INTRODUCTION

The thesis covers a study of man at war as projected by the English poets in the poetry of the First World War, the Spanish Civil War and the Second World War.

The poetry written during each war has already been discussed by critics in great detail separately, particularly that of the First World War. Hence this study will seek to have a comparative focus and will bring out the distinctive features of the poetry of each group of poets as well as the differences between the groups arising out of the political situations and attitudes prevalent at the time.

The poetry of British poets alone has been considered, because to consider the poetry by poets from other nations, even English-speaking nations, would tend to make this research task very extensive.

Even though Britain was not involved in the Spanish Civil War, there were British volunteers who joined the International Brigade and went to Spain. Also the Spanish Civil War soon assumed international status, when it was felt that the fate of humanity all over hinged on the fate of Spain. The Spanish Civil War was immediately followed by the Second World War and bearing all this in mind the Spanish Civil War has been included in the thesis.
Each of the wars has been dealt with in two chapters. Chapters 1 and 2 pertain to the First World War, Chapters 3 and 4 to the Spanish Civil War and Chapters 5 and 6 to the Second World War.

A question may be raised here as to the relevance of Chapters 1, 3 and 5.

These chapters will examine memoirs, letters and other accounts by combatants and non-combatants. In addition interviews have been held where possible with those directly involved. Reference has also been made to one novel in Chapter 1 and one in Chapter 5.

Chapter 1

A study of the sources indicated above gives an insight into the background of the war. Memoirs, letters and novels candidly bring out the experiences of the soldier. They are more raw and undistilled and a soldier is able to communicate in greater detail in these forms of writing. He does not wait upon moments to seize words (to use Rosenberg’s phrase) and then put them in verse.

Chapter 3

The Spanish Civil War was the result of a clash of political ideas, that had its root in the preceding history of Spain. In this event a study of this earlier history and the political background reveal the atmosphere in which the poetry of that period was written.
Students of English literature will be aware of the events that led to the First World War and the Second World War and the course of events during the war. But with regard to the Spanish Civil War they will only have vague ideas of a heroic cause and of how people all over the world rallied round it in the belief that on the fate of Spain hinged the fate of humanity all over. They will not be familiar with the actual course of events or the preceding background and hence the study of the history in this context becomes essential. The Spanish Civil War brought the civilians into the scene of war. This civil war soon took on an international dimension, hence in the case of the Spanish Civil War books like Stephen Spender's *World Within World* or Dorothy Livesay's *Right Hand Left Hand* which has a section on Spain are considered, as they reveal the opinion of other nations, Austria in the first case, Canada in the second towards Spain. These also reveal policies of intervention and non-intervention followed by different nations towards Spain during the civil war. Also included in this chapter is an interview with a Spanish person who had taken part in the Spanish Civil War. This has helped to reveal aspects which may have been written about in Spanish but to which a researcher working with English sources, would not have had access.
Chapter 5

And finally in the case of the Second World War; the soldiers were at an unbridgeable distance from home, either in an alien civilization or at sea, separated from their homes for an indefinite period of time. To these soldiers who were exiled in alien lands or confined to a limited space of a ship for two years or more, every day was an experience. When questioned later about their experiences these men could only say 'we were there then, now we are not.'

A study of such incidents through memoirs or periodicals like *Penguin New Writing* reveals the atmosphere to which a soldier poet was exposed. The chapter seeks to provide wide coverage of the varied theatres of war as well as of the endurance of the civilians during the bombings.

The Second World War practically involved the whole world. It was a total war in every respect involving the lives of a lot of non-combatants and civilians. Interviews with the surviving civilians from a war zone reveal the trauma that they underwent.

Since the chapter will deal only with the British experiences, very important aspects such as Nazism, the European or Chinese resistance movements or the Hiroshima bombings are left out.
Thus Chapters 1, 3 and 5 have been included with the objective of giving a deeper insight into the conditions prevalent at that period and the factors that could have influenced the writing of poetry as observed in the respective wars. The intention is also to examine to what extent the poetry includes the experiences described here and to what extent it selects, shapes and alters them.

Chapters 2, 4 and 6 deal with the analysis of poetry written during the corresponding war periods. But they do not follow an identical pattern, as the circumstances are different and consequently the range described in the poems is different.

In Chapter 2, except for a couple of poems by 'arm-chair' poets like Kipling and Hardy, all the poems considered are those written by soldiers involved in the war.

This chapter categorises the poems into three distinctive periods: the early period of war, the transitional period and the later period of war. In the early period the soldier poets wrote on themes expressing patriotic ideals, heroic war and glorious death, gradually turning to expose the trench life. The transitional period has poems expressing a complete disenchantment, the initial shock, a greater concretization of war but not a complete picture of war. While in the later poetry more predominant
is the mood of indignation over the continuation of war and the concern over those surviving the war. The ignominious death, the filthy soldier, the gibbering mental cases are all described in the later poetry.

Although poems by many soldier poets are considered, there is a more detailed discussion on poems by Rosenberg, Owen and Sassoon.

Chapter 4 deals with poetry written during the Spanish Civil War. Apart from poems by British poets belonging to the International Brigade, this chapter includes a few poems by combatant and non-combatant Spaniards. This has been done primarily in order to compare poems by those who were most deeply affected, with those by others who, though caring enough to risk and even lose their lives for Spain, yet did not have so much at stake and did not possess the same intimate knowledge of the land. Besides, well known writers like Ralph Fox and Christopher Candwell who died in the Spanish War have not in fact written any poems dealing with it.

The poems in this chapter are grouped separately as poems that highlight the Spanish cause and a sense of commitment to it by Spanish or non-Spanish combatants or non-combatants, poems that bring out the significance of the Spanish War for all humanity, poems on the ravaged land, civilian deaths, and poems written after defeat. These
express the despair combined with an assertion that the cause will finally triumph.

In Chapter 6, apart from a couple of poems by civilian poets like Dylan Thomas and Edith Sitwell, all the remaining poems analysed are by soldier poets. Here the poet's experience is not that of the trench warfare but of movement to distant fields of campaign and exposure to alien civilizations, also to battles in the air and at sea. Hence the poetry of the Second World War has been grouped as poems that express the 'New Learning' or the experiences at the training camps; poems on the Home Front; poems on the experiences at the front including poems on the enemy, the dead, the ravaged land and the POW. Then there are poems on alien civilizations such as desert and the jungle terrain, and finally the poems on the aftermath.

A final conclusion after the 6th chapter will compare the poetry of each of the wars and proceed to highlight the distinctive features of each of the wars.

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