath the dust is laid --⁶³

That this poem partakes of, and is necessary to Rosenberg's cyclical plan is clear. The day lies ahead, with its promise of rebellion and the continuation of the design. The poem forms another episode. A separate, lyric statement it may appear in an anthology, but its organic attachment to the 'plan terrific' gives it a greater and far more impersonal meaning. It is not a poem written from within war, but from without, detached and objective. If the reader is searching for, or earnest to read a 'war' poem with a 'dawn' theme, that has the more conventional sentiments of the 'soldier' lyric:-

⁶²Read, Herbert, 'The End of a War,' Poems 1914-1934. (London, 1935), P. 68

⁶³'O'er the Celestial Pathways,' Poems. P. 178. ^{62A}Works. P. 386

the attitude of protest, the elements of realism designed to shock, or the ironic nostalgia, Sassoon's Break of Day⁶⁴ is strongly recommended as a relevant comparison to the vaster designs of Rosenberg.

For Rosenberg at least, Daughters of War was his 'best poem.'⁶⁵ It was done, he wrote, 'in the grand style,'⁶⁶ - 'most complete, most epic.'⁶⁷ It took him, he confesses 'a year to write,'⁶⁸ and it essentially indicates a change in his poetical emphasis towards mythopoeic form. In his letters he tells how he desperately wants to give the poem a universal significance. It involves 'All human relationship,'⁶⁸ and is directed to the unfragmented, the simply human. Now the female, for so long the intransigent force against rebellion, the bulwark of tyrannical control, appears to ally herself and her energy with rebellion. She becomes an agent of the Idea, a component of the design, and a means of effecting its fulfillment. As the poem emphasises, she is a formidable ally.

The myth of the voracious female appetite, and women of Amazonian stature, has its own personal idiosyncrasies and embellishments throughout Rosenberg's utterance. It is there in Returning, We Hear the Larks and Girl to Soldier on Leave, but it has a less sophisticated expression in some of the early poems. It is clear that Rosenberg looked at women in his

⁶⁴Sassoon, Siegfried, Collected Poems, 1908-1956. (London, 1961), P. 82

⁶⁵Works. P. 355

⁶⁶Works. P. 355

⁶⁷Works. P. 320

⁶⁸Works. P. 319

poetry with a certain suspicion:

What virginal woven mystery
Guarding some pleadful, spiritual sin,
So hard to traffic with or flee,
Lies in your chaste impurity?⁶⁹

They have the power to obscure a man's vision, destroy his objectivity; their fierce energy can free him to lose all control:

-- our lithe limbs
Frenzied exult till vision swims
In fierce, delicious agonies.⁶⁹

There is no doubt of their power to produce joy, and the promise of re-generation, but they are too tempting, too succulent, their power too inviting. The fate of the man confronted with the woman appears to be his inevitable and sensual capitulation to self-indulgence:

While molten sweetest pains enmesh
The life sucked by entwining flesh.⁶⁹

With such an aspect they tempt the male to their own security, away from rebellious action.

But Rosenberg's early poem The Female God points to the change and extension of the myth in Daughters of War. The woman becomes monumental, Amazonian, all powerful:

And your hair like massive forest trees
Shadows our pulses, overlined and dumb.⁷⁰

Their eyes show 'infinities,' their hair 'tumultuous locks.' Beside them the man is impotent, insignificant, 'a candle lost in an electric glare.'⁷⁰ In Rosenberg's painting of 1915, The First Meeting of Adam and Eve, the female is the larger fig-

⁶⁹'Sacred, Voluptuous Hollows Deep,' Poems. P. 136

⁷⁰'The Female God,' Poems. P. 130

ure, vast and monumental, and the male appears lame in his right foot. The woman's energy can be totally destructive. She 'usurps' and 'dethrones' God, she is a King-breaker, now a mighty rebel and the world is hers:

Yea! Every moment is delivered to you,
Our temple, our Eternal, our one God.⁷⁰

She has within her the ambiguities of regal majesty, divinity and bestiality as

Queen! Goddess! Animal!⁷⁰

and plainly these qualities are there in the Daughters of War. As epic phenomena, they are there in In Parenthesis, where Jones refers to an 'acorn sprite,'⁷¹ a female spirit that 'takes men to herself,'⁷² and the soldiers themselves cry to the Earth spirits, the 'maiden of the digged places,'⁷³ as well as the Queen of the woods.⁷⁴

Daughters of War⁷⁵ begins with the dance of the Amazons with the spirit of man. The Dance has previously indicated physical rapture, joy and celebration, and here joy goes with 'freedom' and release. The man's spirit is naked, as naked as the dance of bare bodies in Louse Hunting. When the body, the 'corpse' is discarded like the uniforms, as a useless sack, then the man removes the trappings of tyranny and subjection. So his soul will dance in joy with the agents of release, the Amazons. This is the time of perfect freedom, when 'soul knows soul to shine.'⁷⁶ The power and compulsion behind the

⁷¹In Parenthesis. P. 178

⁷²Ibid. P. 223

⁷³Ibid. P. 176

⁷⁴Ibid. P. 185

⁷⁵Poems. P. 85

⁷⁶'Creation,' Poems. P. 158

female is enough to will and bear the soldier from the 'iron' wars, to an element that transcends them, softer, rarefied and spiritually sensuous. There the Idea mollifies, loses the stern and uncompromising texture of its passage through war, and begins its movement towards the 'summer slope.' The movement of the 'corroding faces,' and their way through the iron has been a burning one, a purgation through the 'flame of terrene days' to reach the sublimated state that emerges as the poet's Jerusalem. The ferocious energy of the female compulsion moves violently through death and iron, to find the softer element for the soldiers, shortly to lose their military identities. Death, as in Dead Man's Dump, is the moment of breaking; - as the bones are crunched 'so the soul can leap out.'⁷⁵ Likewise, to the sensations of safety, security and lethargy, and the inclination to

-- take our wage of sleep and bread and warmth,
comes the fierce revitalisation of the Amazons' 'everliving' power that breaks this complacency, causing new dynamism, driving the indulgent behind 'darkness' into 'the flame of day.' This is a love-heat generated with a force to subdue archangels, and it has joined itself to the providence of the 'plan terrific.'

Their strength becomes a support in a time of apparent chaos. The providence behind the poet's Idea makes the women the rescuers, who plucked the soldiers to their own breasts when 'the earth-men's earth fell away.'⁷⁵ Here again, the poet reminds, almost pauses, to emphasise the impossible substance and inexpressible nature of his Idea. The thoughts of

the one daughter are 'essenced to language,' accommodated in words. by her, but conceived and grasped, she declares, as an Idea far more elusive and inexpressible in its unsullied reality. The woman speaks of males leaving a 'doomed earth,' of an exodus, a release. Rosenberg, in a letter to Marsh endorsed that the women take to them the 'released spirits of the slain earth-men.'⁷⁷ Their previous 'lips of ash,' their human dust and cover for the soul, is associated with the 'dust of old days,' or times in the past that cease to have importance as they anticipate the fulfillment of the pristine vision, - regeneration 'in other days and years.' The 'voices sad,' pointing towards the soldier's last weak scream in Dead Man's Dump,⁷⁸ have been metamorphosed into the joyous dance of the souls. In this way, the daughters themselves, despite the unlikely juxtaposition, are agents of the poet's providential plan, following the rat, the louse and the bird.

The cyclical design of this poem is very apparent. Like Owen's Strange Meeting, Faulkner's Crevasse, or The Waste Land, the soul is taken beneath the earth, is relieved of crushing tyrannies, purged of its corporeal excrescences and left free, regenerated with a pristine, 'shining' soul. In such a way the poem is epic, it involves one complete movement within its form, a movement carried through economically, and uncompromisingly within the thematic design of the poet's controlling Idea.

⁷⁷ Works. P. 319

⁷⁸ Poems. P. 84

One day an engineer had remarked to Rivière, as they were bending over a wounded man, beside a bridge that was being erected:

'Is the bridge worth a man's crushed face?'

-- And yet, Rivière remarked on a subsequent occasion, 'even though human life may be the most precious thing on Earth, we always behave as if there were something of higher value than human life.-- - But what thing?'

Antoine de Saint-Exupery
(Trans. Stuart Gilbert)

In Dead Man's Dump, the 'prophetic gleams'⁷⁹ of Rosenberg appear to fix themselves on an actual incident related in a letter to Edward Marsh:

I've written some lines suggested by going out wiring, or rather carrying wire up the line on limbers and running over dead bodies lying about.⁸⁰

This conception is related without pressure, a bland narration of shocking facts that themselves provide a documentary species of truth that would possibly work at odds with Rosenberg's own ideas of poetic truth. Owen's concern with the truth of war, - the truth he saw expressed in the photographs he carried around with him on his leave, the shocking acts of war, the horror and death, necessarily involved himself, and his poetry in a certain attitude of protest. This was clearly an anti-war posture. Dulce et Decorum Est,⁸¹ written for a Miss. Jesse Pope of the Daily Mail, whose frequent chauvanistic contributions demonstrated no knowledge of the actual facts about the war in France, was Owen essentially being

⁷⁹'Daughters of War,' Poems. P. 85

⁸⁰Works. P. 316

⁸¹Owen, Wilfred, 'Dulce et Decorum Est --,' Poems. (Ed. Edmund Blunden), London, 1963 P. 66

'truthful'⁸² and coping with the illusions. A part of his own 'warning' involved telling the facts, and investing the terrible truth about the war with his own imagination, itself often petrified in the attitude of protest.

In his Trench Poems Rosenberg rarely formulates a stance that is not poetic. Moral reservations about trench experience are not the guiding design of his poetry. Dead Man's Dump however is an exception. There is a certain proliferation of horrors that have one dimension within the sphere of protest, although the poem goes much further than the embellishment of an attitude. 'A poet must put it on a bit thick'⁸³ he once wrote, and at the back of his mind was a scorn that he planned to manifest after the war:

If I get through this affair without any broken bones etc., I have a lot to say and one or two shilling shockers that'll make some people jump.⁸³

But poetry, plainly was not the province of 'shilling shockers,' at least, not his poetry. For Rosenberg it was too pure and idealistic a form for utilitarian purposes. War was another item of experience, an excellent 'crucible' for the apprehension and formation of ideas, and not the opportunity of converting art to propaganda. Even in his letters, he spares the recipients those 'blood curdling touches' that he might have indulged himself in, had he wanted to tell the documented truth rather than write poetry.

The most astonishing feature of Dead Man's Dump is the

⁸²Ibid. Preface, P. 41

⁸³Works. P. 350

wild and remorseless energy that moves through the poem. Rosenberg wrote that a poem aims for 'infinity,' brought about 'through movement, the rapid succession of images and thoughts, as in nature itself,'⁸⁴ and more than any other of the Trench Poems, Dead Man's Dump evinces this. Art itself, was strongest when it was composed of strong and firm lines:

The lines must cut into my consciousness, the waves of life must be disturbed, sharp and unhesitating --.⁸⁵

This assertion of 1914 strongly anticipates Dead Man's Dump and the mounting energy of the first stanza. The lines are clear and sharp, the broken rails like thorns, the upright stakes over which the limbers somehow flounder; here are the broken teeth (August 1914)⁸⁶ and the sharp edges of war. Rosenberg's own comments on Futurism appear to point towards an apprehension that is similarly riotous, yet riot expressed poetically, ideally and not with the compromising dimension of propaganda or protest:

Violence and perpetual struggle, - this is life. Dynamic force, the constantaneous rush of electricity, the swift fierce power of steam, the endless contortions and deadly logic of machinery; and this can only be expressed by lines that are violent and struggle, that are mechanical and purely abstract. Theirs is the ideal of strength and scorn.⁸⁷

As in the Trench Poems, the 'iron' stage of the poet's 'plan terrific' is strong, and scornful of the particular discomfort. So for Dead Man's Dump to succeed wholly, as a part of the poet's controlling Idea, it would be constrained,

⁸⁴Works. P. 245

⁸⁵Ibid. P. 251

⁸⁶'August 1914,' Poems. p. 70

⁸⁷Works. P. 249

without reservation, to follow the violent impersonality suggested in this passage. Anything less would be a concession to the particular instance, any subjective compassion a compromising, an attempt to bend the inflexible design.

However, the 'brothers dear' introduces a note of compassion into the poem that remains deeply and permanently embedded within the monstrous energy of expression. Juxtaposed with the imagery of a war of iron, - the rusty stakes like bayonets and the jagged-rails with the hard, heavy, formidable and uncompromising element of the metal of war, the pity appears powerless, only a gesture. Of course, 'pity' in Owen's sense, is too limited a word to use. Rosenberg's 'brothers dear,' like Ford's 'poor dears,'⁸⁸ goes beyond an expression of mere pity to become the component of a new republic, an idea of Jerusalem. As such, they do not pity each other, they should be joyful as in Louse Hunting. They are going onward, following the promise of the 'plan terrific.' In the light of this, apocalyptical elements in the poem take on a less obscure aspect, although in terms of the incident itself, the results of the apparent chaos leave nothing more than a protracted sensation of total suffering and destruction.

The second stanza follows a similar pattern to the first, - the floundering energy, incessant cacophony and the crunch of broken limbs. The ferocious movement of the wheels has similar symbolic overtones to its use in Dos Passos' Three Soldiers. Dos Passos' war too, is an iron war, thematically indicated

⁸⁸Ford, F. M. 'Antwerp,' Collected Poems. (New York, 1930), P. 22

in the chapter headings. The soldiers are pressed into the 'mould' of military insensitivity. When the metal 'cools' and turns the product of the mould amok amongst the world of men, sensitivity and rebellious individuality, as embodied in the protagonist, are crushed, 'under the wheels.'⁸⁹ For Rosenberg, the universe of war, iron and stern, had already shaken the 'rims'⁹⁰ of its sprawling wheels in the face of the dying soldier. Now, in Dead Man's Dump, the bodies feel no pain although their very constitution of humanity and flesh is emphasised as

Man born of man and born of woman.⁹¹

It is singularly ironic that the shells are crying, demonstrating a dubious species of sensitivity, while what had been human remains blank, inexpressive. There are certain proximities here to Owen's preoccupation with insensibility⁹² to conditions that demand human indignation. To Rosenberg it is the dead who accept. The scarcely-living can utter their 'weak scream' right up to the moment of death, and this is not a mere gesture, but a full indication of an exhausted, depleted and waning life.

The third verse introduces the inevitable growth and decay, with the continuation of the cycle by the earth's craving to assimilate the dead. An earlier draft completed the stanza by four extra lines:

Now let the seasons know

⁸⁹Dos Passos, J. Three Soldiers. (New York, 1921), P. 5

⁹⁰'The Dying Soldier,' Poems. P. 75

⁹¹'Dead Man's Dump,' Poems. P. 81

⁹²'Insensibility,' Poems. P. 64

There are some less to feed of them
 That winter need not hoard her snow,
 Nor Autumn her fruits and grain;⁹³

which suggest a completion of the cycle in seasonal terms, fruit and harvest. But the inference here is plainly ironic. The dead appear, at this stage, to be deprived completely of the promise of the poet's Idea, the latter half of the cycle. The idea of a 'suspended' strength indicates the position in life when the promised cyclical development is incomplete, when there is no immediate vision of regeneration. In other poems, the poet can see an end to the suspension, and a vision of the escape from his limbo in

the pools of Hebron again -
 For Lebanon's summer slope.⁹⁴

The separation of the body and soul into the sack and essence is an image that Rosenberg was to re-work in his Moses.⁹⁵ The sack, like a hempen, sack-cloth sandbag exposes the body as a dull, lifeless bag. The souls themselves had gone downwards to the earth, away from the light and the torture of God. The Earth, like the Amazons of Daughters of War, waits with an eager anticipation, greedy for the souls of young warriors. The emphatic demand:

Who hurled them out? Who hurled?

goes beyond a mere rhetorical attitude, to the questioning of the principles behind the workings of such a providence. Here more than anywhere else in Rosenberg's poetry the 'plan terrific' is challenged. Here is the evidence of the poet's tempta-

⁹³Works. Editor's Note. P. 386

⁹⁴'Through these Pale, Cold Days,' Poems. P. 91

⁹⁵Poems. P. 47

tion to compromise his own controlling Idea, when the compulsion towards morality and compassion is almost too strong. The universal, far reaching providence of the Idea loses perspective against the force of the immediate and particular horror. The impersonal artist seems almost overcome by his moral identity as a man, as a soldier, and this rage and humanistic indignation colours the next stanza, with its ingrained pity so deeply synthesised within the poetry. The abortive existence of the soldier here stands no chance in the face of this iron truth, showing no promise of mollification. The nostrils and mouth, the life-giving organs, are 'doomed' by the intractable providence with the aspect of iron. Rosenberg took a copy of Donne's poetry with him to war, and the stanza's final conceit is a metaphysically-wrought synthesis of thematic images that re-occur through Rosenberg's utterance. The images are united through the bee, which like the rat, goes from party to party, and alights on the soldiers, sucking the sweetness from young lives.

The idea of burning, - the pyre of human sacrifice with the consequent shriek and babel, is carried through to the sixth verse, and the inexpressiveness of the watchers of the ritual, their 'usual thoughts untouched,' again points to Owen's awarenesses of insensitivity. The mock heroics and 'seeming' immortality reworks certain images of self-deception and the real stature of the soldier in The Immortals and Louse Hunting. Art had been 'blood and tears'⁹⁶ for Rosenberg long before

the outbreak of war, and Dead Man's Dump continues the poet's preoccupation with images of blood, the 'crimson curse.'⁹⁷ The 'ichor' in the 'giant's' veins is ironically deflated by mortal fear, which becomes the cause of self-realisation and knowledge of the truth of war in the factual, documentary sense that war is horror, slaughter, - one of the truths that The Red Badge of Courage or Le Feu will tell us. That it is merely a stage in a vast design, that it has no real truth separated from that design, and that its particular horror is subordinated to the providence of such a design, Rosenberg will tell us.

The seventh verse suggests that the higher, noble, and more ethereal elements, like air and fire, have as much intransigence and more power than those lower elements like iron, which form the visible contours of the battlefield. When all elements combine to surge against the soldier, any sense of time disappears, and the end becomes the ever-present. In death they are out of time, within life time only means death. But there is the conventional pity of war, the 'dream' of home and the poet's compassion for his soldiers. The 'dear things,' recalling the 'dear faces' of Home Thoughts from France,⁹⁸ is a gesture of pity that appears to partake of 'adhesiveness' in its Whitmanesque quality. To Rosenberg, Drum Taps was the finest war poetry, and Whitman's utterance itself, he declared, was 'a roadway right through humanity.'⁹⁹ Again the gesture

⁹⁷'On Receiving News of the War,' Poems. P. 124

⁹⁸Poems. P. 74

⁹⁹'Fragment on Emerson', Works. P. 255

itself, the commitment of love, pushes far into Rosenberg's ungraspable sense of regeneration through love, the love of the providence behind the Idea, and those soldiers refined and distilled as the components of that Idea. The poet himself emphatically named 'love' as 'his theme,'¹⁰⁰ the cause and constitution of his whole plan, guiding the soldiers to the summer slope.

The eighth stanza strikes a crisis like that of the ode in language and gesture, dovetailed into a poetic ritual, staged by a particular chaos, wrought by an apocalyptical energy and all suggested by 'vehement spontaneity and direct vision.'¹⁰¹ The recurrent images show themselves: the 'bowels' of the earth,¹⁰² and an 'iron' love, - savage and momentarily to the soldier, insensitive, from a God/idea that so loves his people that he will instigate a 'terrific' revelation as a necessary harbinger to their freedom. In the sphere of providence of this ominous darkness, the Earth is suspended, swinging in smoke and disorder. Here again, as in In War, the air itself is 'untuned.'¹⁰³ The kiss, ferocious and violent, is a part of the ritual, confirming to its potential components the plan's covenant and promise of cyclical completion.

'Blood curdling touches'¹⁰⁴ dominate the ninth stanza, as the verse moves away from apocalyptical truths of some mystical revelation of almighty force, to the documentary horror

¹⁰⁰Works. P. 265

¹⁰¹Works. P. 249

¹⁰²Compare: Break of Day in the Trenches and Daughters of War

¹⁰³'In War,' Poems. P. 76

¹⁰⁴Works. P. 350

of a specific incident. The imagery has moved from fire and air to earth, and now settles on water, as a man's soul 'drowns' in conditions that deny even human love. The thematic parallel with the cyclical Lycidas may not be coincidental here; Rosenberg had read, and approved of the poem.¹⁰⁵ The dead man is left, taut and stretched, unifying his death with the shrieks, and high pitch of the poem, all pointing towards the discord of broken men. He lies at the 'cross roads.' He is in the way, in the centre, and must form the basis for commitment. His body, lying there, forces action, necessitates conviction, and prompts the choice between humanity and artistic impersonality, here covered with the aspect of insensitivity. The 'plan terrific' is at its crisis. At this point of the poem, the result is in suspense, delicately balanced between the man's convictions of a particular love that ignores the greater design, and the force of the plan itself, the poet's vision, with its 'theme' of universal, impartial love.

It is the etherial elements which metamorphose the face, burn it black: - a fire which could cleanse only scorches and leaves a humanity faceless, anticipating the further damage done less subtly by the iron wheels and the baser elements. Even the grass is more healthy, has more life. This organic vision of soldier and grass, archetypcal enough, had its precedent with Whitman and Crane,¹⁰⁶ but recurs more than once

¹⁰⁵Works. P. 317

¹⁰⁶-- And there was a massacre of the young blades of grass. They were being torn, burned obliterated --

W. Follett (Ed.) The Work of Stephen Crane (v. 2), (New York, 1962), P. 97

in the Trench Poems.¹⁰⁷ There is a cessation of noise. The silence seems almost as terrible with the calm after the crisis. Again the poem seems to be following the ode form, with the contemplation that follows the rapture of the song and the promise of joy. Ford Madox Ford wrote of the 'terror'¹⁰⁸ of the silence in the trenches, that followed the great roar of the guns. Similarly the surge and shock of the previous stanzas exacerbate the sensation of poetical silence that follows. Yet these are menacing quietnesses, silences that have 'sunk' almost to a vorticist silence that is again closely associated with water.¹⁰⁹ This water that follows the fire would suggest an act of ablution, but at this moment in the poem, the cycle promises nothing further.

The wheels are a relative tyranny, as well as a means of rescue, like the Daughters of War, for the slowly expiring soldier. Again his hands are stretched, taut and chaotic, yet also in the gesture of benediction, on the cross-roads, forming a shape that can only be highly religious. His soul reaches towards its centre, gropes towards the wheels which indicate human, organic sounds. But the wheels appear as the agents of an immoral, monumental insensitivity, the tyrannical ele-

¹⁰⁷ Compare The Burning of The Temple, where Solomon sees his dreams, like soldiers

Are charred as the burnt grass...

Poems. P. 89

¹⁰⁸ Ford, F. M. A Man Could Stand Up. (Toronto, 1965), P. 146

¹⁰⁹ Wyndham Lewis' own impressions of Vorticism:

-- a whirlpool. At the heart of the whirlpool is a great silent place where all the energy is concentrated. And there, at the point of concentration, is the vorticist.

Quoted in Violet Hunt, I Have This To Say. (New York, 1926), P. 211

ments of a torturing God who wants no communication with blood, pity or life, only their destruction. The absolute horror of the moment, the event, sees no further than itself. That all this pain is the stage of a providential design loses all possibility in the face of such a moment. The tortuous questions asked by the soldier are the highest intensification of rootlessness in Rosenberg's utterance. The soldier lies in complete suspense, waiting to be plucked away, this time not by the frenzied females, but by the iron wheels, the sternest possible agent of a Providence that remains invisible yet still inflexible. As the pace of the poem quickens, going faster until the last line, the wheels have no control save their own massive energy, like the voracious appetite of the daughters, expressing a complete and untainted freedom, with no restriction. In the crisis of the event this energy appears completely destructive, the antithesis to a creative providence, as the word 'break,' like the waves, is repeated in three consecutive lines, until the final 'tide' of destruction has deluged the life. The 'half-used life' cries out as it breaks with the rest, in one last gesture of protest and rebellious sensitivity in a cracking, foundering universe that has lost control of the energies of disintegration under the wheels and the tide. The soldier is broken and drowned simultaneously, and there is no sense of regeneration. The event itself does not promise, it ends. The wheels 'break,' the tide breaks, and he himself breaks. The world of the poem is as 'strangely decayed' as himself, with the violent fragmentation of an uncontrollable energy.

The final stanza presents no sense of redemption or a completion of the cycle. The 'summer slope' is forgotten in the pitiless ferocity of the moment. There is an eagerness for a complete death and release from the iron God, from the plan itself, rather than a sense of confidence, promise, or even faith in the poet's providential, controlling Idea which will move on to its Jerusalem and full fruition. For the soldier, the 'they' of the poem are ominous forces. To him they are not the cohorts of the beneficent design. There is a sense of a revelation, an apocalypse, but instead of the four horsemen, there are the hoofs of the mules. There is, however, a more terrible extension, the extension of the machine, the futurist and twentieth-century application of the myth - the wheels of the rushing, crushing omnipresence of the indomitable iron will and energy of God.

Towards this, the upturned face, already charred, stares.¹¹⁰ The burnt face recalls the inarticulate soldiers of The Troop Ship, insensitively trampling on each others' faces.¹¹¹ The sense of rapid movement and cacophonous noise is exacerbated even more as the limber, with no foresight, no control, 'crashes' round the bend. Against this riotous, thunderous crash is the weak, expiring sound of the dying soldier, to him the world with the moment has

¹¹⁰ Note Stephen Crane's last story The Upturned Face, in which the sensitivity of some soldiers digging graves, reacting to burying a dead soldier, petrified in the attitude of staring, forbids them to cover his face.

Stallman, R.W. (Ed.) The Red Badge of Courage and Other Stories. (New York, 1952), P. 135

¹¹¹ Poems. P. 70

Gone as the mouth's last sighs --¹¹²

The final problem is the graze. Why just a graze and not the complete destruction? Why just the mark, the sign and not the crush like the 'broken tooth'¹¹³ or the 'broken men'?¹¹⁴ Why not the entire facelessness of the man and the uncompromising, impersonal loss of identity of the action, swallowed up, purged by the guiding designs of the 'plan terrific'? Here is a humanity dead, but not faceless. The concession is made to human pity and the man stands as a symbol, a sacrifice to the horror of war, just as his last sound is a 'scream' of protest. On the face of Rosenberg's soldier, the graze, the flesh broken with jagged edges¹¹⁵ fits the sense of dislocation behind the entire symbolical conception of the poem.

Dead Man's Dump has constituted a contest, far greater than mere tension, between moral honour in the most appalling human conditions, and artistic integrity, impersonality, and the poet's controlling truth that the war was in fact a providential part of a vast design. The distance and physical, continental detachment, of On Receiving News of the War, written in South Africa, could afford to be more impersonal than utterance from the 'torn fields'¹¹⁶ of actual conflict, and a poem based on such a visionary, phantasmogoric experience as that which inspired Dead Man's Dump. For the precombat

¹¹²'The Burning of the Temple,' Poems. P. 89

¹¹³'August, 1914,' Poems. P. 70

¹¹⁴'From France,' Poems. P. 72

¹¹⁵The pierced, broken skin, and the attitude of sacrifice may well be Christ-like, with the concomitants of resurrection and miraculous regeneration, but such a reading, I think would indicate a dubious cyclical manipulation of a poem, that essentially stops as the event stops, finishes with the death.

¹¹⁶'Break of Day in the Trenches,' Poems. P. 73

Rosenberg, accommodating the direction of the 'plan terrific' in On Receiving News of the War,¹¹⁷ the pain and horror of the 'crimson curse'¹¹⁷ was a stage to be passed over poetically to reach the 'pristine bloom'¹¹⁷ to follow. Such an end gave less concentration, less magnitude to the journey through blood and death and the passage through war. But no hope, no shine of regeneration radiates from Dead Man's Dump. It is just war, only war. For the soldier it is incessant, universal war, a world of contorted dead piled high. For him there is no promise, only death. In such events the poetic identity, the impersonality is almost impossible to completely assume, and Dead Man's Dump becomes a monstrous test-piece for objective expression. Rosenberg almost succeeds, but the temptation towards the safety, security and normality of human compassion is, at the very crisis, too much, and the poem adds more disguise to an idea that is already desperately elusive.

¹¹⁷ Poems. P. 124

4

THE GRASP OF MYTH

Rosenberg I only repeat what you were saying -
the shell and the hawk every hour are slaying
men and jerboas, slaying the mind.

Keith Douglas. (Egypt, 1943).

The vastness of the 'plan terrific' reached a long way back, as well as the long way forward to the summer slope. As such, carrying on a deliberate continuity with the past, and expressing a cyclical vision common to much of the most esteemed universal utterance, its accommodation in terms of mythology and archetypal controlling metaphors, was ultimately necessary and inevitable. A 'war' poet is more likely than Rosenberg, for example, to be one who thinks only on the moment, the horror, and his necessary attitude to it as a fighting man who retains the essentials of sensitivity in a time of gross insensitivity. A sense of discontinuity with the past, as well as disinterest in the future and possible amelioration is likely to arise, as the moment, the event, and the sentiments emanating from it - compassion, horror, indignation, exhilaration, - become all. This may well account for the lyrical fastness amongst the utterance of 'war' poets, as past, future and vaster designs are lost in the separated sensations of the lyricist, intensified and petrified in the moment of war, and exaggerated, made to lose all thematic proportion by the emphasis on a passage of horror. This was the poet's dilemma in Dead Man's Dump, and almost as an

answer, he had turned to the myth in Daughters of War, to deliberate formal continuity with the past, and an acceptance of a more widely and intuitively understood framework of symbols and forms.

With his contribution to Georgian Poetry 1916-17, (Moelue's Song from his Moses,) Rosenberg became a Georgian. Without peddling any categorical or formal considerations about the Georgians, it suffices to say that they constituted a social group under one title rather than a category, of various, diverse and highly individual talents, who followed a mutual commission to produce some of what Monro declared was 'the real poetry of modern England'¹ in the face of the public monopoly of the Newbolt/Noyes, post-victorian axis. Rosenberg was another of the distinctive talents, with Marsh, the shepherd of the Georgians, as his patron, and Abercrombie and Bottomley, two of the senior members, as his mentors. Of course, 'distinctive', when applied to Rosenberg amongst the Georgians, is a leading word. In such a group, themselves with such a further strata of acquaintance, the name of Rosenberg seems a weird and discordant sort of protuberance:

Marsh took Jim Barnes to dine with Mr. Asquith in Downing st., and after dinner they had the Prime Minister and J.M. Barrie to themselves when the ladies retired from the table. Later on in the month there was a breakfast visit by Robert Bridges

¹Quoted in The New Poetic, P. 59.

at Gray's Inn, charades with Rudyard Kipling at Lady Desborough's party at Taplow, a Yiddish play at Whitechapel in company with Gertler and Rosenberg, and a mission to Portsmouth with Mr. Churchill. On the tenth Hugh Walpole entertained him (Marsh) to tea with Henry James, Max Beerbohm, and H.G. Wells --²

Arthur Waugh's comment on the Georgians, that it was enough for them to accept 'individual whims and wayward fancies in the place of firm philosophical ideals',³ is a dangerous formal generalisation. At least Bottomley and Abercrombie, winding into the verse drama, setting a standard for Moses and The Unicorn, spoke in far higher forms than 'individual whims'. But such a judgement is at least indicative of certain massed promptings towards lyricism in Georgian Poetry, and the contentment with the articulation of sentiments within a brief, separate form. The 'firm ideal' that Rosenberg evolved was plainly unsympathetic to the mere lyrical response, but Monro considered it to be 'a lowering of standards' to include his poetry, despite Rosenberg's 'power on the surface'.⁴ Even Bottomley judged the poetry of his epistolary pupil as an inconsistent 'gasp of beauty',⁵ and then a sink to exhaustion. He was firm that it lacked both architectonics and intelligibility.

² Hassall, C. A Biography of Edward Marsh, (New York, 1959) P.252-3.

³ Quoted in The New Poetic, P. 81.

⁴ Hassall, P. 420.

⁵ Ibid., P. 402.

But these actually were critical comments on Rosenberg's Moses, and plainly, they arise from thought that has failed to give credit to the evolution of the poet's design, and refused to align itself to the growth of his Idea, being content with what appears as a lyrical fragment, Koelue's Song, outside of the vaster design of the verse drama. To Bottomley, all the rest of Moses was a 'farrago!'⁵ Rosenberg himself, in a letter to R.C. Trevellyan, tells of his purposes, and they are vitally and organically connected to his 'plan terrific':

Moses symbolises the fierce desire for virility,
and original action in contrast to slavery of the
most abject kind.⁶

And the play is about rebellion, Rosenberg's most concentrated and intense comment on freedom. Moses himself is a rebel in every way. The Biblical stereotype of obedience to God is wrought by Rosenberg to the violent egoist/hero;

Ah! I will ride the dizzy beast of the world
My road - my way.⁷

He approaches the pattern of the soldier/braggart:

Hah! I'm all a bristle. Lord! his eyes would go
wide
If he knew the road my rampant dreams would race.⁸

⁶Works, P. 350.

⁷Poems, P. 53.

⁸Poems, P. 49.

The Biblical figure whose own brother became his priestly appendage, now has the aspect of the prophet and visionary, to discard 'his' own dull outer eyes' for 'the living eyes underneath'.⁹ He has visions of springing leopards, a tornado, tearing up the roots of slavery,¹⁰ becoming in himself the 'hammer', the lone rebellious 'genius' in a world of commonplace minds, to break the vulgar structure;

And your admirable pyramids
And your interminable procession
Of crowded Kings --¹¹

Like the Female God, he grows toward the stature of a king - breaker. He becomes Herculean hero/rebel/prophet, breaking the 'meshes'¹² of tyranny. His magnanimity is questionable as he veers towards caricature in his excesses. Rosenberg had plans to use the Judas Maccabeus myth to find a 'more magnanimous'¹⁵ hero, and certainly Moses rebellious momomania occasionally finds the protagonist appearing rather ridiculous:

I am rough now, and new, and will have no tailor --¹³

But single - minded rebellion, with its sudden violent 'power'¹⁴ to 'break', like the wheels of Dead Man's Dump, through the comfortable illusions of safety, was vitally necessary for Rosenberg. The sleep was overlong and too indulgent, too

⁹Poems, P.49.

¹¹Ibid., P. 48.

¹³Ibid., P. 48.

¹⁵Works, P. 374.

¹⁰Ibid., P. 48.

¹²Ibid., P. 55.

¹⁴Ibid., P. 50.

comfortable, the 'torpor'¹⁶ of the souls in Egypt coerced and tyrannical. All this is very similar to the Blakian attitude to the Newtonian universe: order had come as a dubious harmony, curtailing freedom and virility, dislodging, taming spontaneity, and creating the man-trained mind and the pettinesses of authority. The 'mould' of On Receiving News of the War, is now a 'groove':

Who has made of the forest a park?
Who has changed the wolf to a dog?
And put the horse in harness?
And man's mind in a groove?¹⁷

But Moses was written at war, under the firm stranglehold of military authority, and the mythopoeic expression of rebellion represents a direction that follows a more strongly impersonal and detached commitment to the next stage of the 'plan terrific'. The period of slavery in Egypt itself is the passage of war, the crisis of tyranny. The slaves, like the soldiers, have 'skin sacks for souls',¹⁸ they are humoured by rats;¹⁸ they are subjected to the experience of more 'broken teeth',¹⁸ and like the discordant stakes of Dead Man's Dump, 'their bones stick out to find the air'. The iron instruments of oppression, previously the guns and rails of war to harass the soldiers, are now the iron pincers used by the taskmasters to break the teeth of their slaves, and the 'iron hurtling crane, oiled with

¹⁶Poems, P. 52.

¹⁸Poems, P. 47.

¹⁷Poems, P. 51.

¹⁹Poems, P. 48.

our blood'¹⁹ destroys their own selves as it builds up the pyramid, the embodiment of their subjection. Again, as in Break of Day in the Trenches, the blood mixes with dust; the old Hebrew, like the soldier has

All his dried-up blood crumbled to dust--²⁰

As in Dead Man's Dump they suffer the ultimate agonies:

All agonies created from the first day
Have wandered hungry, searching the world for us,²¹

and like Rosenberg's floundering soldiers, his subjected Jews are 'life's inarticulate mass'.²² The Old Hebrew, immune, work hardened to suffering, is insensible, like Owen's soldiers, choosing slavery and turning away from rebellion:

By choice they made themselves immune
To pity and whatever moans in man--²³

The Jews only see the particular evil, the hostile God.

The 'plan terrific' is closed to their eyes, as it was to the soldiers', through the agonies of the present:

God's unthinkable imagination
Invents new tortures for nature --²⁴

The woman figure again is the lure towards safety, security, the prophylactic to rebellion. The 'soft hair'²² falling through Moses' fingers is the same temptation that faced the soldier in Girl to Soldier on Leave and Returning, We hear the Larks.

¹⁹Poems, P. 54.

²⁰Ibid., P. 58.

²¹Ibid., P. 54.

²²Ibid., P. 53

²³'Insensibility', Owen, P. 65.

²⁴Poems, P. 57.

What Rosenberg has done is to find another metaphor for subjection and rebellion. The war was one, and now the application of the Moses myth is another, a 'parallel'.²⁵ It partakes of the thematic expression that has gone right through Rosenberg's articulation of the 'plan terrific' and received inevitable exacerbation and intensification, weaving its symbolical expression through the experience of war. The blood, the 'crimson curse' is spilt, not by the German guns, but the Egyptian pincers. Here the compassion of a man in the trenches is objectified into the indignation of a Jewish slave:

For shame! Our brothers' twisted blood-smeared
gums--²⁶

Again these 'brothers', (compare 'brothers dear'²⁷ in Dead Man's Dump) are the potential components of the Idea of the new land, the city after the rebellion, the new Jerusalem that the action of Moses will eventually establish. In their false and adopted land of slavery, there is, like the 'torn fields'²⁸ of trenchified France, only desolation, a landscape of sterility, a 'dead universe',²⁷ a 'white waste world'.²⁸ It is the debris world of The Waste Land waiting for the waters of re-generation, with

Only the mixing mist and sky
And the flat earth,²⁹

²⁵Works, P. 373.

²⁷Poems, P. 81

²⁹Poems, P. 50.

²⁶Poems, P. 53.

²⁸Poems, P. 73

and it is also the terrain of the Western Front, waiting for the sign of the iron providence, or the daughters themselves.. Now the providence materialises in the man, the virile superman hero, Moses himself; 'I'm man',³⁰ he declares, and he has the 'iron sinews'³¹ of providence. His thoughts, standing like 'mountains',³² are fixed on that same summer slope and dreams of Zion, 'limned turrets' and 'chinks of light',³³ The hero, already rebel, genius, prophet and giant, now becomes the artist, not only the monumental workman delving his quarry,³⁴ but also the 'shaper',³⁴ his rod 'scratching new schemes in the sand'.³⁵ He is engineer, architect, bringing fertility to the wasteland, transparently the Cellini figure, man of every action and thought. It is his own art, the energy of his construction, a rebellious freedom that defies all gyves and fetters, that will shape the 'newer nature',

So grandly fashion these rude elements
Into some newer nature--.³⁶

With this release for the components of the idea, the new generation is established, where 'soul knows soul to shine'.³⁷ The world of time and the body disappears, and the soul's new nature sings in joy, in rapture:

³⁰Poems, P. 59.

³²Poems, P. 50

³⁴Poems, P. 61.

³⁶Poems, P. 62.

³¹Poems, P. 58.

³³Poems, P. 55.

³⁵Poems, P. 55.

³⁷'Creation', Poems, P. 159.

Soul sack fall away
 And show me what you hold.
 Sing! Let me hear you sing.³⁸

The man who dismissed Rosenberg as a mere windy rhetorician, was in ten years time to articulate something very similar: not in Jerusalem, but in Byzantium, as the worn being forgot its corporeal constitution and revelled in its soul:

An aged man is but a paltry thing,
 A tattered coat upon a stick, unless
 Soul clap its hands and sing, and louder sing--³⁹

Before his last gesture, the final dispatch of the taskmaster, in itself only a 'small misdemeanour, a touch of rebelliousness', a symbol of what is to come, Moses, the prophet now,, sees the providence behind 'the plan terrific'. He sees how the 'barbaric love' of the particular instance, the period of horror, the stage of slavery, will soften, and 'sweeten to tenderness'⁴⁰ on the summer slope. This may be a reassurance that the ferocity of the love amply demands, particularly when it manifests itself in the extremities of Deam Man's Dump, when tenderness, or any idea outside of time, is destroyed by the ultimate agony of the moment in time. There, in the apocalypse there is only one real world for the soldier and poet, and that is France, the pile of bodies and the shattered track. For Moses there is the promise of 'tenderness', a real promise of a real existence.

Previously he had declared:

³⁸Poems, P. 50.

³⁹Yeats, W.B. 'Sailing to Byzantium', Collected Poems (London, 1965) P. 217.

⁴⁰Poems, P. 61

Only putrefaction is free
And I, Freedom, am not.⁴¹

Nothing in Rosenberg's poetry more succinctly manifests his dilemma. The artist must follow and trap his idea, his ultimate Freedom, the real Freedom at the expense of putrefaction, moral corruption and a lesser, relative freedom on Earth.

Rosenberg's utterance can never be that of a moralist if he chooses real Freedom, and he can never be a true artist if he is content with merely being free, in its relative, lethargic, human dimension. Such a relative freedom is authoritarian, makes rules and wars and gives orders, creates armies and makes slaves to build pyramids, listens to woman, and sleeps the comfortable sleep of indulgence at night. As such, it is the freedom of arbitrary standards of control, and now the Freedom of the artist moves above it, like Moses, in order to destroy it.

Rosenberg's Unicorn fragments, as the poet confessed, were 'just a basis'.⁴² They are dissatisfying drafts, struggles of a poet to crystallize something inchoate and incomplete in his mind. Even The Amulet, which through fear of loss he sent home for typing, was only the 'merest sketch, and the best' was 'yet to come',⁴³ Unfortunately, it never came, and Rosenberg's earnestness to change The Amulet to 'something most clear,

⁴¹Poems, P. 51-2.

⁴³Ibid., P. 317.

⁴²Works, P. 378.

⁴⁴Ibid., P. 319.

most extraordinary',⁴⁴ only materialised in the unfinished shape of The Unicorn. The various correspondence that covers Rosenberg's desperation to clearly express what was to be his last, culminating word on the war, once more demonstrates an artist groping for the evasive idea, struggling for articulation and, in impossible physical conditions, standing - to for inspiration. In a letter to Marsh he wrote:

I am stuck in the most difficult part; I have to feel a set of unusual emotions which I simply can't feel yet -- In my next letter⁴⁴ I will try and send an idea of the unicorn--⁴⁴

When the pressure seems too overwhelmingly formidable, the artist's tormenting need for patience, waiting on the Idea, takes him towards the self - induced prophetic ecstasy and excitation of the old testament nābî:

I have a way, when I write, to try and put myself in the situation, and I make gestures and grimaces.⁴⁵

As a drama, The Unicorn was to be about 'terror', the 'terror of hidden things'.⁴⁵ Such a theme may appear to accommodate itself perfectly as another intimation of the 'plan terrific', as a particular vision of the 'barbaric love' behind it. But The Unicorn follows the crisis of Dead Man's Dump, when the momentary 'terror' of the soldier had eclipsed the general, providential design of the poet's Idea. Now, in his last letter to his friend Miss. Seaton,⁴⁶ the war

⁴⁵ Ibid., P. 375.

⁴⁶ March 8th, 1918. 'Miss. Winifred Seaton had advised and encouraged him since the time of his apprenticeship'.
Works, P. 389.

itself had been confirmed in his mind as the agent of particular horror. The dream of the artist, it seems, has been overcome by the physical oppression of the event, and the personal vision of the soldier. Now, instead of Love, the guiding design of the war, leading towards regeneration, there seemed only 'an ambitious and unscrupulous will'.⁴⁷ Instead of the music of the idea, there were only the 'devastating forces' of war, which, to the poet, appeared to have lost its relative aspect, and now became all, reality, the all of Dead Man's Dump. For Saul, the 'ordinary'⁴⁸ man 'into whose life the unicorn bursts', there is only suicide, certain death, inevitable destruction, like the fate of the soldier in Dead Man's Dump.

In such fragments paradoxes remain, and often prove formidable. What had been an 'unscrupulous will' in the letter, has a somewhat different meaning in the text. The Nubian, a black figure with the heroic qualities of Moses; giant and rebel:

And the man loomed, naked vast, and gripped the
wheels --⁴⁹

sees that the 'lightning of the heavens/Lifts an apocalypse'.⁵⁰ Certain modes of expression adopted by Rosenberg had already put the symbolical environment of the piece in terms of the Western Front: graphic descriptions of mud and slime

⁴⁷Works, P. 379.

⁴⁹Poems, P. 95.

⁴⁸Ibid., P. 375.

⁵⁰Poems, P. 99.

and the impossibilities of motion that appear similar to the realism of Sassoon's Counter Attack.⁵¹

The slime clung
And licked and clawed and chewed the clogged
dragging wheels.⁵²

When the Nubian describes the 'apocalypse' in terms of 'rushing sound/From pent eternities',⁵³ and associates it with 'this ecstasy of form',⁵⁴ it seems that the design, the formal 'plan terrific' is re-evoked, at least in his own case, as a release from the sterile, narrow life he leads:

I have no life at all
Only thin, golden tremors--⁵³

And yet, if he releases himself from this sterility only to attach himself to the dubious substitution of Lilith, female and mother, he is also directing himself towards more slavery. She is the female demon, the 'sorceress',⁵⁵ the 'screech-owl' of Isaiah,⁵⁶ associated with night, long hair and dreams,⁵⁷ which in Rosenberg's poetry, have become thematic symbols of the menace of apparent, hollow safety and indulgence. Although she talks rather glibly of rebellion:

Can one choose to break? To bear,
To wearily bear, is misery.⁵⁸

Lilith in fact embodies the opposite like the girl who speaks to the soldier on leave,⁵⁹ she stands as a prophylactic against completely free movement,

⁵¹'Counter Attack' & 'Attack', Sassoon, P. 70-71. compare.

⁵²Poems, P. 94

⁵³Ibid., P. 100.

⁵⁴Ibid., P. 99.

⁵⁵Poems, P. 97.

⁵⁶Isaiah, XXIV 14.

⁵⁷Ed. Singer I. The Jewish Encyclopaedia V.VIII (New York, 1906) P.88.

⁵⁸Poems, P. 98

⁵⁹Ibid., P. 88.

Weaving for men profound subtleties--⁶⁰

It is similarly ironic that she should wear the amulet, itself a preventive measure against such 'screech - owls' as herself, who would kidnap new-born infants. It is the Nubian who needs the amulet, for self-protection against Lilith. In Bottomley's Solomon's Parents (1906), another verse playlet, King David makes the same mistake as the Nubian, associating Bathsheba, temptress and Lilith figure, with comfort in the night:

Bathsheba, dread is the night that has fallen on us.
Has not the falling of night always drawn us together.⁶¹

Whether The Amulet constitutes legitimate poetic ambiguity, mere confusion, or a substantial portion of both, is left to critical conjecture. The fragment appears to concern the gesture of a misconceived act of rebellion, on the part of the Nubian, that leads only to deeper subjection with Lilith herself. Certainly the idea of regeneration through rebellion is now here apparent, and any freedom becomes completely superficial and pyrrhic: nothing but a defeated hollow gesture.

The Unicorn itself, although another fragment, becomes a little clearer. At least Rosenberg paraphrased the myth:

Now it's about a decaying race who have never seen a woman; animals take the place of women, but they yearn for continuity. The chief's Unicorn breaks away and he goes in chase. The Unicorn is found by boys outside the city and brought in, and breaks away again. Saul, who has seen the Unicorn on his

⁶⁰ Ibid., P. 97.

⁶¹ Bottomley, P. 92.

way to the city for the weeks victuals, gives chase in his cart. A storm comes on, the mules break down, and by the lightning he sees the Unicorn race by; a naked black like an apparition rises up, and easily lifts the wheels from the rut, and together they ride to Saul's hut. There Lilith is in great consternation, having seen the Unicorn and knowing the legend of this race of men. The emotions of the black (the chief,) are the really difficult part of my story. Afterwards a host of blacks on horses, like centaurs and buffaloes, come rushing up, the Unicorn in front. On every horse is clasped a woman. Lilith faints, Saul stabs himself, the chief places Lilith on the Unicorn, and they all race away.⁶²

The race of men stricken with sterility, strongly anticipates Eliot's utilisation of the myth of the impotent fisher king in The Waste Land. The emphasis again is on rebellion. The word 'break', by now so thematic of rebellion is repeated twice, and the action of the 'black' lifts the wheels of human progress 'from the rut'. The Unicorn itself would appear to be the ultimate symbol of ferocious and rebellious energy, the energy of God himself:

God brought them out of Egypt; he hath as it were,
the strength of the Unicorn.⁶³

It is untameable, fleet and active, an ideal symbol for the elusive idea that will never be trapped or domesticated:

Will the unicorn be willing to serve thee, or abide
by thy crib? Canst thou bind the unicorn with his
band in the furrow?⁶⁴

⁶² Works, P. 377.

⁶³ Numbers XXIII 22.

⁶⁴ Job XXXIX 9-10

Saul gives chase to the untameable as the poet gropes after his idea, both 'break down'.⁶⁵ Isaiah refers to the 'land soaked as blood',⁶⁶ after the rampant trampling of the Unicorn, which itself points to the terrible energy of the war, and the 'crimson curse', all within the divine love of the 'plan terrific', just as the unicorn is associated with God himself.⁶³ All biblical references point to a huge and formidable ox-like creature, beautiful in form. This is probably the Assyrian 'rimu',⁶⁷ and the embodiment of a monstrous will, associated with the stern but shaping will of God.⁶⁸

To Saul, the ordinary man, the unicorn only means 'terror' in its sublimity. Like the soldier seeing the visions of guns and fire

I am a shivering grass⁶⁹ I cower, I quail
This is no mortal terror --⁷⁰ in a chill wind

His own environment has the rootless sterility of the 'torn fields of France'.⁷¹ He lives in the midst of war:

⁶⁵Rosenberg to Miss. Seaton (written in Hospital, 1916):
-- He (the poet) knows that the most marvellously expressed idea is still nothing--
Works, P. 371.

⁶⁶Isaiah XXXIV 7

⁶⁷Ed. Hastings, J. Dictionary of the Bible, V.IV. (New York, 1902) P. 834.

⁶⁸Hemingway's description of the bull radiates a similar formidable beauty.

-- his head up, the great hump of his muscle on his neck swollen tight, his body muscles quivering--

'My God, isn't he beautiful,' Brett said.

Hemingway, E. The Sun Also Rises. (New York, 1954) P. 139.

⁶⁹Note the re-working of the 'grass' image for soldiers. See my comments on Dead Man's Dump.

⁷⁰Poems, P. 107.

⁷¹Break of Day in the Trenches. Poems, P.73.

The roots of a torn universe are wrenched,
See the bent trees like nests of derelicts in
the ocean,⁷²

The 'rushing' and 'sweeping' of this unicorn has the same uncontrollable power of the limber of Dead Man's Dump.

Jones too, was to use the mythical unicorn image. For him it suggested the energies of violence behind the morning assault. Again the unicorn 'breaks', is completely rebellious:

-- as to this hour
when unicorns break cover --,⁷³

and this hour again is dawn, when the energy of the Idea fully generates itself. Like the soldier under fire, Saul can only see this energy as 'flashes',⁷⁴ 'two balls of fire casement glaring'.⁷⁵

To Tel, the unicorn is something very different, just as the war is something very different to the poet's vision of design than it is to the soldier's grasp of moment. To Tel, the beast embodies a release, a rescue from sterility. He craves for the unicorn as the poet craves to grasp his whole providential Idea of universal design:

Man yearns and woman yearns and yearning is
Beauty and music, faith and hope and dreams,
Religion, love, endeavour, stability
Of man's whole universe.⁷⁶

At this point the unicorn remains the symbol for the Idea, the general design to the poet, but in its stage of terror, the particular torment of the man. The dichotomy of man/poet

⁷²Poems, P. 111.

⁷⁴Poems, P. 112.

⁷⁶Poems, P. 103.

⁷³Jones, P. 168.

⁷⁵Poems, P. 111.

appears to have reached its fullest expression in the contrasting attitudes of Saul and Tel towards the unicorn. The Unicorn tells us this clearly enough, as it tells us that, like the soldier and his fate with the particular terror, Saul dies. But from there onwards, the fragment becomes obscure. Tel, like the poet, is searching for re-generation, and like the fisher king, to remove the sterility, to bring fertility. A fragment called The Tower of Skulls describes the features of this 'death's land'. The 'layers of piled up skulls'⁷⁷ recall Dead Man's Dump and the battlefield, as well as the domain of the fisher king. Yet shining from all this dust, debris and desolation, is the promise of regeneration. When an 'aged flesh looks down' upon his 'tender brood'.

He knows his fire is dust and seed.⁷⁸

Tel however, the impotent chief, looks not towards the unicorn and the idea, the design for fertility, but towards woman, Lilith, the demon of uncreative safety and the antithesis of Freedom. She remains to him

The incarnate female soul of generation.⁷⁹

But with Lilith is mythically associated destruction, desolation. She is the 'screech-owl' that would haunt the rubble of Edom's mined fortress,⁸⁰ itself a part of the environment of war. So Tel is utilising the monstrous providential energy of the unicorn only for the capture of Lilith, and the way to more

⁷⁷Poems, P. 101.

⁷⁹Poems, P. 113.

⁷⁸Poems, P. 113.

⁸⁰Isaiah XXXIV 14.

destruction. He is misusing the unicorn, abusing the 'plan terrific'. He is using the source of rebellion and regeneration to carry the source of tyranny and desolation. Consequently his movement and rescue are both ironic. The energy of the plan, the 'barbaric' love of God, crystallised in the unicorn, is prostituted by Tel to become the beast of burden, carrying the maker of menace; and this time it is not the ironic apparent menace of Providence in the shape of momentary terror, but the real menace of demons, of sorcery.

The Unicorn, as such, represents a final consciously ironic comment on the 'plan terrific', now associated with God, energy and strength as well as form, and all symbolised within a synthesis of the beast itself. Like the soldier, and Saul, Tel misreads the Unicorn. His interest is with the woman, not the providential idea. Tel himself is transparently the poet, seeing his idea, managing to ride the unicorn, articulating the design, but being overwhelmed, and overcome by the temptation of the particular terror, by Lilith, or the horrific sorcery of the moment, in Dead Man's Dump. Tel succumbed, but the poet ironically affirms his idea, his plan, in the face of the most telling arguments of Lilith. These are the barbaric and particular agonies of his own providential design, his own trench experiences. They speedily force a spreading insensibility and massive obscurity over any hope of the Idea that promises to 'sweeten to tenderness'. Even for Rosenberg the temptation of Lilith can be too devastatingly radiant:

Sometimes I give way and am appalled at the devastation this life seems to have made in my nature. It seems to have blunted me. I seem to be powerless to compel my will in any direction, and all I do is without energy and interest.

--No drug could be more stupefying than our work, (to me anyway), and this goes on like that old torture of water trickling, drop by drop unendingly, on one's helplessness.⁸¹

This was slavery, and the pestilential insensitivity that formed the mind so preoccupied with rebellion. Such an acute monomania in such perverse conditions, more than anything, needed the formal discipline of the myth, to detach itself from a physical situation that says more to the human faculties of compassion than any impersonal shape. Those shapes of the myth seek out the imagination, and they were ultimately the completest way of avoiding the terrible temptations of human pity.

⁸¹Letter to Miss. Seaton. (Feb. 14th, 1918) Works, P. 378.

AFTERWORD: THE LEGEND

-- discover the direction of the impulse--
Isaac Rosenberg.

For the mind that seeks, within the testaments of the fighting men of the Great War, the radiance of undistilled pity, intense personal utterance, confided anguish that does not caricature itself in morbid excesses or speak with wild declamations or easy attitudes, it can find them all in Rosenberg. It will not find them in his poetry, but there, poignant and real, in his letters. A poet who can persuade F.R. Leavis to veer from his producible texts by force of legend:

It is fortunate that we have these letters. Without them, impressive as the poetry is, we could not have realised the extraordinary heroism lying behind it,¹

and make the established hierophant of critical impersonality speak with such an efflux of critical sympathy and abstractions on Rosenberg's Collected Works;

-- the total effect should be, not only the recognised enrichment of the English language by a dozen pages of great poetry, but the enrichment of tradition by a new legend. And Rosenberg belongs, not with Chatterton, but rather with Keats and Hopkins.

-- a rare document of invincible human strength, courage and finesse --,²

¹F.R. Leavis 'The Recognition of Isaac Rosenberg', Scrutiny V. 6 No. 2. (Sept. 1937) P. 232.

²Ibid., P. 234.

plainly radiates a certain mystique that will tend to obscure, or at least colour, our monumental shibboleths of critical detachment. Rosenberg's letters, full as they are in manifesting a heroic personal onslaught on the crippling conditions of a monstrous force of insensitivity, themselves build up an idea of the poet/hero, the one individual rebellious mind straining against the enveloping tyranny of mindlessness:

Winter is not the least of the horrors of war. I am determined that this war, with all its powers for devastation, shall not master my poeting, -- I will not leave a corner of my consciousness covered up, but saturate myself with the strange and extraordinary new conditions of this life, and it will all refine itself to poetry later on --³

Such is the heroic side of the poet's incorrigible pragmatism: and to the human, moral vision it had often appeared depraved, pitilessly transcendent and unsympathetic.

But as well as the artist in war, the dimension of the poet as heroic outsider, Rosenberg was also a Jew, and the little man so small, that he was constrained to join the Suffolk Bantams, - a regiment of men so small, that their standing battle posture, as he pointed out, made them look as if they were sitting down. His letters show that he was poor, dependant on patronage, small, absent minded, tubercular, of a victimized ethnic group, and a desperate and formidable opponent of insensitivity. In every way he satisfies the image of the outsider, the lost man. When he returned to London on leave

³Works, P. 373.

in 1917, he wrote to Bottomley that, as a soldier home,

-- things here don't look quite right to me
somehow--⁴

A writer can quite easily mould this image, caricature it to an accommodating, sentimental character in the most nauseating way. There was 'unassuming little Rosenberg',⁵ 'impoverished little Rosenberg',⁶ Rosenberg 'the boy'⁷ at twenty eight, patronised socially, and not just financially, out of any real identity, made scapegoat of all literary compassion:

If Brooke was a symbolic figure of the last of the Old Wars, here was another sacrificial victim, a symbol of war new style--⁸

With these extensions, Rosenberg takes on a mythical aspect, he becomes a semi-fictional character whose empathetic brightness can affect even Leavis, himself an old soldier. Blunden, another ex-service man, can 'feel the passionate idea of Isaac Rosenberg',⁹ but whether this is the 'idea' of the poet, the 'plan terrific' itself, or the sensible glory that radiates from the myth of the suffering, rebellious little hero's sacrifice to the enginery of insensibility, Blunden's sympathetic criticism leaves ambiguous. The present author has attempted to resist these rays, and sought to be impersonal in his treatment of Rosenberg's poetry. He has tried to trace

⁴Works, P. 377.

⁵Hassall, P. 381.

⁶Ibid., P. 382.

⁷Ibid., P. 401.

⁸Ibid., P. 439.

⁹Blunden E. The War Poets: 1914-18 (London, 1958) P. 36.

the lines of the poet's controlling Idea, the ether, the Real Substance, behind Rosenberg's utterance through its accommodation in symbols and words, that he, the author, only knows poetically. He has tried to get above the infectious pity, to reach the level of the poet as he makes shapes of the environment of tyranny and war. In doing so he has realised the impossibilities of complete detachment and critical pragmatism, just as the poet realised it, and expressed it within the horror of Dead Man's Dump. Groping with fragments - and Rosenberg's whole canon is the mere fragment of an Idea - is in itself an aspect of criticism that tends to compromise with the appreciation of separate, or part-units of utterance to find the whole Idea. It would be tempting enough to judge Break of Day in the Trenches or Daughters of War just as fine, complete, and separate individual utterances. They may be this, but they also transcend this. They represent two stages, two components, two links of many other links that suddenly, violently and inadvertently stop with The Unicorn. For the present writer, this pursuit of the poet's Idea has been all, and he would justify this approach, with Rosenberg, as a legitimate, if sympathetic, singlemindedness. There is no fullness in an Idea that exists in fragments, but there can be more than in the isolated articulation of short - lived responses, lyrical cries in the dark. The way, the route, the direction

of the Idea and the recognition of its essential mobility, is more important than the analysis of a coerced and unsympathetic pause at critical gun-point:

I think anybody can pick holes and find unsound parts in any work of art; anyone can say Christ's creed is a slave's creed, the Mosaic is a vindictive, savage creed, and so on. It is the unique and superior, the illuminating qualities one wants to find - discover the direction of the impulse--¹⁰

¹⁰letter to Miss. Seaton, Works, P. 371.

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