CHAPTER VI
SECOND WORLD WAR

War is not simple; in more or less degree
All are guilty though some will suffer unjustly.

(Anne Ridler 'Now as then' BG 19)

'War is not simple'; surely all the Second World War poets were aware of this from their early adolescence and were aware that they too would be drawn into the more or less continuous war and may be perish in it. They did not need to educate an audience through their poems about the horrors of war or the nature of modern warfare, for the First World War poets had already performed these tasks in minutest detail. The Second World War was not confined to a particular area like the French-German border in the First, but raged world wide. Hence the landscape of the poems includes air, sea and alien lands. The poets write not only of the actual experience of the battle but range more widely, and speculate more often on more abstract themes.

Terror is their palsy, the knees
Of men buckle for the fear of man.

(J. Bronowski, Man Take Your Gun, BG 19)
When located in an alien civilization, and when not directly involved in battle, the poets observed the surroundings, the landscape, the people, and expressed fascination or revulsion, interest and a desire to know the alien world, while sometimes the setting simply aroused a nostalgia for home.

Though Keith Douglas, Sidney Keyes and Alun Lewis have been considered as the three major poets of the Second World War they have not written a considerable body of war poetry as have Owen or Sassoon. On the other hand notable poems have been written by a large number of combatants not known as war poets nor indeed sometimes as poets. The chapter therefore does not deal with the work of individuals separately. Instead the poems have been grouped according to the themes they treat of as under:

6.1 **The New Learning**

This heading has been taken from the Brian Gardner Anthology: *The Terrible Rain, "The War Poets 1939-1945"*. This section consists of poems written at the beginning of the war with civilians not only being inducted into the military routine but the evolution of a new individual, a soldier who has lost his identity to become a part of the war machine.

6.2 **The Home Front**

This section consists of poems by combatants as well as non-combatants on the air raids on London and other cities
as well as some poems related to civil defence.

6.3 At the Front

This section will receive the fullest treatment and so the poems have been further sub-divided and grouped under the following sub-headings.

6.3.1 Awaiting battle.
6.3.2 The Actual Experience of Battle.
6.3.3 The Soldier.
6.3.4 The Enemy.
6.3.5 The dead.
6.3.6 The Ravaged Land.
6.3.7 The POW Experience.
6.3.8 Myth and Reality.

There is bound to be a certain amount of overlapping, particularly in the poems concerning battle. In assigning a poem to a particular sub-section what has been kept in mind is the saliency of a particular theme in relation to the point to be illustrated.

6.4 Alien Lands

This section consists of poems on a soldier’s experience in an alien land.

6.5 The Aftermath

This section consists of poems written when the war was over.
6.6 Conclusion

The conclusion will seek to bring out the distinctive features of the poetry of this war.

6.1 The New Learning

The following lines from W.H. Auden's "From September 1, 1939" (BG 14) record the consciousness that a totally new kind of existence was about to take the place of the old.

Waves of anger and fear
Circulate over the bright
And darkened lands of the earth,
Obsessing our private lives;
The unmentionable odour of death
Offends the September night.¹

The final years of the thirties for the victors and the vanquished of the First World War (bright and darkened lands) were a period of frustration and unhappiness. It was a 'dishonest decade' and the people feared the war looming ahead and were angered by their incapacity to avoid the war. The threat of an impending war was omnipresent as seen from the last two lines.

Apart from this general awareness of war there was a sense of preparation as evinced in 'Two Pairs of Shoes' by Keith Footit (BG, 21)
Draw back the curtains, 
Dim the electric light, 
Now the stage is set for 
Our improptu first night, 
We've had no rehearsals, 
We don't need the cues, 
And out in the corridor 
Are two pairs of shoes. 2

Right from the opening lines where the poet is with his lover there is a note of urgency. He avoids mentioning that the recruitment has already started except by mentioning the 'Two pairs of shoes'.

He pleads with his lover 'whisper dear, you love me': as though he is aware of the uncertainty of his return and the last couple of lines bring out the urgency and shortness of time.

There's no time to lose, dear, 
There's no time to lose. 
Already they are polishing 
Our two pairs of shoes.

The poet is so restless, he is unable to concentrate and spend some moments with his lover, neither can he detach himself from the 'gathering storm'. The quickness in the tone of the poem expresses the poet's feelings of fear and excitement that probably was the mood at the beginning.

The poet captures this initial war momentum, the preparation, the awareness of what was to come, precisely
through the short lines and the alternate rhyming.

In another poem "To Certain Ladies, On Going To The Wars" by Henry Treece (BG, 22, 23) we see the poet attempting to be lighthearted and cheerful while bidding good-bye to his frivolous life. The poet says:

It's time I was leaving
To live another way.

There seems to be a falseness in the underlying tone because the poet is aware of another life ahead. He speaks to the ladies of the 'damp beds'; 'the washing without soap', the 'black lice' all that the body has to get accustomed to, the same body that knew only the 'friendly limbs' and the 'silken sheeted rooms.'

The poet is aware of his duty, for he tells the ladies

   So many lads I knew once
   Are rotting under sods:
   I owe them this one journey -
   So farewell, pretty birds.

We observe that the poet uses a flippant tone all throughout the poem probably trying to mask the underlying seriousness of the war.

This knowledge of war and its preparation were induced from school. This can be observed in the poem "The New Learning" by Ian Serrailler (BG, 30)

In Nature class the school-boy's head is taught to contemplate, instead of a flower-pot and cactus stump, a budding aluminium dump.
In the above lines we can observe the poet's sarcastic reflection on the school-boys's mind being conditioned to accept war as natural. In the later verses one can gauge the poet's pain and grief at the realisation that the Christian child brought up with the knowledge that God alone can bring salvation is now taught to accept -

The British blockade will
bring Salvation

and wonders at the 'new commandent' of the Christian soldier.

From the conditioning of the school boy's mind we proceed to the conditioning of the raw recruit under training. A significant number of poems deal with life in the training camps, the gradual transformation of human being into soldier.

The poem 'Squadding' by Jack Lindsay (BG, 32, 33) begins with the picture of the early days of instruction at the camp, where the soldiers form their squads, nervously adjust their caps, finger their belts. The poet makes an apt comparison of the soldier to 'a crab'. He describes how the crab shedding his shell may feel lost 'between two worlds' and may not be so 'scared as wary'.

This comparison in fact explains the feelings of the soldier who accepts the sergeant and the 'insulting candour of his stare' and gradually starts to obey his commands.

From a 'random rhythm' the arms and legs now start moving in a strange unison and here the poet questions
himself about this change and wonders if a 'kind of love' could exist in the change.

He is unable to reconcile the change that has taken place in him. His true self seems to be in conflict with this new self. He writes:

The brain
is numbed with semi-defiance. It isn't true.

As though to convince or console himself he keeps repeating 'it isn't true' but finally he is helpless. He feels foolish when he cannot live up to his new role as military man and ends by taking pride in it. The squadding is now carried out in a confident way, not as it was before.

and an urgency raps
your mind -
tightened, look, in the buckle of belt
and sling,
jestingly sealed in each momentous trifle,
stamped now, clamped in the bolt and
the bayonet ring,
fondled and final in the uplifted rifle.

The words 'jestingly sealed', 'fondled', all attempt to show how the soldier develops a kind of affection for his arms and the transformation in him is complete in the phrase 'final in the uplifted rifle'.

The poet deftly and precisely handles the initial uneasiness of the soldier following the sergeant's command and the final reconciliation on the change of identity.
Not all poems end with such an acceptance of a new role. Henry Reed in both his poems 'Judging Distances' and 'Naming of Parts' (BG, 33, 34, 35) describes the method of instruction at the training camps. But in his case the new role is always alien. Also what is interesting is the way he has managed to distance himself from the reality and that is his only defence. Yet he shows at the end how there is really no escape from it all.

'Judging Distances' opens with the lines:

Not only how far away, but the way that you say it
Is very important.

These opening lines are an example of the poet's handling of a dual set of values. Though the sentence is actually spoken by the sergeant before starting the instructions the sentence is meant to reveal the poet's dislike of the sergeant's style of instruction. The sergeant says:

Perhaps you may never get
The knack of judging a distance, but at least you know
How to report on a landscape.

The tone in the above line highlights the sergeant's assumption of the men's lack of knowledge, his mockery at their ignorance especially by his repeated use of the phrase 'at least you know'.

The tone also suggests how the poet flinches at the sergeant's attitude and his style of imposing the instructions on the men.

In the third verse on concluding a certain portion, the instructor asks one of the men to say 'what he sees over there to the west, and how far away, after first having come to attention.'

To himself the poet says:

The still white dwellings are like a mirage in the heat,
And under the swaying elms a man and a woman
Lie gently together.

In a parody of the sergeant's jargon he answers:

Which is perhaps,
only to say
That there is a row of houses to the left of arc,
And that under some poplars a pair of what appear to be humans
Appear to be loving.

And that this parody of an exchange between the two takes place in his own mind is clear in the next couple of lines where the sergeant is made to reply:

Well that, for an answer, is what we might rightly call
Moderately satisfactory only, the reason being,
Is that two things have been omitted
and those are important.
The human beings, now: in what direction
are they,
And how far away, would you say?
The poet's reply to this ends:
At seven o'clock from the houses, is
roughly a distance
Of about one year and a half.

Though these lines directly imply the military explanation
of the knack of judging distances what the poet really conveys
is that the normal life he sees was for him a year and half ago.

All throughout the poem we observe the poet's skilful
manipulation of the voices thus bringing out his underlying
bitterness regarding the war.

On similar lines is Reed's next poem 'Naming Of Parts',7
where the poet mimics the matter-of-fact tone of the sergeant
explaining the training lesson for the day in order to bring
out the mechanical routine. The poem begins with

Today we have naming of parts. Yesterday
We had daily cleaning.
And suddenly there is a transition to another scene as

Japonica
Glistens like coral in all of the neighbouring
gardens,

It is here that we observe how skilfully the poet has handled
the tone and voice. We realise that the speaker is the
trainee and the instructor's words are repeated in his mind. The transition to the outside scene that takes place only in the speaker's own mind reveals the poet's manipulation of the voices.

Later in the poem once again the poet handles the voice in the same way while explaining the working of the bolt.

We call this
Easing the Spring. And rapidly backwards
and forwards
The early bees are assaulting and
fumbling the flowers:
They call it easing the Spring.

The poet's mind drifts between the instructor's lessons and the scene outside. There is a pun on the word 'spring' and the repetition of the phrase 'easing the spring' reveals the poet's mind getting momentarily distracted by some far off memories.

All sorts of attitudes are implicit in Reed's two poems. One can gauge the poet's sensitive nature that flinches at being at the mercy of the sergeant's limited mind. So the poet reasserts himself through covert mockery and by letting his mind drift off to the things he values most.

Thus soon the army became a world where men were just taught 'to kill and die'.
And men live here to learn to kill
and die;
This line is from the poem 'Army' by Kenneth Neal (BG, 40)\(^8\)
where later in the poem he says:

We're tired of waste and muddle
and the mind
Perpetually and helplessly confined
To barracks and parades upon a tidy square:

In waiting to be sent to the battle or the scene of action
the soldier often realised how time had wiped out all the
seasons, his girls, his past, in the course of 'war's
outrageous year'.

The soldier's body is now like a lathe frame;
of bone married to his weapons and is developing a 'ribbed
affinity' towards the barrels of the guns and all the war
machinery. ('The Soldier' by L.J. Yates, BG, 41).

At this stage the soldier is himself surprised how the
transformation in him has taken place and this is observed
in the poem 'Tell Us The Tricks' by Paul Scott. (BG, 32)\(^9\)

The poem begins as a dialogue between a civilian and
a soldier. In the first verse the civilian questions the
soldier about his life and ends the last two lines of the
verse thus:

Tell us the slow process,
from man to soldier - ?
In the next verse we find the soldier bewildered on hearing the question and he fumbles while he says:

The soldier's here - The man is not:
Man's voice was lost;
The sex decayed
By the bitter bayonet - the chattering shot
The growth delayed.

It is only on being questioned that the soldier realizes how he is totally a changed person. The tone reveals the soldier choking while he mentions his lost identity and his inability to command his past to appear. Yet he does not fail to express a faint hope that probably 'some other time', 'some different year' he may be able to recall them.

A cynical tone is observed all through the poem. After all the poet was a civilian first, later a soldier.

At such times in a camp, far away from the battlefield the army does strange things to a person. This aspect can be studied through the poem 'The Recruit' by John Manifold (BG, 31).  

A new recruit enters the new environment of the army, a new life where he is on his own all alone, where he has no one of his family around him.

Suddenly and miraculously he discovers he has friends around him.

The poem describes how this comradeship between the recruits develops depending on various bonds. They may
share a place of origin like London or Wales while in the
case of someone else the friendship develops because of a
common job, or a common sport or hobby and in this way you
have a lot of friends around you.

There is some cord, either 'nation', or 'region', or
'craft', that connects or binds each individual to the other
so that the poet feels he is no longer isolated. He realises
that he is a part of many groups bound to each other by varied
bonds and the individual becomes -

I as a point where circles intersect.

The poet has distanced himself from the evils of warfare of
which he has to be a part and has sought to look for goodness
even in evil. He discovers those finer bonds entangled in
the web of destruction. 'Comradeship' was one such bond
which even the war veterans today have great regard for,
They feel that they could not have endured the war but for
the comradeship.

NAAPI CONCERT by Maurice Lindsay (BG, 39,40)\textsuperscript{11} shows
another aspect of army life. The soldiers' only pastime took
the form of concerts.

The poet sketches the falseness of life in the
'painted voice', 'trembling legs' of the singer while the
troops applauded her. Though the singer feels her songs
provide triumphant entertainment the soldiers are bored, they
are just contemplating death. Their faces reflect 'fear and
pain'. The dancing floor is a 'mirage' where they see what the future holds for them. And when the dancer is gone

They drink their watery tea, play
simple games
and think, the night is short and
day is long.

The concert did not remove from the minds of the soldiers the reality, the war that had to be faced. In fact the expectation of the day when they would be sent abroad often led them to contemplate that

'It is Death Now We Look Upon.'

Day fall
Swallow song
Murmurous the river
Which is memory -
it is death we now look upon.

The poet (J.R. Hodgson; BG, 74,75)\textsuperscript{12} is reflective. But whether he is contrasting the past or the present or the future he is preparing himself for death.

The tone of the poem speaks of the poet's conflict in expressing the reality of war. The poet brings in the past, present and future in short lines and by use of words like 'day fall', "swallow sing" to complete those pictures, while omnipresent is just death. In a way the poet has managed to bring out the enormous picture of death in war.
Sidney Keyes's 'Advice For A Journey' (BG, 29) shows how a mind previously trained to think about the war envisions the future.

The poem is rather literary in form. It describes the poet's preparation for the war, his inability to face the obstacles for lack of skill and will-power.

It is only at the end of his advice that the poet's ironic attitude to war is brought to light. He warns his friends:

We'll find may be, the dream
under the hill -
But never Canaan, nor any
golden mountain.

Success at the end has been depicted as an illusion through a reference to 'Canaan' (a land of promise, a heaven).

After undergoing the 'New Learning' the transformation of a soldier mentally makes him contemplate on 'What Purpose Love'. J.R. Hodgson reveals soldier's view in his poem 'What Purpose Love' (APP, 46) The first question that comes to his mind when he thinks of 'love' is -

What purpose love
When death is morrow?
Causeless grief
Waits on a kiss
lonliness
lies locked in the warm flesh
laughter's echo
mocks from the silent wood.
The poet feels that love will bring more pain since it is to end so soon. He thinks how much grief these few kisses will cause, how the flesh will feel lovely without the embrace of the beloved and those moments of laughter they shared in the wood. Would echo mockingly at their short-lived love. This he feels can be avoided if he refrains from love.

6.2 The Home Front

The bombings of London, the world of air-raid shelters, the civilian attitude and response to war is the theme of poems by many combatants as well as non-combatants. 'Bombs In My Town' by Charles Hamblett (AFP, 39) has a description of the poet's small town that is bombed. He recounts his meeting with some farmers whom he has earlier spoken to. After the bombing he notices a change in the route they take to drive to 'High Street', a change in looks also. He feels in their faces there is a 'death-vacant' look. The death-vacant look is the result of some personal loss of their house or their near and dear ones, and though they returned to continue life as normal their mental framework that had undergone the shock was still to return to normalcy.

The poet glances across the empty markets without the noise of the horse carriages or the tradesmen. In a small town a market place is its 'heart' not just a centre of commercial trade but a meeting place for so many people,
where an exchange of local gossip cannot be bypassed. Today the tradesmen are not in any jocular mood, but seem to be in an abstracted mood. They bow over their belongings collecting their stock.

And in the last verse the poet expresses his own feelings.

To see your small, damaged town
Where each stone
Holds a history of its own,
Evokes a wild pity
Deeper than being
With strange folk, seeing
The devastation
of their city ...

The poet's feelings reveal the lifestyle in small towns and villages, how everyone is acquainted with everyone else and their concern over anything happening in their town or village. The poet's own association, his knowledge of the history of every stone, apparently evokes more pity for his own bombed town, than when he sees the devastation of a city belonging to others.

A poem titled 'Point of View' by R.P. Brett (AFP, 24) expresses the point of view on the bombings as heard in a butcher's shop at Bolton Lancs. The poet repeats the butcher's account of what he has seen in London. The poem is rather a raw poem that projects the civilian death as a
form of slaughter and the scene is exceedingly ugly. In
fact the conversation itself begins as:

It's slaughter – nothing more or less –
The bombing in this war ...

The word 'slaughter' gives an insight into the ruthless way
the civilian destruction was brought about.

Various scenes that one witnessed during the blitz
are described like 'a leg hung from a tree', or a part of the
body lying somewhere, or a hand with a wedding ring or a
child wrapped in a shawl or just flesh in lumps lying all
around that was shoved into sacks after the air-raid was
over.

The butcher reacting to the killing of the defenceless
folks and calling the killers swine is himself a killer of
defenceless animals. Even as he is talking –

His chopper fell and fiercely spilt
A sheep's head clean in two.

In his opinion the folks were defenceless because they
couldn't fight back the attacks on them and at that moment

And swinging dumbly on a hook,
A dead pig gave him such a look.

The dead pig seems conscious of the irony.

The conversation presented in the butcher's language
is in keeping with the butcher's profession while bringing
out the nature of civilian damage and loss of lives.
'Night Raid' by Desmond Hawkins (BG, 57) gives an account of life in an underground air-raid shelter during the night.

The poet describes how life carried on as usual with people going to sleep, the daft boy playing, rummy and the dancing girl making comments:

If there's a bomb made for you,
You're going to get it.

Actually what the poet wished to express through the dancing girl's words is that you can't avoid your fate. If you have to die, it could be anywhere and at anytime. This was of course the fate of the civilians during the bombings and the civilians did take anything that came their way.

In the shelter there were people muttering 'the bees are coming' a reference to the arrival of the bombers.

Way off the guns muttered distantly.
This shows how the people were so alert that they could not just sense bombers arriving but also the direction from which they were coming even though they were far away.

Words like 'muttering', 'whispering', in darkness, bring out the anxious moments of unknown fear, the uncertainty of the aftermath, otherwise there is an air of casual acceptance.
In the next verse the poet mentions the dancing girl's idea of life.

And the dancing girl clicked her teeth like castanets
And said, 'I don't mind life, believe me I like it. If there's any more to come, I can take it and be glad of it.

The dancing girl was full of life and wished to live it, enjoy it the way it came. She was confident that she could face whatever might come her way. While expressing her views:

She was shivering and laughing and throwing her head back.

Words like 'shivering', 'laughing', 'throwing her head back' capture the fear, excitement and the carefree spirit in the face of all difficulties.

While the girl symbolises a certain vivacity and willpower to carry on with life, there were men on the pavement who were thoughtful, pensive, possibly trying to foresee something.

In direct tone and simple words the mood of the Londoners is captured without the poet resorting to any literary devices.

The unusual nature of modern warfare as experienced by an anti-aircraft gunner during an air-raid in the 'Battle of Britain' is the theme of the poem 'Unseen Fire'
The poet refers to such a war as an 'inhuman' sort of war.

Inhuman because it is so dependent on technology that the people directing the firing cannot see the enemy who comes in the aircraft. The enemy's arrival is caught on the screen and the combatants from the ground -

Wait

For the precise split-second to order fire.

Words like 'precise' and 'split-second' bring out the speed and accuracy with which the orders are given and carried out.

The poet refers to those voices as ghosts that relay the messages to the soldiers to fire.

And immediately in reply to the instructions received he hears the 'guns-roaring' and the 'air-craft waging war'

Inhumanly from nearly five miles height
Meets our bouquet of death - and turns sharp right.

Once again the poet refers to the air-craft waging war at nearly five miles height with soldiers below as 'inhuman'. This may be due to the unnaturalness of the whole situation even from 'five miles height' and also to contrast with the immediate natural event that was death.
What is visible is only the destruction that is left behind. The poet involved in the bombing operation is probably at the headquarters far away from the field of action. The enemy's arrival is observed on the screen and the destruction is carried out. The fire itself is 'unseen' but the reality is the scars or the wounds that it leaves behind and this fact the poet finds hard to reconcile with.

For centuries war conjured up an image of heroic warriors who met their equals face to face and decided their fate; but modern technology had changed the character of warfare altogether since it involved machines to destroy innocent civilians. In this context also the poet may have referred to the war as 'inhuman'.

The poem reveals the development of new technologies in modern warfare, and in interesting aspect of being in the war yet distanced from it, as also the dehumanising enormity of war.

No discussion of the poetry of the bombing of London can be complete without the inclusion of Dylan Thomas's 'Refusal To Mourn The Death, By Fire of A Child in London' (BG, 62) and Edith Sitwell's 'Still Falls the Rain', however well known they may be. Both poems are highly allusive, metaphorical, employing a variety of literary devices.
An interesting angle of approach to the first poem is set forth by Donald C. Freeman in "The Strategy of Fusion - "Dylan Thomas's Syntax" and some of his insights will be used here.

Freeman suggests that discovering the linguistic strategy employed by the poet leads to the discovery of the poetic design and this in turn gives a deeper insight into the poem's meaning.

To the poet birth and death are not discrete events but a never-ending cycle of birth, life, death, decay, and regeneration. An act of creation leads to an act of destruction and conversely death and destruction contains the seeds of regeneration and rebirth.

The poem is an elegy and the occasion is to mourn the death of a child whom the poet, explicitly refuses to mourn because he finds an eternal life in death.

Freeman demonstrates how the idea of fusion of individual death with the whole of human history is reinforced by the poet's handling of syntax.

In the poem the poet dislocates the syntax and when the sentence is decoded it goes like this.

Until the mankind making, bird, beast and flower fathering, and all humbling darkness tells with silence the last light breathing and the still hour is come and I must
enter again this round zion of the water bead and the
synagogue of the ear of corn. I shall never let pray the
shadow of a sound.

'Or sow my salt seed
In the least valley of sackcloth to mourn
The majesty and burning of a child's death.'

Preposing an adverb never with a second preposing of
an adverb until that ends in a long clause brings into focus
the paradox in the poem because 'never' and 'until' are two
contrary entities that juxtapose each other.

On reading the decoded sentence and understanding the
fusion brought about by the proposing of the adverbs in the
syntax of the sentence, it is easy to comprehend that the
poet would never wish to mourn the child's death. There is
a shift backwards from the second verse to the first to
relate the meaning to the context of the poem.

The third and the final verse set forth the poet's
reason for refusing to mourn the child's death.

The poet considers it as murderous or blasphemous to
mourn the child's death. By the use of words like 'murder'
or 'blaspheme' which would ordinarily not be used to mark
a mourning the poet forces the reader to look deeper for the
actual significances of life and death. He does not wish to
see the individual death of the girl apart from its context
in the entirety of human history.
In the final verse he foresees in the death of 'London's daughter' the grain of future regeneration. Only in the case of the girl's death he feels -

'After the first death, there is not other.'

That is he sees an eternal life for the girl after her death probably because of her innocence and youth.

By using the 'strategy of fusion' of preparing an old verb and transforming the syntax in the poem the poet skilfully brings out the intense tension and the release of the situation thus presenting the enormity of innocent destruction during the London bombings.

It is largely through biblical allusion that Edith Sitwell expresses her concern over the contemporary human sufferings as well as suffering through the ages in her poem 'Still Falls The Rain'.

All throughout the poem the poet repeats the phrase 'still falls the rain' using the rain image to express the ceaselessness of war.

The year 1940, the year of the bombings in London is epitomised in the 'nineteen hundred and forty nails' on the cross.

To bring out the increased bombing through newer and swifter modes of destruction she has made allusions to the sufferings of Christ. She has referred to Christ shedding
his blood for humanity yet from the beginning of human history starting with Adam and Eve and Cain the human brain has always nurtured a greed for blood and 'Still falls the rain'.

She recalls 'Dives and Lazarus' from the Parable of the rich glutton and the beggar (Luke 16:19-31) but realises that

Under the rain the sore and gold are as one:

Here she wishes to imply that the innocent and the wrong doers both meet the same fate in the present war.

In the dehumanising war where every human being met the same end she makes a comparison with the wounded baited bear and the hunted hare which epitomise the helpless victims. (Bear baiting and hare hunting were highly popular sports practised during the 16th and 17th centuries).

Quoting from Faustus's final soliloquy 'O Ile leape up to my God:

Who pulls me doune.

She expresses her grief that there is always a strong pull that obstructs the human being from turning to God so that he fails to notice Christ's blood flowing down to quench the thirst of every heart. And in blindness the human being suffers endless pain.
But the poet is not without hope. In the last verse there is a desperate assertion in the tone that in Christ one can look for redemption.

Then sounds the voice of one who
like the heart of man
Was once a child who among beasts
has lain -
"Still do I love, still shed my
innocent light, my blood,
For thee."

The poem 'The Stand-To' by C.D. Lewis (BG, 48,49) on a group evolved in civil defence displays the new comaraderie brought about by war.

Often the comradeship that is spoken of is between the soldiers during combat or in some camps. But here C.D. Lewis speaks about the older men who did not go to serve in the war, instead were slowly involved when they were called for guarding the village, possibly when there was threat of invasion.

The poem opens with the description of autumn probably symbolising death for those thirty men, who were ordered to the 'Stand-To'. The poet mentions those thirty men who were either roadmen, farm labourers, masons who had all turned to 'another trade'. 
On the night the 'Stand-To' was ordered the poet feels this may be the last night all thirty men go home so he wishes to record in verse a picture of each of those men who had stood with him. Each of those thirty men had certain qualities and they were so faithful to one another, that words like 'destiny', 'fortitude', 'duty', 'history', 'honour', that were the stock-in-trade of politicians seem irrelevant to the love and fundamental decency that motivated these 'rag-tag' fighters. This also reveals that when the 'Stand-To' had been ordered, to those men who came forward, it was purely to protect their fellow beings. They did not come forward to honour these words by the politicians. Their duty was one of protection and they carried it out faithfully as a close-knit group.

So in the last verse the poet wishes that the autumn wind blows not just the leaves but also a song for those men. The poet is touched by such a display of comaraderie among these elderly village folk. They represent a 'tattered fire-flag' that flies in the 'heart of darkness.

One may end the section with a poem which records the scene with more immediacy.

Ruthevan Todd in 'These are Facts' (BG, 65, 66) refuses to claim that in war there are medals and glory to be won. He wishes to unearth what the war actually destroys.
He calls to mind how London was built and how the incessant bombings spared only the Dome of St. Paul's Cathedral. The newspapers made much of this but the poet cares more about the homes and the lives of the ordinary people of London. While the corpses are depicted in all the ugliness as a sorry stained and 'crumpled rag', 'liable to stink', the poet also wants to assert that people are more important than places, it is they that make a city not works of architecture. The poet has used his words very economically to bring out the loss of lives due to the bombings on London.

6.3 At the Front

6.3.1 Awaiting Battle

Experience of the battle did not always involve action. There was an indefinite period of time that had to be spent awaiting action.

R.N. Currey in the long section on 'Exile' in his collection This Other Planet reflects on the wrenching of a soldier from his roots and his departure into exile.

Part I under the section Exile is entitled 'Man's Roots'. It begins as:

Man's roots are not in earth.

And the poet goes on to mention how the trees, the flowers, all things in nature stand at one place while for man it is different. The change is observed starting with the farmer
who has left his field and moved to 'war with foreign powers.'

How man is destroyed if he is wrenched from his roots can be observed in the following lines:

But, as a ship or migrant bird or deer,
Moves in a limited orbit driving back
On pre-determined Courses, so with man;
His many branching lips, have roots, and he is drawn
By vital tissues; dying if they crack.

The comparison here is to an epiphyte, a plant that grows on another plant and that also has roots extending into the air.

Here man has roots in one place, the earth, to which he returns on death, while he develops aerial roots that branch out; these aerial roots that have eyes, mind, lips, are those that are directed to man's movements but if the 'vital tissues' that hold him to the earth, the host of the epiphyte are cut off it will result in his death.

Whatever may be his new course he has his roots in this earth to which he returns on his death. His exile as a soldier may uproot him to an alien land but there are 'vital tissues', bonds with which he is bound to this earth. His course is predetermined; to this earth he must return.

The comparison of man to an epiphytic plant that adapts itself to the environment for survival, projects a modern man's adaptation to war, and subsequent defence against the various destructive forces.
In part VII (p.20) under the same section of Exile the poet describes the exile at sea proceeding to examine the exile encountered by the family left behind at home. To quote:

Men, huge beneath artic equipment,  
setting out  
To remove aerial regions, whence to destroy  
Regions remote from their personal knowledge.

The opening lines indicate the exile at sea, the journey ahead unknown. Their only companions being the 'sustere air', 'fleecy ice cliffs', and vigorous space. The phrase to destroy regions remote indicates very far off places, and the personal knowledge of that region or any other information is unknown to the soldier, he knows only of his mission to destroy.

And at the end it is uncertain whether will find the extreme limit, 'Ultima Thule' or come back the way they went like a bus route whose starting and terminating point is the same. But whatever it is the poet says:

They have left their human values  
on the runway.

This is a form of exile for the soldier but the poet in the next verse relates this exile also to those parents who sends their sons to the war.

The soldiers have been uprooted from their place of birth, with only their roots, parents and family left behind,
and have been planted in an alien land, amidst alien speech and to be nourished in some alien way.

The poet writes that the parents sent their children

Unwillingly to greater safety, knowing
That every mile of the train's unpublished journey
Carried off not their children but themselves;
All these are exiles;
All those whose sons and husbands
fight in ships,
And planes, and remote places,
carrying off
Uprooted hearts, and leaving hearts
uprooted,
Beside their hearths and household Gods.

The poet wishes to capture the futility and aimlessness of war through the idea of exile. The soldier's restlessness, the uncertainty of the end, the dislodging of hearth and household, leaving all human values aside are aspects highlighted in the course of the whole poem.

While the poems discussed above reveal a reflective mood of the poet on his way to unknown lands, the poems that will follow now will bring out in a more concrete way the picture of a soldier who has reached his destination and is awaiting action.

This was often a very listless time for the soldier; He came prepared for death but he had to wait for it. This
sometimes made him contemplative; he reflected on his actions, he thought of death, the unknown fear disturbed his nerves and excited him. Whether as an airman or a soldier in an alien land he passed through a very tense emotional phase and this is observed in a couple of poems.

The first one is by Timothy Corsellis 'What I Never Saw' (BG, 70,71). The poem begins with the following lines:

I was ready for death,
Ready to give all in one expansive gesture
For a cause that was worthy of death.

The poet has come prepared, he is eager to take part, he is mentally ready for he regards his cause as worthy. Instead he has to wait when he realises -

What I never saw
Were the weary hours of waiting while the sun rose and set,
The everlasting eye turned upwards to the sky
Watching the weather which said 'Thou shall not fly.'

The weather is the obstacle to the air-force pilot so that he is not able to carry out the planned operation and his listlessness is projected in the lines where he constantly looks towards the sky and tries to predict the weather.

He is impatient 'watching the weather'. So he passes time with his companions with whom he shares a common interest in -
pronography and
a desire to outdrink one another.

During the course of conversation he realises -

War was remote

and those of his companions who were back were recounting
their experiences of those places.

The monotony of waiting is further enhanced through
the following lines -

The papers ran out early today,
There was no butter for the bread at
breakfast,
Nobody calls us at dawn,
we never strain or sweat,
Nor do they notice when we come late.

We observe how each trifle jars and irritates him and he
concludes

The sacrifice is greater than
I expected.

This line brings out the essence of the poem. The poet had
come prepared to sacrifice himself but what was expected was
a far greater sacrifice for an unknown length of time.

'Forgotten Army' by James K. Cassels (BG, 164) expressed a sense of fear while awaiting action in an alien
land.
The tropical climate, with its heat, dust, monsoon and jungles, tortured the soldiers. Under such circumstances 'the waiting' causes so much more misery. This is what the poet tries to project through the poem.

He gives a detailed account of the heat, the dust blowing, the toll of the drought followed by the misery after the monsoon.

Only in the last verse does the poet actually mention his fear.

The heat - the wind - the dust - the mud
Each grasps its hour, is cut away,
Savaged and slashed within its bud;
But we - we still await our day.

The poet feels that the worst of the climate has come and gone but they were still waiting. He feels the worst should be over for them also, because when the worst is over, they may even be able to go back but in the alien land if they remained so long indefinitely they may become a 'forgotten army'.

By describing nature's fury in lines like:

Destroying sun-drugged moods like flame
Scalding a lotus oozing mouth.

Or a phrase like:

Wind's lust is strong and male

or again:
Until the dust was beaten tame
By rain that swamped the months-old crust.
The poet reveals his mental preparation for the fury of the war. Yet his immediate worry is not how he will face the situation but the fear of waiting indefinitely, in which event his very existence may be forgotten.

6.3.2. The Actual Experience of Battle

Now turning to poems of the battle front we may begin with the war experience of air-force pilots.

'Operations Calling' by David Bourne (BG, 73,74) describes the speed with which the operation is carried out.

The poem opens with the airman receiving the coded instruction and immediately snatching his helmet he is off for action.

The second verse describes how he manoeuvres the parachute, fixing his oxygen snout getting in and out of the cockpit while preparing for the bombing for for bailing out in an emergency.

The last line that states 'Operations called and spoken.' indicates probably the final signal given and the attack that was carried out.

Words used precisely describe only the actual mechanism used to carry out the attack. This style conveys
the swiftness and the accuracy of the mode of attack.

Another poem that brings out the airman's alertness, his skill and manipulation of the enemy, his visualising the enemy, is Denyer Cox's 'Aviator' (AFF, 33, 34).

The opening lines describe the aviator's alert senses.

So carefully
The eye glances along the sights,
The instinctive mind calculates
from familiar data;
Ease forward, control the fall.

The aviator's senses react instinctively as though it is a reflex action. And with his calculating mind he gauges the distance and the bombing is carried out visualising the enemy in his mind.

Soon he sees the damaged enemy aircraft, so close that he can see the airman's face which:

Storms sickeningly up, confused among
dark wings
And the steel-jawed chatter of bullets.

After this the aviator is faced with an absurd question that brings out the reality of his action.

He visualises the twisted hands and limbs of the dead enemy and calls it 'idiot futility' and 'helplessness'. He questions his own mind as to where that dormant power was resting, in which corner of his mind that it got so easily provoked and resulted in bloodshed.
It was all futile, he was himself helpless in getting an answer for he realises that what was done cannot be undone; and there exists no fire that can weld the broken and torn spirit and flesh.

The aviator attempts to calm himself after the storm only realising the futility of his own action leading to the enemy's death.

In his other poem 'Elegy' (APP, 34, 35) E. Denyer Cox describes the manufacture of the bomb where the mass of unwrought metal is cast into a mould to acquire the cylindrical shape containing all the elements, so that the moment it is dropped it should have the capacity to destroy the Church and release blood, tears, agony among men.

This description of the bomb is going on in his mind while he is flying the aircraft. With the release of the bomb he wants to release his own agony because he says:

He was my brother. I will kill the brothers of him who killed my brother.

He is determined to take his revenge and he does so by releasing the bombs. The bomb while tearing the flesh releases the soul of these dead to fly bat-like in the night. And in the last verse when the clock 'crashes to the bubbling flames' completing the final destruction of the town the flames cover the shame of men.
Another poem 'A Pilot To All Ravaged Cities' (AFP, 53, 54) by Hugh Popham reveals the conflict in the poet's mind as he flies over the cities after bombing.

In the first verse the pilot sounds relieved that even though they bomb the cities and even though airmen die in the skies it is in the earth that the dead rest and this leaves no mark or scar in the sky.

He speaks of the silent spaces where they fight a different kind of battle. There are no cities in these spaces or in the moon that will reflect the human anguish. But looking down he can see the survivors in their houses built out of love and lying around are the dead.

In the final two verses again there is an assertion by the pilot, who feels he has the capacity to observe those victorious moments, endure those moments of fear and sadness because when they depart all the destruction is erased from the site of the battle, that is the sky.

In the course of his army life and the action on the battlefield the soldier develops a strange bond with his guns. And he communicates with his guns in an 'alien language'.

The dialogue that transpires between a soldier and his guns in an alien language is described in the poem 'Heavy Guns' by R.N. Currey.
The machine-gun's response to the soldier's shouted words in an 'alien language' is indicated by the movement of the pointer on the dial.

At the word 'fire' these guns put out their 'long tongues' of 'blinding flame' followed by the thundering noise. The mammoth fire makes him recall the likeliness of the scene to 'Aladdins djinns'.

But they are devil-slaves, Alladin djinn;
They keep the deadly letter of their command,
Exult to kill their masters cut of hand.

The machines' response to the soldiers' command resulting in the huge destruction is similar to Alladin's genie that was a spirit summoned, formed of fire which encircled the world, assuming various shapes enormous in size. It suggests something that was portentous and hideous.

The last line brings out the irony. The machines exult at killing the master, ultimately resulting in the master being ousted by the slave. The whole process of action is symbolic of the initial stages of war, and later war's hold over man.

War producing a machinery
of death and slavery.

(Soldier's Bathing, F.T. Prince, BG 95).
6.3.3 The Soldier

When in action soldiers are welded into a group with one aim and purpose. In some poems an effort has been made to stand back and present a detached view of the soldier when not in action.

'Soldier's Song' by Joceyn Brooke (BG, 88,39) presents a type of soldier with whom the educated poet in ordinary circumstances would have little in common. He tries to present him as he is with his imperfections as well as his finer qualities and seeks to get inside his skin. The language makes use of slang and colloquialisms which may be frequently used in novels on memoirs but not generally in war poetry.

The poet refers to the soldier as a 'swaddie' and asks death to be kind to this soldier who has already suffered the strains of war, but who is none-the-less cheerful. He feels a sense of satisfaction in his 'muscled body', 'quick hand', and 'practised eye'.

The poet tells us that the soldier has had his fill of women and drink and has given up hope of news from home. There is an antithetical note when he says how the soldier was 'bomb-happy', that is, he is the sort who enjoys action in battle probably because it holds more excitement yet he is scared of getting hit by a bomb.
He is grateful for being endowed with prized possessions like the 'quick hand', the 'practised eye' all of which are useful to him.

He is proud of his profession, of himself, of his 'easy mind', which has adjusted to all circumstances and his withstood all the calamities.

In the last verse once again he repeats his request 'to death' to be kind to the soldier and this time he gives the reason that it is only through the soldier that the seeds of future generation will be born, it is only in their 'dark sun's setting' that there will be a 'harvest' or a fresh new breed.

Throughout the poem the poet uses colloquial language and phrases and sketches the life that the soldier has already seen. He is rather tired of it, he feels it's enough. He does not fail to mention his gratefulness for all the qualities that he possesses, he does not plead but only requests an easier release from the present life. The poet has brought out how the soldier made the most of available life embodied by a sense of excitement, bravado, pride and the evermingling sense of fear.

'Soldiers bathing' by F.T. Prince (BG, 96,97,98) is a poem containing long sections where the poet philosophizes on the present sacrifices involved in the war.
The poet observes a band of soldiers belonging to his own group bathing, stripped bare.

The scene is the starting point where the sight of the naked body leads to reflection.

Although the naked body was a reminder of the soldier's bestial strength, and that was disgusting as the soldier stands naked for the poet the body is no longer gross but 'fragile and luminous', conscious of the desires and needs of the flesh. This nakedness the soldier feels is much sweeter and in such an atmosphere he forgets 'his hatred of the war'; how the war was a machine that produced either death or slavery.

The poet is reminded of Michelangelo's cartoon of 'Soldier's bathing' and another by the Florentine Pollaiuolo who painted a battle of naked warriors, with the foe being straddled and slain. He recollects the nakedness of these bodies and how both paintings by both Italian painters represented 'war's sorrow and disgrace'.

Next is the allusion to Christ on the Cross slain and stripped representing the fury of the human beings that had led to his being crucified on the cross.

Suddenly the poet realises that today we are scarcely 'conscious of ourselves'. For this he derives his own explanation as the presence of some great love that has made us so furious that in terror of it we rotate round its groove that has been:
'Greased with our blood.'

Perhaps crime affords a certain freedom, while love brings terror. Hence we prefer it. He is no longer afraid of fear or ashamed of nakedness. He is conscious of a strange delight in him as though even the evil is beautiful, perhaps because human nobility manifests itself in resistance to evil as Christ showed divinity in his willingness to suffer at the hands of the evil doer.

The poem is a fairly long contemplation on the various implications of war, its shame, sorrow, disgrace, and its evils.

'Air Gunner' by John Tudney (AFP, 58,59)\textsuperscript{34} fittingly expresses the feelings and thoughts of an inarticulate young man caught up in the turmoils of war. Tudney himself was in the R.A.F. and as in most of his other poems he was able to communicate, not only his own experience but that of countless others.

In the present poem the poet reflects on the transformation of boy into man in war. When he first looked through the gun his eyes were a boy's eyes. They revealed doubt and uncertainties and he trembled with fear.

Soon the eye acquires greater vision to observe beyond the object. He discovers peace when he watches the migrating birds that go year after year timelessly because it is a
necessity, for them to do so yet they perform it uncalculatingly; that is they do not evaluate their results beforehand. The birds go there for their own purpose. It is the purpose that was important.

This helps the airgunner to put his 'boyish doubts' aside. He realises his task, his purpose his present that was important. At this stage he says:

The man's eye and the boy's were one.
Mockery and death retreat
Before the eye behind this gun.

He has now acquired the eyes of a man in front of whose eyes 'mockery' and 'death' both retreat. He does not analyse the outcome of his actions neither does he reflect on death except to remind himself of the purpose of it all and in this is his transformation.

6.3.4 The Enemy

This section includes poems that bring out the reactions of the soldier when he faces the enemy or comes upon the body of the enemy he has killed.

The first poem considered here is 'Combat Report' by John Pudney (BG 76,77). The whole poem has two voices and two possibilities can be envisaged regarding the two voices.

Just then I saw the bloody Hun. (1)
You saw the Hun? You, light and easy
Carving the soundless daylight. (2)
The first sentence (1) printed in italics is the airman reporting while sentence (2) may be either the retrospective voice of the poet, who is reflecting in a more sophisticated way on the account the airman has given him or it could be the poet sitting listening to the airman and commenting to himself as the airman speaks.

Initially the airman refers to the enemy as 'the Hun' and his reaction is:

I was breezy when I saw that Hun.

Now the enemy 'that Hun' may not have been actually visible to him, it may be just the enemy's aircraft but from the tone in which 'that Hun' is mentioned it sounds as an abusive word. It conjures up an image of a barbarous brutal enemy.

The airman describes the hide and seek combat in the clouds between him and his enemy and even praises him for his skilled manoeuvring. But soon the airman brings the German aircraft down and says:

He burnt out in the air; that's how the poor sod died.

The enemy's death immediately changes the airman's feeling and he calls him a 'poor sod' which reflects his sympathy towards the 'dead enemy'.

All along while the airman gives the commentary of his sighting 'the Hun' and later the mode of attack to the final end, the second voice is seen to be responding to
every comment. The second voice is more literary and as the plane rises higher in the clouds the voice reflects:

Did Michaelangelo aspire,
Painting the laughing cumulus
The majesty of the air.

And later when the enemy aircraft catches fire the second voice does not credit or discredit the airman but voices his opinion on the aircraft that 'is deadly' that does not take pride in its actions and under any circumstances can pass through 'heaven' as well as the dirt. He probably feels that the airman will react to the circumstance while the plane which effected the attack was immune to what it had done.

The jungles constantly presented the fear of snipers to the soldiers. Bernard Gutteridge bring out the various emotions of a soldier attacked by a sniper in his poem titled 'Sniper' (BG, 166, 167).

The poem opens with the attack on the English soldiers hidden among the 'feathery banana trees'. The poet appreciates the sniper's marksmanship. His killing of the English soldier with skill and precision is brought out:

Again as it was last time, that spurring noise, thud, and the writhing figure in long grass.

To match the sniper's precision the poet says:

We move ten men to one and have him then!
This reveals the brute force that was used to match the superb precision of the sniper.

Finally the English soldiers manage to kill the sniper but the poet says:

He had killed neatly but we had set
Ten men about him to write death in jags
Cutting and spoiling on his face and broken body.

Clearly the soldiers are ashamed at the way they killed the sniper, in such a clumsy fashion that his whole face was cut and spoilt and the body broken. There is a sense of appreciation of the enemy in terms of the method the enemy employed and also of his brave spirit for he was alone and the English soldiers were a group of about ten. The enemy was punished as an act of defence more than revenge and more so his work was appreciated.

In the poem 'Vergissmeinnicht' Keith Douglas (BG, 107, 108) describes his reactions when he and his companions go back to the 'nightmarish ground' and find the body of one of the enemy soldiers lying sprawled out in the sun. The combatants have all returned and left behind was this dead soldier, his body mutilated. Seeing the body the poet recalls the live enemy.

As we came on
that day, he hit my tank with one
like the entry of a demon.
The enemy's powerful attack, his strength, all appear vividly before the soldier poet's eyes. While the poet is immersed in such thoughts he notices:

Look, Here in the gun pit soil
The dishonoured picture of his girl
Who has put; Steffi Vergissmeinneht
in a copybook gothic script.

Probably the dead soldier's little belongings like his purse or diary have fallen out of his pocket and in the gun pit soil they find a photograph of his girl friend who had scribbled on it the words 'forget me not'. The state which the photograph had reached made the soldiers feel that she did not deserve that treatment, hence the word 'dishonoured' to describe the picture.

Keith Douglas then dwells the irony of the situation, the dead soldier lying there, his body mutilated, his girl-friend's photograph beside him in a dishonoured state while the tank or the soldier's equipment was as it was 'hard and good'. It had not suffered any change.

In the last verse the poet delicately differentiates in the mutilated body of the soldier the two identities that had complemented each other to form one body. The soldier was a lover and a killer. But though death had destroyed the killer it had automatically done the lover mortal hurt. The killer and the lover had returned to dust.
Douglas wants to bring out how the killer and the lover are like two sides of a coin; the killer symbolising evil and the lover goodness and loyalty. In what appears evil there may be love engrained also. Both exist together and complement each other. And this is true in the case of an enemy soldier also.

Another poem on somewhat similar lines is 'Fort Capuzzo' by Hamish Henderson (BG, 103). Here the poet breaking journey at Capuzzo, notices a soldier as he entered the cemetery.

and stood looking at the grave of
the fallen enemy.

On watching this scene the poet is unconsciously touched by the soldier's action and recalls the word 'pietas' and says no commentator, pimp or informer or traitor would know what the word meant. 'Pietas' is a word that calls to mind the figure of virgin Mary with the dead body of Christ in her arms. What it epitomises here is the deep sympathy of the soldier while he visits the grave of his enemy. This sympathy, from the bottom of one's heart cannot be obtained or seen as coming from the news reel commentator who merely conveys the messages of death.

In the next verse the poet represents the soldier's thoughts which in all probability are his own. He refers to the dead soldier as a 'Good Jerry' because in war it was
assumed that 'the only good Jerry is a dead Jerry', and the poet had the relief of looking at a dead one. But immediately he is sympathetic also when he observes how young the dead soldier was 'just eighteen', and at that young age he had lost everything. He recalls the various reasons for which the young soldier may have decided to join the army. Either he would have been conscripted or he would have volunteered. On the word 'volunteered' the poet calls the dead soldier, a 'silly bastard' and calls it a 'fatal mistake' he had made. He repeats the word 'fatal mistake'; probably he regrets his own decision to volunteer and he thus wishes to emphasize his mistake.

The poet even tries to think how the enemy soldier must have died and is at the same time thankful that it was not one of his own 'chaps'.

In the last couple of lines he says:

Dont be late on parade when
the Lord calls 'Close Order'
Keep waiting for angels. Keep
listening for Reville.

Here he hopes that after death it will be different, it's the Lord who will call him.

The poem comprises a mixture of feelings. The feeling that it is the enemy dissipates on seeing the youth that has perished in the process and takes the form of compassion and regret at inhuman suffering.
Some poets trace this inhuman killing back to the beginning of mankind, to Cain killing his own brother and being a coward. This is observed in 'Cain in the jungle' by Denys L. Jones (BG, 168). In fact the very first line contains an allusion to Cain's killing.

I have killed my brother in the jungle,
And the way he has killed so neatly with precision tells us that he was 'sniper'.

After the killing the soldier feels in some way a connection to the dead enemy soldier. He traces his relationship to the evolution of mankind: beginning with the 'paleozoic prototype' the original form which his mother too had come from:

In Caverns on some slow silurian stream.

Silurian relates to the 'geological time, the third period that characterized the appearance of land plants.

At that time the young ones or cublings played with one another; there was no differentiation in any way while they worked on flints bones or scraped the skins of the ichthyosaurs, the extinct fish-like marine reptile. Soon changes appear with the improvements in evolved forms; even at that time the poet and his brother were together but inspite of all this relationship he fought.
He fought his brother 'for the planets', that is, a stage had come when man fought for supremacy in everything whether it was land, air or in water. He disentangled himself from nature. He did not wait to hear the 'linnets'. He was only interested in gaining supremacy.

He had killed his brother in what now seems to him a cowardly manner, made his wife a widow and all that he inherited out of his action was his brother's empty house.

This is a long highly literary poem in which the poet attempts to accept his guilt, by acknowledging a relationship with the enemy, the starts from the making of mankind. By this he also presents the enormity of the killings in the war and what it signifies in the history of mankind.

The soldier poet's view of the enemy in this war may be summed up in the lines from R.N. Currey quoted by Roy Machab in a review of war poems by R.N. Currey from his volume 'This Other Planet':

To us he is no more than a
machine
Shadow on an instrument, what can
he mean
In human terms? a man, somebody's son
Proud of his skill, compact of flesh and bone
Fragile as Icarus — and our desire
To see that damned machine come down.'

This demonstrates in a way what the enemy meant to a sensitive poet during the war.
6.3.5 The Dead

The theme of death is treated in any war poetry and it is appropriate that we now pass on to this. The sight of the dead reminds one of the actual agony. The soldier has undergone, and also the ultimate value of his flesh.

In his poem 'Gallantry' Keith Douglas (BG, 106,107) is cynical about the applauding of death in battle while in reality what modern war inflicted was an ignominious death. He rejects the Colonel's glorification of war.

The poem begins with the Colonel mentioning a joke over the microphone which the poet feels is relayed 'into the ears of a doomed race'.

Here the poet recalls the different ways in which those three young boys had lost their lives. The poet mocks at the 'gallantry' of the colonel who does not take part in the combat but says 'it was a brave thing' that these boys had done. The poet feels it is only a term for the colonel's use because the reality was inhuman.

In this way the poet condemns the dehumanization of war being painted in glorifying words like 'heroes'. He feels it all a show, and by rejecting such glorification is actually exposing the harsh reality.

The poet's repeated mentioning of 'into the ears of a doomed race', 'into the ears of the boy' conveys the total dehumanisation of man's race and their extinction from earth.
Sometimes the surviving soldier suffers a certain guilt when he watches the dead body as he passes by because of his inability to help the dead. This attitude is reflected in the poem 'War Dead' by Gavin Ewart (BG, 178). The body of a dead soldier is 'lying by the roadside in his proper place', with the face all covered with dust. This reminds the poet of a piece of used equipment that has been thrown aside.

The poet is sarcastic over the glorification of these dead soldiers. 'War memorials' built in their honour, he feels, are a sad attempt to acknowledge their sacrifice and atone. The land that is covered with their lamenting stones was once covered by the bodies of the dead soldiers whom no one heeded. And to the poet these 'lamenting stones' are a heavier load on the heart of these soldiers because they rekindle the scene of these dead bodies beside the road.

The comparison of the dead soldier with used equipment thrown aside is very touching while exposing the bitter truth of war.

The poem 'After Night Offensive' by James Farrar (BG, 179) brings out the stillness after the attack. All that is heard is the distantly echoed cry of the owl.

Only the 'peep of the moon' and the slight wind moving the grass reveal the dead soldier's lying amidst the grass. He describes the dead soldiers as:
Rooted to the soil, remote and 
faint as stars, 
Looking to neither side, they lay all 
night. 
Sunken in the murmurous seas of grass.

The dead soldiers are immovable, so the poet feels they are remote from the scene of action and sunk in the grass are no longer visible to anyone.

The only lullaby is the 'Cries of the owls' and the noise of the 'wind and the moon' as they play softly with the dead.

The stillness of the aftermath of an attack is as imposing and enormous as the offensive. And this stillness effects one's nerves equally with the action.

The poet skilfully uses the night scene, with the moon, the faint stars to bring out the vulnerability and the defenceless state of the dead soldiers lying amidst the 'seas of grass'.

There are the dead all around and they evoke different feelings in each one and what happens when you see your own dead in territory that the enemy had occupied is rather interesting to study. The poem is an extract from a poem entitled 'Portrait And Background' by James Walker (BG, 101).

The moon-light isolates the dead soldiers as being somewhere far away but it's the vivisecting light of the sun.
that oppresses the poet. Because in sunlight the identities of those dead soldiers are revealed and most of them are anonymous.

The poet is grateful that the enemy have placed stones over the bodies that will keep their bones a little longer from the jackals and the ravens.

At one place where there was a patch of wild flowers growing and some larks were seen, he reads a small sign

'Ein unbekannter englischer soldat.' meaning an unknown English soldier. Though he is pleased at the inclusion of the word 'English' which provides more identification than the bare 'unknown' he is displeased by the word 'unknown'. The word haunts him because of the realization that their end was anonymity. The soldier for all he had sacrificed became someone unknown in the end.

This realization makes him despise his body and his flesh. And he says from that time when it was dark, if they happened to stumble over these dead they cursed those who were dead as well as themselves.

They cursed the dead because they reminded them of their end in anonymity while they cursed themselves for continuing to be involved in war.

The ultimate end makes him furious yet he cannot escape the present. This is well depicted in this poem.
6.3.6 The Ravaged Land

In the Second World War fighting was scattered over various terrains and not confined to a limited area as in the case of the First World War. Probably because of this one does not come across many poems where the theme of the ravaged land is discussed unlike the poetry of the First World War.

'Observation Post - Forward Area' by Alun Lewis (BG, 169) has the picture of a foreign land ravaged by war.

The poem opens with a description of a poverty-stricken land. But this life too had a place for love though in the present they were inflicted by a darker beast than poverty, that had spread fear all around. The last verse says:

Love could be had for nothing.
And where is love now?
Gone with the shambling oxen,
Gone with the broken plough,
Death lives here now.

This verse implies that in spite of being poverty stricken love was there but the war has devastated everything so that in the place nothing resides except death.

A typical scene of the poverty stricken is brought out in the bleached thorns, in words like decay, drought and the skinny goat herd. And a more devastating scene of a land
devastated by battles is brought out in the following lines:

The cowdung fires guttered out,
The wizened women cried,
The bridegroom lay trembling,
and rigid the bride.

How the simple life was stunned to silence can be observed in the above lines.

6.3.7 The P.O.W. Experience

The POWs (Prisoners of War) had their own form of experience of alien lands.

'OFlag Night Piece' by Michael Riviere (BG, 137) describes the poet as an isolated POW in an impregnable 'Schloss' in Germany. There are three hundred POWs but they are all separated from each other.

The poet describes the topography of the place where they are imprisoned and also the way they are guarded. This was only a form of physical imprisonment. The poet in his mental capacity is still free. They cannot imprison the thoughts of these POWs.

The POW may not be free to move about or do anything but he has not lost his freedom of thinking. And with such encouraging thoughts and thoughts of his home that are again 'unchallenged' the poet says:

The vanishing prisoners escape to sleep.

Even if one assumes that the prisoners have been subjected to
a harsh physical treatment, sleep was an 'escape' from physical and mental agony and that escape could never be prevented.

In another poem 'The Blind Cat' Alex Potter (BG, 138, 139) draws an analogy between a blind cat and a person at a camp. To quote the first verse:

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About the square a black cat plays,
    He has a curious mind,
And lives in a world as dark as
    himself
For this strange black cat is blind.
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The square to which the cat is confined indicates the person being kept in a camp while the word 'blind' implies being cut off from the outside world.

The poet describes the birth of the 'black blind cat' in the barracks probably trying to imply how their generation had been born in the war environment and ended up as being part of it. But here is the only difference. While the 'blind cat' always had his mother with him who guarded and guided him, these soldiers had no one. So in the last verse the poet says:

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Now many of us are like that cat,
We don't know where we are going.
A pity our mothers are not with us,
To see what we are doing.
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Probably through these last lines the poet wishes to express
that there are many who regret having joined the war which they had done because of their curiosity.

The sheltered and protected black cat evokes the memory of a home and warmth which is not unusual when in an alien land.

6.3.8 Myth and Reality

There are few poems one comes across in Second World War poetry where one observes the poet rejecting the old concept of heroism. They myth about a war hero that has been carried on for centuries is contrasted with the present situation thus highlighting the reality of modern war.

John Jarman in El Alamein (BG, 100,101)\textsuperscript{43} captures the reactions of a soldier who had fought at El Alamein and later hears that the place is now full of flowers.

The poet is unable to erase from his memory those days when the 'Sea of Sand' was crazy and the battle made El Alamein as famous as 'Troy' or 'Agincourt'.

He says of El Alamein he only recalls 'the grey faced men' covered with sand, the tanks, the guns, the trucks, and the wreckage that was left behind.

Those men have mingled so much in the sand that it can only belong to them. He feels a oneness with that land and says that the others who came will never understand all this. They will just halt near these 'rusty mine fields' and notice the flowers.
The poet somehow expresses a duality of feelings. First he is sorry because the truth about the numerous loss of lives at El Alamein will not be remembered as they will be covered by the flowers. Yet at the same time by not sharing this grief with the others the poet feels those moments and that land will only be theirs. No one can take the reality that was El Alamein away from him.

The poem depicts the ferocity of the desert war, resulting in huge claims made on lives and how at the end of it a soldier wishes to cherish alone these moments.

The actual scene of war is contrasted against the flowers presently found at El Alamein as also contrasting the myth surrounding the death of those soldiers to the agony that they had undergone.

T.W. Ramsay in his poem 'From the Eighth Army' (BG, 99,100) rejects the old concept of heroism by describing the reality and contrasting it with the myth.

He describes what the soldiers actually went through when he says:

We ploughed the sand with shell
   and burning bomb
And found few bones there where
   we left our own ...

Again later in the poem he speaks of how they hated the sand because of sand's capacity to absorb all their blood. He feels at least it was just the desert sand, for they could
have been sent into the mud. This revealing that they could have been sent to worse places while the papers would call them heroes.

The soldiers who went through the war realised the existence of such a myth of a hero being a visionary being who may have existed only in Greece.

In the last verse the poet mentions the soldier who returns to the sand after wandering the whole day; where the dust forms a coverlet over him and the hero lies there buried under the dust, only to be forgotten.

The poet rejects the myth of the soldiers proclaimed as a hero in the newspapers by presenting the reality of the situation.

That an older view of heroism is still preserved however is evident in 'Think Not That They Are Lonely' by O.C. Chave (APF, 27). The poet speaks of the people of the occupied lands who defy their German oppressors by placing flowers on the graves of British aviators.

The poem describes everyone passing by paying homage to their quietness. In paying such a tribute to the aviators they have been made into demigods. Their shrines may not be huge and overpowering, drawing large crowds of various people. Yet all Europe pays homage to them through tributes of flowers or far off in silence. Although the heroic myth is preserved
those who pay tribute to the heroes are ordinary
simple suffering people in their gratitude and not orators
and politicians who have suffered nothing. The tone of the
poem is not plangent and hence does not jar as do other poems
that preserve the myth of heroism.

6.4 Alien Lands

While many fine poems already discussed in the section
on 'At The Front', are set in alien surroundings like the
jungle or desert and summon up these landscapes, in the
poems analysed below action is remote; and the soldier is
on his own in the alien surroundings. What the new
surroundings reflect to the soldier, how he makes an effort
to study them and what he ultimately sees in them can be
observed.

The first poem discussed in this section is 'The
Mahratta Ghats', by Alun Lewis.

The first two verses of the poem are about the
Mahratta Ghats the will slopes where the goats are grazing
on plants that have 'bitter thistles'. He describes the
huge rocks jutting out at certain places while they are
loosened at other points along the tracks; and the
unbearable heat and the harshness of labour when he says:

Dark peasants drag the sun upon
their backs.
The hard labour, the heat that robs the body of strength is apparently visible in their dark colour and effort with which they drag their loads.

In the next verse there is the 'red soil' of the Ghats turned into 'finer red' conveying the existence of a fertile patch about which he says in the last line of the verse:

'Siva has split his seed upon this land.'

Then follows the description of the vast arid land, and the endless sufferings of the peasant woman, the herds grazing, the cowdung fires, the brutal force of the zamindars and the 'grinning priests'. The poet questions will the peasant move away from this reality,

And climb, before a thousand years have fled,
High as the eagle to her mountain bed
Whose soil is fine as flour and blood red.

The poet seeks an answer to his question in the immovability of land. The peasants or the lean folks have no other means of livelihood, they are bound to that arid patch for life, indebted to the zamindar. The whole system of landlords, priests and Gods whom they have worshipped as having exploited them. And wonders:

And did a thousand years go by in vain?
And does another thousand start again?

The poem does not picturise the war in any way, but reveals how a soldier poet in an alien surrounding has tried
to study the civilization of that place.

Along similar lines is the poem 'Jasper And The Khaki Drill' by Reginald Levy (BG, 153, 164). The poet is curious to absorb every aspect of the surroundings. He is in the process of acquiring new information about the place and all this has a sad undertone where it links to the memory of home and that becomes his limitation.

The poet is charmed by the colours of sunrise and sunset; he finds them 'exotic, erotic' and they cast a disturbing spell on their barrack life. He feels entranced amidst such beauty, but also senses an incongruity between the Khaki clad soldiers from Camberwell or Glasgow in close juxtaposition with the bright Indian colours the Taj Mahal, and

Wishing it were our own
Church steeple.

Next one turns to a desert experience in the poem 'Egypt' by C.S. Fraser (BG, 95). By giving three examples in the first two verses the poet reasons out how the awareness of reality would make one cautious of its false image.

There is the man who recognizes the 'unloving hands' of the prostitute, wanting to return to his own 'home-town pretties'. Then the man who knows what compromise the flesh has to make, and will always feel safer studying theory in
some books. Lastly if one knew the demands of the posters calling volunteers for the war one would go and read it again before taking his decision.

But the poet says the fisherman who spread the net is very shrewd. The migratory birds who fall a prey to it end their hopes of going back for ever. Here lies the similarity to the soldier's life. And the explanation for this is sought in the next couple of verses.

In those verses the poet mentions the Nile irrigating a barren region, the presence of the palms whose roots are just ankle-deep in sand. The life of the exiled soldier is equally shallow and illusory. He seeks momentary diversions but comes to terms ultimately with the reality as the grounds of that is as bitter/coffee at the bottom of the cup.

Probably the poet tries to convey that after the desert experience they could not hope for anything in life. Desert war had made a meaningless existence of their lives.

6.5 The Aftermath

When war was over there were the soldiers who survived and those families who lost their men in war. There are a few poems that bring out the feelings of these survivors.

Often the Second World War soldiers being at an unbridgeable distance from home for long periods of time were worried that they would in course of time be forgotten at home.
They felt that their lovers would no longer be waiting at home for them. The soldiers in prose works often use blasphemous words while speaking about their lovers. Very different is the poem 'War Widow' about to be discussed where the poet J.B. Warr (APF, 82) captures the feelings of a war widow.

In the first verse the poet brings out her inability to communicate with anyone who comes to console her on the death of her husband and also later. In course of time, as years pass by, her feelings have been numbed so that there are no tears left behind to weep for him. In fact she does not sense any pain and after his death she has herself ostracised herself, kept aloof from everyone and everything so that after years she cannot communicate with any one at all. She only knows:

'He is with me still'

She has only those memories of her beloved that she relives when she is alone. What makes the poem different is that a 'forgotten love' is being visualised from an opposite end.

In another poem titled 'Poem After Victory' John Townsend (BG, 190, 131) captures the scene of pain, grief and pity after the war.

The opening lines describe the scene after the war, the countless number of dead and those 'uncertain' survivors who are returning to 'pity' pain and grief.
Uncertain, for one never knew their fate, certainty was only death, but they were returning to an uncertain life of pain, pity and grief.

They were returning to the desolate cities that symbolised grief. They would recall the memory of those slain in the war. They were returning to lead their lives in pain for they were all in some way handicapped. They suffered from 'severed limbs', and all these could be only reshaped in pain.

But 'pity' to all those 'uncertain survivors' was just like a 'shattered stump'

'bleeding within his brain'.

That is, the disaster was so great that it had numbed all emotion. Their emotions are 'characterless as rain'. They can receive nothing nor can they give anything. To quote the last two lines:

And corpses exhale no pity; and the living
Batten upon the slain.

Those dead required no pity and even those living, the 'uncertain survivors', fed on the dead for it is through their death that the living could survive.

For Johnny' written on the back of an envelope during an air-raid became quite famous after it was used in the film 'The way to the stars' and subsequently was
almost an embarrassment to the poet since he had written better poems which tended to be obscured by the attention paid to this one poem.” (Howard Sergeant in C. poets, Ed. James Vinson). Here the same poem by John Pudney (APP 58) has been analysed as an epitaph to conclude this chapter.

In rejecting a shroud and the people’s tears for Johnny, the poet rejects the common man’s pity. Because pity will not help Johnny who is dead or even his family. What helps the dead is food for their children, a better world for their children. He says:

Better by far
For Johnny - the bright star
To keep your head
And see his children fed.

6.6 Conclusion

On the basis of analysis of the poetry written during the Second World War the following can be observed as the distinctive features of the poetry of this war.

First is the poetry written at the outset of war, grouped under 'The New Learning' section. These poems reveal the initial awareness of the outcome of war and the reactions to the instructions given at training camps. The soldier’s realization of his transformation comes in at the very beginning of war.
Next are the poems on the civilian bombings in London and around, the air-raid shelters, and poems on civil defence which capture the inhuman and unnatural nature of the Second World War apart from depicting the civilian involvement in war.

The indefinite period of time spent in awaiting action contributes to a large body of poetry by soldiers during this war. At such times a soldier stands back and presents a detached view of the experiences of war. He dwells on his life, on his feelings towards the enemy, and sometimes absorbs himself in the alien civilization. Thus the poetry covers the complete range of experiences at the front during this war.

There are a couple of poems, for example, 'Heavy Guns' by a poet like R.N. Currey which describe the new technological warfare yet reveal the poet's negative attitude towards such innovations.

The poets have tried to bring out these various themes analysed in this chapter by drawing allusions from the history of mankind or from religion. Sometimes they contrast the reality with myth thus highlighting the horrors of war. The reject pity so that reality can be confronted. Thus the poets cover the various terrains of war, succeeding in doing so in almost every way.
End Notes:

Frequent references have been made in the body of the text to poems from two anthologies namely: (1) Air Force Poetry by John Pudney and Henry Treece, (2) The Terrible Rain by Brian Gardner. Hence the following abbreviations have been used while referring to them in the course of the chapter.

(A) Air Force Poetry (AFP) ed Henry Treece and John Pudney (London. John Lane. The Bodley Head Ltd, First pub. 1944)


(2) ibid, p.21.

(3) ibid, p.22,23.

(4) ibid, p.30.

(5) ibid, pp.32,33.

(6) ibid, pp.33,34.

(7) ibid, pp.35,36.

(8) ibid, p.40.

(9) ibid, p.32.

(10) ibid, p.31.
(11) ibid, pp.39, 40.
(12) ibid, pp.74, 75.
(13) ibid, p.29.
    (London, John Lane, The Bodley Head Ltd, First pub. 1944) p.46.
(15) ibid, p.39.
(16) ibid, p.24.
(17) Gardener, op.cit, p.17.
(18) ibid, p.50.
(19) ibid, p.62.
(20) Donald C. Freeman, *Dylan Thomas's Syntax in Roger Fowler's Style and Structure in Literature, Essays in New Stylistics*.
    (Oxford, 1975)
(21) Gardener, op.cit. pp.48, 49.
(22) ibid, pp.65, 66.
(23) R.N. Currey, *This Other Planet*.
    (London, George Routledge and Sons Ltd, 1945) p.12.
(24) ibid, p.20.
(25) Gardener, op.cit, pp.70, 71.
(26) ibid, p.164.
(27) ibid, pp.73-74.
(28) Pudney, Treece, op.cit. pp.33, 34.
(29) ibid, pp.34, 35.
(30) ibid, pp.53, 54.
(31) R.N. Currey, op.cit. p.33.
(32) Gardner, op.cit, pp.88,89.
(33) ibid, pp.96,97,98.
(34) Pudney Treece, op.cit, pp.58-59.
(35) Gardner, op.cit, pp.76,77.
(36) ibid, pp.166,167.
(37) ibid, pp.107,108.
(38) ibid, p.103.
(39) ibid, p.168.
(40) Roy Menab on R.N. Currey.
in *Contemporary poets* edited by James Vinson.
(42) ibid, p.178.
(43) ibid, p.179.
(44) ibid, p.101.
(45) ibid, p.169.
(46) ibid, p.137.
(47) ibid, pp.138,139.
(48) ibid, pp.100,101.
(49) ibid, pp.99,100.
(50) Pudney Treece, op.cit, p.27.
(52) Gardner, op.cit, pp.163,164.
(53) ibid, p.95.
(54) Rodney, Tracee, op.cit., 67.
(55) Gardner, op.cit., pp. 120, 121.
(57) Rodney, Tracee, op.cit. 58.