CHAPTER I

WARS AND THE REIGN OF ANXIETY

Human Life and Anxiety:

Anxiety has ever been a part of man. Differentially speaking, not God but Man himself gave birth to the human life as we know it, and this must have happened in the post-Eden era of heavenly peace. Once out in the wide strange world, the first Man and Woman were faced with manifold problems of 'what', 'how', and 'where'. Thanks to the 'Forbidden Fruit', the horizons of knowledge must have extended only too dangerously to fill the Ancients with worry, uneasiness, dread and nervousness which we notice as common accompaniments of man's earthly existence, and which as we shall see later, found vivid expression in English Poetry in the Thirties, stand amply exemplified also in works of Psychological research on Social and Abnormal Behaviour. Broadly speaking 'Anxiety' denotes a mental tension, a kind of fear condition resulting from insecurity which threatens one with failure or disaster. Freud subjected the term to a minute analysis and much further research now makes available a rich wealth of information about it: "Anxiety is first of all a state of apprehension, of concern, of uneasiness. It is a special kind of fear .... A second use of anxiety restricts it to a more limited kind of vague fear: the fear of insecurity .... Anxiety is used in a third way to mean concern over our own conduct i.e. feelings of guilt." E.R. Hilgard, 'Introduction to Psychology' (Methuen, 1957, p. 166).
at least with a sense of uncertainty, if not of utter bewilderment or dismay. Then with the birth of Abel and Seth, life ever had its first beginnings marked by murder. Where there was guilt, then a terrible conflict to release through murder.

A little consideration will show us why man is ever prone to suffer from anxiety when the latter has shadowed him from the very dawn of life. He has in him an ever-present instinct for 'self-preservation'; as soon as there is threat to that, the peculiar tension called 'anxiety' becomes active. What with the numerous ailments, conflict, instability, and insecurity which assail earthly existence, the 'self-preservation' instinct remains permanently under threat. One is anxious not only because of physical hazards like death, but also of uncommon fears like emotional misery, intellectual dismay, or spiritual and cultural decay.

Wars and Anxiety:

As we begin to look closer, we may notice the presence

1. We have used the term for its symbolical import and not in the Freudian sense. In his 'Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis' (Allen and Unwin, 1952, 2nd Edn., pp. 330-31) the learned Doctor maintained that the dread or anxiety condition (produced on all occasions on which life is endangered) reproduced the painful feelings of the experience of birth.
of a particular type of 'conflict' at the root of anxiety in human life. War or the threat of aggression is the form which this conflict has assumed ever since man began to live in organized societies: "... the main forces making for war in the successive historical epochs consist in general

1. cf. "In the widest sense of the word, conflict is conscious competition, and competitors become self-conscious rivals, opponents or enemies .... Conflict may involve the defense of what one already has or the aquisition of what one has not; and the aquisition may mean the taking away of that which pertains to another or the appropriation of that which another would like to have. The defensive, destructive and obstructive aspects of conflict become entangled with one another in every crisis." (Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences: Vol. 3, pp. 194-95, Macmillan Co., New York, 1950). It is common knowledge that the conflicts of wars have arisen out of expansive power of populations, expansive power of political systems, expansive designs of economic conquest, and now, clash of ideologies.

'Conflict' is an all-pervasive psychological phenomenon. Modern researches point out that the individual is highly upset and likely to behave abnormally when passing through any type of conflict. The reason suggested is that conflict arouses incompatible response dispositions due to which the individual finds himself puzzled and at a loss — the more he is unable to discriminate, the more and more he is likely to be abnormal in behaviour i.e. irresponsible, confused, fear-ridden; cf. Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology (pp. 480-86), Vol. 66, No. 5, May 1963, vide the article "Intra-individual instability and Conflict" by Prof. Worell. "While we have confined our attention thus far to relatively simple experimental situations, our findings may be extended to broader areas of behaviour. We assume that all conflicts — whether they be called attitude conflicts, discrimination conflicts, belief conflicts, drive conflicts, opinion conflicts, etc. — fundamentally consist of: competition among simultaneously aroused incompatible response dispositions, and the necessity to make a discrimination between different strengths of response alternatives."

Superficially it may seem illogical to jump from individual to racial or national level, but, given the
conflicts of interests, material or ideal, actual or traditional. The pattern of wars of the early oriental period is fairly uniform; so also is that of the war from the Persian through the Roman; so is also the modern world from the early nationalist, with economic objectives, through the later nationalist-imperialist, with industrial-capitalist objectives.¹

...... (contd.)

objective situation i.e. the economic, political and ideological environment, the general reaction in shape of thought or behaviour would be shared by all in one form or the other; vide p. 16, "Readings in Sociology", Alfred, M. Lee, Barnes and Noble, 1957 — the essay 'Classification of Social Problems' by Park and Burgess.


¹cf. .... the most casual glance at world-history will show and unending series of conflicts between one community and another or a group of others, between large and smaller units, between cities, countries, races, tribes and kingdoms almost all of which were settled by the ordeal of war". (S. Freud, 'Civilization, War and Death', Hogarth Press, 1953: from 'Why War?', a letter to Prof. Einstein, September, 1932).

'Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences' op. cit. p. 341.
Speaking of time nearing our own, Quincy Wright, in his Study of War, lists 273 wars fought between 1493 and 1941, an average of three every five years. We believe that modern psychology has subjected anxiety states to systematic tests and research. One of the main findings is that anxiety situation lowers intellectual performance besides creating confusion, upsetting normal logical thinking, and distorting vision. Under such a situation an individual does not fare well because he is either afraid of failure or unduly anxious to achieve success (vide 'Test Anxiety and Intellectual Performance' Irwin G. Sarason, Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology, Vol. 66, No. 1, January 1963, pp. 73-75, and also Vol. 21, 1957, pp. 485-90).

Now it should not appear far-fetched if we view the threat of war as an anxiety situation posed before a community at large, polluting sane activity of the human brain. By way of illustration we may point out the mood of England and France during the Thirties as a symptom showing their eagerness to avoid a showdown or failure; similarly, Germany wished to achieve success with a vengeance.

Again, man's muddled state of thinking should be held responsible for his self-destroying steps i.e. indulging in warfare. People become nervous and irritable when the prevailing conditions make it difficult for them to discriminate between right and wrong, or sane and undesirable in the given circumstances. This can be likened to the behaviour of the dog in Pavlov's researches on conditioned reflexes.
that very guilty (?) organ suffers most due to the wars and the terror of war. It stands irreparably damaged and one readily imagine the misery, the fear, the anguish and the fury of the mind of the twentieth century man who has had to undergo the ordeal of two Great Wars in a brief period of thirty years.

Inter-War Period and Anxiety:

The period between the two World Wars has been an age of anxiety if we keep in view the fact that these no-man's years subjected mass consciousness to unnerving economic privations and political insecurity. The people of the world have been a prey to an ever-insistent worry, (which according to psychologists is a synonym for dread or chronic fear), since 1919. Even as the Treaty of Versailles was signed, Marshal Foch, the Generalissimo of the Allied Forces, remarked: "This is not Peace. It is an armistice for twenty years".

The Treaty of Versailles was the harbinger of the troubled Twenties. In that painful decade Europe saw the decay of its traditions, faiths, culture and stable economic order. There was anxiety all around. But whereas for the feeling masses it took the shape of frustration and extreme physical misery, for the 'thinking' elite like the poets

and philosophers it assumed the form of a mental attitude of disillusion at the break-down of all cultural standards. An Eliot could only become cynical and satiric and write a Waste Land. It was spiritual alarm indeed for one who had any vision left: "The trouble that certain people may take to ignore the serious crisis through which Western history is passing to-day will be in vain .... Such is the situation with which European existence is confronted to-day. The system of values by which its activity was regulated thirty years ago has lost its convincing character, its attractive force and its imperative vigour. The man of the West is undergoing a process of radical disorientation because he no longer knows by what stars he is to guide his life."  

The decade that commenced on January 1, 1930, is a significant one for the present generations. It witnessed the career of the secret forces which led to the violent outburst of World War II. It staged the climax of anxiety that had been disturbing western humanity. Its landmarks were: economic crises, Nazism, Fascism, Abyssinia, Spain and Munich. It preceded that violent episode which has left an unhealing scar on the body, mind, and soul of humanity. Its fore-running anxiety, far-reaching violence and nuclear reactions have seeped into the very marrow of the bones of those who are alive to-day.

Pre-War and Post-War Anxiety:

At this stage it may be proper to analyse the nature of that particular brand of anxiety which characterizes the period just before wars. It can be easily seen that a period just before war has a uniform and universal character in respect of anxiety because the tension and crisis at that time are there for all. After the war the emotions vary as between victors and vanquished. The implication of this is that there is a qualitative difference between anxiety racking the human mind before a war and after it. Broadly speaking, the pre-war anxiety gives birth to a fear and the will to act, while the post-war anxiety arouses deep despair and disintegrated faith.

In Poetry before Great War (1914-18) Hardy's tragic mood (in such poems as Channel Firing or the Convergence of the Twain) was the product of the former, and Eliot's frustrated cynicism (in The Waste Land or The Hollow Men) the result of the latter.

Historically speaking, with the visit of the Kaiser, England began to sense danger. There was worry due to the fear of the loss of empire. France felt that there was a threat to her sovereignty, and shuddered. Germany fretted and fumed because her dreams of power and ambitious designs were likely to fail if all did not go well. Charles Peguy's noble heart bled at the miserable prospect in store for France:
the noble German poet George Heym prophetically brooded over the vision of an imminent world catastrophe; Ernst Disse was the model for heroic aspirations before the Germans who worried over the fact that these might fail and bring dishonour and disappointment. In short, there was a note of worry in the poetry, as in the life, of England as well as France and Germany.

Similarly a distinction should be made between the type and intensity of anxiety prevailing in the pre-Great War (1914-18) period and that prevailing in the pre-World War II (1939-45) decade. Whereas in the former there was the usual anxiety over disaster, in the latter there was much greater dismay and misgiving. The sensitive poet could sharply visualize that the entire western world was doomed. The threat was more sinister and as such the psychology of the poets was sufficiently different, and more sharply and individually eloquent, too, in that darker umbra which covered the world in the second catastrophe. Accordingly, the poets felt much greater social or humanistic concern, the strain which we do not generally notice in the note of worry expressed by the pre-Great War I poets.

Poets, Human Life and Anxiety:

Human life has ever been the concern of Poetry and poets. One can ponder over Anxiety dogging life, Poetry
leavening it, elevating it, releasing and fulfilling it. One may further try to find the perspective embracing common man's hurried mind (the hunting of) and the poet's creative mind (the birthplace of).

It should be revealing to watch the poet's finsy the realms of Anxiety — an ever accompanying factor in human life — and unfolding a vision of human life seeking to weave itself into a texture of persuasive beauty analogous to the delicate splendour of nature.

Of all creative writers it is the true poet of a period who offers the most fruitful case for study. He goes deep down into the emphases, interests, preferences and apprehensions of his contemporaries. He alone, as it were, has the true perspective. He is able to comprehend his own period's ferments and feelings, hopes and aspirations, dreams and visions, heartaches and heart-breaks.

The poet is the most sensitive unit or focal point of the consciousness of a race. His comprehension is unique and unparalleled. Like divinity itself he goes behind appearances and invests them with a significance which prophetically proves to be true as time passes, but which for


2. cf. "It is to the poetical literature of an age that we must in general, look for the most perfect, the most adequate interpretation of that age." M. Arnold, 'Modern Element in Literature', 1869.
the time being is not fully and clearly apprehended by the mass-consciousness. I mean that .... intercommunication between the outer being of things and the inner being of the individual man is a kind of divination (as was realized in the case where the Latin vates was both a poet and a diviner). This expresses that others only feel vaguely and goes on to invest a strangely significant and truthful meaning to an apparent medley of affairs.

The way of the poet is neither that of the mere technician, nor the cunning magician, nor yet of the retiring mystic. He possesses a sensivity of the soul, a


2. Cf. "Poetry has its source in the pre-conceptual life of the intellect .... But when it comes to poetry, the part of intuitive reason becomes absolutely predominant .... What matters to us is the fact that there exists a common root of all the powers of the soul, which is hidden in the spiritual unconscious, and that there is in this spiritual unconscious a root activity in which the intellect and the imagination, as well as the powers of desire, love, and emotion, are engaged in common. The powers of the soul envelop one another, the universe of sense perception is in the universe of imagination, which is in the universe of intelligence. And they are all, within the intellect, stirred and activated by the light of the Illuminating Intellect." (pp. 3, 55, 78, 89, 'Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry', op. cit.).
creative subjectivity, or an intensity of imagination which helps him to understand the human society, its hopes and failures and successes, its ethical and moral purposes, its need for tranquillity in the teeth of anxiety. His poetry itself is born in anxiety: he is worried because he has to express some idea or feeling or vision that would leave him at peace only when it has secured a release through his chosen medium i.e. musical words: "In my attempts to study the nature of creative processes, I have become more and more aware of the anxiety which accompanies such deliberate reversion to a more primitive process. Ehrenzweig also emphasises this as an essential part of creation, not only because of getting nearer to forbidden wishes, but just because the depth mind's way of working seems like chaos to the surface mind. Stokes also hints that it is seemingly chaotic form of the depth mind, as well as fear of the destructive wishes, that contribute to the creative agonies of the artist ..." 2


2. 'Psycho-Analysis and Contemporary Thought', ed. by J.D. Sutherland, Hogarth, 1958: from the essay "Psycho-Analysis and Art" by Marion Milner. It can easily be understood that Anxiety holds a peculiar and uncommon blend in the poetic make-up. It is definitely not the crippling or overwhelming tension which might be called poetic apprehension.
The poet's vision is unique. He concerns himself with Life, Man, and Things. It is while he is in the thick of it that he secures a peep into Truth. He contemplates the prospect (physical, mental and spiritual) as it hovers before his inward eye, the common considerations have been temporarily lulled, and then dawns upon him a sense of the Sublime as his imagination secures a Total view: "... it seems that at these moments, which are characterized by the sudden lifting of the burden of anxiety and fear which press upon our daily life so steadily that we are unaware of it, what happens is something negative: that is to say, not 'inspiration' as we commonly think of it, but the breaking down of strong habitual barriers — which tend to re-form very quickly. Some obstruction is momentarily whisked away." 2 And, as the true poet goes on to convey that tranquil vision (like that granted to the great tragic heroes of Shakespeare), he releases a healing fount which allays anxiety by (a) showing the sane way of Love, and (b) exposing the viciousness of suicidal frame of mind

1. In words of J. Maritain: "It is so because creative subjectivity cannot awaken to itself except in communing with Things". (p. 26, 'Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry', op. cit.).

resulting from the path of Hate, Conflict and Clash i.e. war.

The years 1930 to 1939 became the years of the Great Depression and the Second World War. These were troubled times marked by acute nervousness. Western human-

1. For example, it would be nothing short of suicide if those who possess Nuclear Bombs and Death Rays, choose to declare war. Individuals who are high-strung and in the habit of taking tranquillizers are most likely to commit suicides: (cf. "Role of Dread in suicidal behaviour", Spiegel and Neuringer: 'Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology, Vol. 66, No. 5, May 1963). The same seems to be the mental condition of entire races which are trying to be guided by hatreds, aversions, distrust and ill-will. The poet who has the right perspective evaluates social conditions from the viewpoint of higher values like love, sympathy and mutual understanding. Thus he is invested with a saner and deeper view which strikes at the root of anxiety rather than simply trying to dope or drug it with the opiate of jingoism or cunning propaganda (the line adopted by military adventurers or scheming politicians).

2. Nervousness is a very common ailment harassing the common man in the stress and strain of 20th century existence. It produces desperadoes as well as neurotics: "It is a state in which the person finds himself unable to meet the given situation and where he resorts automatically and unconsciously to hesitation, anxiety, substitution and escape mechanisms, which often carry with them disablement for living and distress of mind and body". (A. P. Magonet, 'The Healing Voice', pp. 166-67, Heine-mann, 1959).
ity was passing through a critical stage which could be likened to the 'middle' and 'last' stages of Anxiety'.

There was widespread misery due to unemployment — originally caused by the breakdown of small industries, intermittent suspension payments, and finally fermented by the financial panics in the wake of the American Wall Street disaster. There was also a European fear brought about by failure of the League of Nations, rise of Dictators, and the mad Armaments race among different Powers.

1. Modern psychological researches, while distinguishing the stress reaction and the neurotic personality maladjustment from anxiety proper, point out three phases in the development of Anxiety. In the first phase there is relaxation, while in the middle phase there is upsurge of destructive fear, and in the last phase, active preparation to face the situation irrespective of the current dread or the likely consequences. If we take the two decades of armistice, we might call the Twenties as the first phase involving an idealized faith in human nature's goodness and in the League of Nations; the Thirties (the middle and last phases) showed worry, dread and fight. (These ideas have been derived from the book 'The Meaning and Measurement of Anxiety', R.B. Cattell, Ronald Press Co., 1961).

2. cf. "At the end of the war we felt that we were discovering a new world; and we have, in fact, made many novel and exciting political experiments ... In the last two or three years, however, we have begun increasingly to doubt .... The new order of political society seems to be very different from what we had been led to expect". (Gathorne-Hardy. 'A Short History of International Affairs 1920-39', p. viii, Preface to the 1st edition 1934; pub. by Royal Institute of International Affairs, Oxford 1952)."
A new generation of poets sailed into the literary firmament during this period i.e. the Thirties. Wystan Hugh Auden, Cecil Day Lewis and Stephen Spender were its most brilliant stars. To those poets the life and imaginings of their childhood must have appeared as an unreal dream, or at best belonging to some other 'self':

Who, nurtured in that fine tradition,
Predicted the result,
Guessed Love by nature suited to
The intricate ways of guilt,
That human ligaments could so
His southern gestures modify
And make in his mature ambition
To think nothing but ours,
To hunger, work illegally,
And be anonymous?

They felt the injustice implicit in the economic misery—it was none of their doing, since the capitalists and politicians had manipulated to bring it about. There was, therefore, an irony in their tone but a fight in their soul:

Europe's in a hole
Millions on the dole
But come out into the sun...

One, two, three four
The last war was a bosses' war.
Five, six, seven, eight
Rise and make a workers' state.
Nine, ten, eleven, twelve
Seize the factories and run them yourself.

The post-War economic debacle was painful no doubt, but one could have a sardonic smile if one had the vision of Mr. Auden

1. Stanze II, "In Father's Footsteps" by W.H. Auden.
2. 'The Dance of Death', W.H. Auden, 1933, pp. 9, 16: Faber 1941.
to see that the disgusting factors responsible for it were enmeshed in the Dance of Death.

The generation of Day Lewis, Auden and Betjeman had a unique background. It had been too young for the Service but in its youth now was old enough to weather the came of it. Its heroes had been wiped out and it inwardly shuddered to think that the same tragedy might be re-enacted. Thus Mr. Day Lewis thoroughly disliked the sick and delinquent conditions (physical, intellectual and spiritual) of the prevailing times, but more than that he felt dismayed at what might happen if political bungling had its way. There was, thus, an urgency in his tone but also a strong will-power to look forward to the future with hope:

In these our winter days
Death's iron tongue is glib
Numbing with fear all flesh upon
A fiery-hearted globe.

An age once green is buried,
Numbered the hours of light;
Blood-red across the snow our sun
Still trails his faint retreat.

Spring through death's iron guard
Her million blades shall thrust;
Love that was sleeping, not extinct,
Throw off the nightmare crust.

Eyes, though not ours, shall see
Sky-high a flame,
The sun returned to power above
A world, but not the same.

The thundering hoofs of the war horses of Hitler, Mussolini and Franco were hurtling down the corridors of Peace, and there could be nothing but about : the logic of the times:

Whether to die,
Or live beneath these skies -
Heavily hangs the weight of this sky...

Stay away, Spring!
Since death is on the wing
To blast our seed and poison every thing. 1

In other words, the human scene of the decade before World War II was very vividly realised, made articulate, and interpreted by the three poets, W.H. Auden, C. Day Lewis, and S. Spender. As their minds and hearts had been formed by reacting to the human scene of that period, we take them to be representative poets. They were so fully alive to the meaning of the contemporary life that they evinced a prophetic intuition. We may go so far as to suggest that a prophetic vision is the test of the particular vision possessed by all representative poets before wars. 2 We must not ignore the fact, however, that it is co-incidental with their acute sensitiveness, vivid expression and profundity.

1. pp. 169, 170, 'Collected Poems of C. Day Lewis', (Cape and Hogarth 1954), from the poem "February 1936".
2. Prof. B. Ifor Evans, while commenting upon the changed mental outlook of the inter-war period, calls only those writers "genuinely creative artists who understood and expressed the crisis in imaginative terms." 'English Literature Between the Two Wars', p. 12.
Accordingly, in the Nineteen Thirties we have con-
centrated our attention on three poets, viz., Wystan Hugh
Auden, Samuel Beckett, and Stephen Spender. They faith-
fully followed the currents born of anxiety, and what is more,
also shrewdly traced its origins and prophesied its
career as a threatening cataclysm. As poets who
placed sensitive fingers upon the pulse of time, Auden,
Day Lewis, and Spender eloquently diagnosed the malady
then pestering Western Europe. Each in his own way —
through Anger or Pity, Misery or Hope, Indignation or
satire — was able to decipher the meaning of the anxiety
agitating the minds of his contemporaries.¹

A probe into the underlying emotions of the masses
during a decade before a horrible cataclysm like the World
War II, is very significant, though it may be difficult to
traverse those shadowy chambers of the mind. During the
Thirties the predominating manifestation of such emotions
was in the shape of FEAR reflected in individual outlook

¹. cf. "To be sure when writing of an anticipated war, the
artist must select this material out of the past and pre-
sent .... For the poet, not all of such material is
confined to the objective events. Much of it lives in
the memory, emphases, interests, preferences, and appre-
hensions of his contemporaries ...." Kenneth Burke,
'The Philosophy of Literary Form', Vintage Books, New
York, 1957, pp. 203, 204.
behaviour. The Great War had disturbed evil and the ugly many-symptomed disease "Anxiety" of political insecurity, and economic misery) was the chief evil that it unleashed.

It is no exaggeration to say that the consciousness of the Western Man has been invaded by a deep-seated fear ever since the beginning of this century. That takes the form of an oppressive emotion of Anxiety just before the international outbursts of violence. The true poet realises that as the precursor of the cataclysm itself.

We may generalize by saying that Poetry before War evinces a clear foreboding of the coming catastrophe. We believe such a pattern can be discovered before all war-scarred periods. ¹

The New Poets' Good-bye to the Ivory Tower:

Anxiety had raised its ugly hood to strike, and how could a true poet (the 'knowing' man) remain just a passive spectator? He was in the thick of it. He could

¹. We can visualize the note of anxiety and concern even in the Athens of 5th century B.C. during her clash with the Persian empire. Had this thing not been there Aristophanes would not have pleaded so movingly for peace at the threat of Peloponnesian War latter. (vide the prayer at the end of the play 'Lysistrata').
be soft, angry, bitter, desperate and what not, but would
definitely not be complacent. The poets Auden, Day Lewis,
and Spender had not only cried out against such they could
not commit a patriotic sin but were also aware that such spirit and signs of the times were nowhere anywhere which prompted such lines:

"I see the guilty world forgiven",
Dreamer and drunkard sing ..... 
So dreamer and drunkard sing
Till day a sobriety bring;
Parrot-wise with death's reply 
From whelping fear and nestling lie 
Woods and their echoes ring;
The desires of the heart are crooked as corkscrews
Not to be born is the best for man
The second best is a formal order
The dance's pattern; dance while you can.
Dance, dance, for the figure is easy
The tune is easy and will not stop
Dance till the stars come down with rafters
Dance, dance, dance till you drop. 1

The last line was a shrill shriek which should have awakened those who had any sense left. But there were many who lived in a sort of perpetual summer school (in the words of Mr. Spender "the generation of those who were consistently blind to events from 1918 to 1939") 2. This is how a matter-of-fact gentleman commented upon Auden's line "Not to be born is the best for man": "I am now only bringing up to date a

2. 'Horizon', June 1942, p. 432.
point that I fully documented in a recent analysis of the subject-matter of modern poetry .... I showed how modern poets are beset by the sea and deepness, and I suggested that this was due to sea's apparent timelessness etc., etc. In my analysis, I pointed out that modern poetry had the habit of generalizing for humanity from their very limited personal experience .... My own detailed studies, with some twenty helpers for over a year, have so far altogether, failed to find in Lancashire this Audenic-angel-trouble, and — as I pointed out in my analysis — poetry is exaggerating the social importance of death with a capital D.¹

One might be tempted to question the remark "contemporary artists' retreat from present reality and nasty looking future". Those poets were very much alive to the conditions obtaining then: through these they visualized a serious catastrophe which they feared, was going to overtake the western world. They painted its terrors in all their grimness in order that it might be stopped, if at all possible, while there was still time left for that:

¹. 'The New Statesman and Nation', March 12, 1938; from ‘Mass Observation — A reply’ by Tom Harrison, p. 409.
Oh, look at the warplanes! Screaming hysterical treble....

and out of the dream-house stumbling.

One night into a strangling air and the flung

Rags of children and thunder of stone niagaras tumbling.

You'll know you slept too long.

Mr. Spender published a long poem 'Vienna' in 1931.

Therein he indignantly registered his anger against the rising Austrian-Fascist tyranny. Through the symbol of that unhappy city he symbolically suggested where all that was leading to. He would stop liberal socialism from being crushed if he could. He did not simply portray the physical event - he further tried to interpret it in imaginative terms. It was not mere short-sighted journalistic reportage but a poet's purposive vision. It was neither mere documenta-
tion, nor a pose of propaganda or showmanship - it was sincere integrity of poetic purpose.

1. 'Collected Poems of C. Day Lewis', p. 172: from the poem 'Bombers'.

2. Also compare: 'To-day there is merely a choice between two kinds of internationalism. The one kind is war, the other peace. The form of internationalism in which most of the world lives today is war. There is and there will be many shifting of alliances, but as long as the peace treaties exist there will be the same fundamental condition of economic war leading eventually up to an out-break like the last Great War.' (vide p. 174, The Bookman, May 1934: from 'War or Peace' by S. Spender).

3. cf. "I am not one of those in Europe who believe that a European War is imminent. My opinion is quite to the contrary. Political leaders and 'spokesmen' in foreign offices must not be taken too seriously, it is not for the temper of the mass-mind of the people of Europe that counts. It is not for war, as I have observed it, and I think this applies to Germany and the 'revisionist' countries as well as to France and her allies." The Literary Digest, New York, Jan. 13, 1934, p. 3. by Lawrence Hills, Editor of the New York Herald, Paris.
Poets and Human Concern in the Thirties:

The decade comprising the Thirties was clearly
marked by the economic upheaval which threatened to
be a threat to the very existence of certain industries. This was an unhappy political
cal condition. But the insecurity was not solely brought
about by political alliances and mis-alliances. It was an
acute economic misery which put a sharper edge to the
sense of anxiety.

The poems of Auden, Day Lewis, and Spender had a
humanitarian bias because they were moved by what they saw
around them. Poverty, unemployment and 'hunger marches' under-
lined the abject state of economic dislocation. The upset
had been smouldering ever since the Great War which had most
sharply hit all normal industries and avocations. The
matters sharply worsened with the Reparation payments and
the advent of the Great Slump after the Wall Street crash
in America. Industrial stagnation and unemployment faced
the university students as they came out in life. All this,
added to the moral degradation of the doles to the doles
of the unemployed, roused the poetic indignation of the true
poets. This also crystallized the sense of guilt from which
they suffered as a result of belonging to the upper middle
classes. Thus was born the dream of social morality which
inspired Auden, Day Lewis, and Spender to wish and plead for
better, fairer, and more satisfactory social order: "One might say that these poets saw around them a world of apparent safety and real drift .... They turned naturally to the apparent safety and real drift to images of never consciously faced and of conscious human purpose. They felt a certain deadness in the England around them. In England slugged by the slump, full of the unemployed leaning against walls, reading papers, and sharing between two of them perhaps, with delicate cautious puffs, a single cigarette). They wanted to make men more alive to the tensions and dangers of the time, to the possible power and purpose and beauty of the time, also".  

1. G.S. Fraser, 'The Modern Writer and His World', p. 214. Also compare "Growing up in the aftermath of the first world war, these younger poets saw the Waste-land not only as a mental state but also as a physical condition which included industrial stagnation, unemployment, poverty .... They sought first of all for a clear understanding of what had happened, for a history of the process which had brought about the present situation, and for a plan for the future which such an understanding could bring them .... They saw their country as diseased and demanding immediate cure .... They were looking to the past for understanding and to the future for remedy .... For these poets did not thrust the past behind them and turn with utopian zeal to a vision of the future .... Their aim is to understand the past, interpret the present, plan for the future". (David Daiches, 'Poetry and the Modern World', 1940: University of Chicago Press, May 1941, pp. 190, 193, 194, 194, 195).
The economic ills called for practical economic policies, and what more handy or suitable than the Communist doctrine? Auden's poems in New Country, M. Roberts's introduction to the same, Day Lewis's Magnetic North and Spender's Vienna—all were genuinely inspired by Left-Wing sympathy, the only channel of faith which passionately argued for a better deal to the 'have-nots'. No wonder that the entrenched and hardened 'old gang' was as severely satirized as the criminal militarists denounced. This created a persistent source of worry to the poets. As a compound of this and the political insecurity, the Thirties developed an individual note of anxiety which found a forceful expression in Poetry; the sensitive poet could not but try to forewarn:

Soon, soon, through dykes of our content
The crumpling flood will force a rent
And taller than a tree,
Hold sudden death before our eyes
Whose river dreams long hid the size
And vigours of the Sea.¹

Ever since 1930 the forces of Death were on the march again. The tread of their threatening footsteps echoed down to the very heart of poor Lucie Manette, the European Peace. The common man became increasingly aware² of a horrible

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² Awareness breeds anxiety just as Ignorance maintains bliss. Anxiety has been classified as one of the derived feelings which are felt by man only and which presuppose a high level of intelligence.
catastrophe being in store for him. This naturally crept into Literature, the mirror that reflects even the most nebulous of emotions ranging the human heart. Literature, in so far as it is alive and young, adjusting itself to the world in which it is reflected, but these adjustments in the past have been more gradual. Since changes in the world were slower. It is a commonplace to say that the rate of change in the modern world outstrips the capacity of the human mind to adjust itself to its new conditions .... Boys of twenty were born in a world of internal combustion engines and steering wheels which meant nothing to their fathers when they were boys. To the latter war seemed as remote as the Middle Ages; to the former, it is tomorrow's prospect.  

The representative poets of the Thirties were truthfully sensitive to the undercurrents of the human scene. Their poems were powerfully symbolic representations. Mark the urgent emotion of Auden's SPAIN. It epitomized the sad drift of European affairs:

The stars are dead; the animals will not look;  
We are left alone with our day, and time is short and  
History to the defeated  
May say Alas, but cannot help or pardon.  

War was there at the gates of Europe, if one kept the Austrian trouble and the Spanish Civil War in view. But even Rt. Hon. Lloyd George did not mind declaring: do not... neither did they want it in 1914. But the nations that are popularly supposed to want war are not ready to fight, and the nations that are ready to fight do not want war ....... On the whole, I am optimistic as to the prospects of peace for another decade. 1

Though the European peoples had been growing more and more uneasy, even in the Nineteen Twenties, the mass consciousness as a whole became vexed beyond measure as the tension went on mounting up and up in the Thirties. For example, a mystic like the noble W.B. Yeats had, as early as 1919, given a prophetic picture of the significance of the prevailing scene:

Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold; Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world, The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and every where The ceremony of innocence is drowned;

...... somewhere in sands of the desert A shape with lion body and the head of a man, A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun, Is moving its slow thighs .......... And what rough beast, its hour come round at last, Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born? 2

2. p. 184, 'The Pocket Book of Modern Verse', ed. by Oscar Williams; from the poem 'The Second Coming' by W. B. Yeats.
But the poets of the new group in the Thirties consistently voiced the tension and optimistically sought to face a fear that anxiety had attained its peak. Auden, Day Lewis, and Spender (the poets chosen by us), possessed keenly receptive souls and imaginative vision so as to be able to visualize through that very anxiety the shape of things to come. They began to forewarn from the very beginning of the new decade. Their fancy took in the entire spectacle of anxiety which instead of crippling them served as a bracing font of inspiration. In short, in the Thirties human concern was a good enough idea to move a poet's genuine emotions. For example the threat of Air Warfare could most vividly work up his genius to a 'fine frenzy' - as Honour would have touched the divine spark in Spenser, and the notes of a Nightingale in Keats.

The New Poets and Realism in the Thirties:

These poets, thus, built their poetic structure out of the myth of contemporary life. The emphasis on 'contemporaneity' is of utmost importance in all literature. It implies that the creative writer does not think it proper to retire to the 'ivory tower', that he realises his responsibility towards his fellow men. So is it that the so-called 'social reporting' poems of Auden, Day Lewis, and Spender had a humanitarian bias. They incorporated the prevailing social scene because they 'cared'. They were
quite clear about it in their own minds: "The problem before poetry today is not to escape from life on to the mountain peaks, nor to escape into itself, but to meet the life that is around us and, in the doing, enjoy it."¹

In the Thirties one could not have found it to ignore the actualities of life. In that 'contemporaneity' there was 'timelessness' as well as 'newness'. Undoubtedly, immortal poetry derives its inspiration from unchanging emotions centred round Beauty, Nature, Love, Joy, Death and the like. But it can be psychologically understood that the garb of the emotions does change i.e. the ideas out of which emotions arise change in a particular manner in a particular age.² The physical anxiety was topical but it gave birth to a spiritual anxiety i.e. concern for the welfare of humanity, which came into the poet's heart through Pity and Love. When Auden used an expression like 'old gang' or 'Adversary' it aroused undying emotions e.g. Hatred (we might call it bitter disgust or angry contempt). When Day Lewis here depicts the fear of Death, his imagination is stirred by the hope of rebirth in Nature as contrasted with the fear of annihilation of human life:

Whether to die,  
Or live beneath fear's eye —  
Heavily hangs the sentence of this sky ...

1. p. 10, 'The Bookman', October 1932: from an article 'This age in Poetry, by S. Spender.  
Stay away, Spring,
Since death is on the wing
To blast our seed and to poison every thing.

It should however be borne in mind that the spirit of realism and a distinct type of realism in expression as well. The poets in style corresponded to a change in subject-matter. The poets of the Auden group began to make use of ultra-modern imagery in place of the conventional one. They brought in machines, pylons, dynamos as well as Freudian symbols. And in order to make it familiarly intelligible they reverted to the use of language in the form of every day idiom and slang. The concept of pure poetry or poetic language yielded place to the use of words in their denotative sense. With this sort of usage Auden could invest so much force and urgency in his expressions that the reader could feel the words starting into life. In spite of the fact that many of the poems of Auden, Day Lewis and Spender were considered to have been written in the language age of a coterie, the realism in the use of images and language

2. cf. "Wireless and aeroplane in the physical world, Jung and Freud in Psychology, Fascism and Communism in politics, the slump in economics - all of these, though they might not have altered human nature, have profoundly modified the stuff of consciousness .... from this stuff literature has to be made". R.A. Scott-James, Editorial notes London Mercury, April 1935, pp. 522-23.
was prompted by these poets' desire of identifying themselves with the common man's emotions:

All the lads and lasses in the lands at present;

Dame were the boys then, and girls were gay.

In Flanders by medalled commanders
The lads of the village are vanished away.

Cursed be the promise that takes our men from us—
All will be champion if you choose to obey;
They fight against hunger but still it is stronger—
The prime of our land grows cold as clay.¹

There could be no plainer or more heart-rending sigh! Summing up:

The events of History are noisy, crude, and upsetting. More important, however, is the spirit of Man ranging it and 'coming to the port unspent'. Even as History is being made, the participant Man is not in a torpor. Mass consciousness is surely though vaguely aware of the undercurrents. The true poets can, like the philosopher, understand, reveal, and interpret their ultimate drift (with an added human emotion absent from mere philosophical flights). Messrs Auden, Day Lewis, and Spender caught and reflected the troubled spirit of the worried fourth decade of this century. They made it characteristically significant and of all time by identifying it with the perennial human emotions of Love, Hope, Fear, and Pity — variants of Anxiety in the heart of human beings facing War clouds. We can well share

the true tragic emotion:

0 visions of a faltering will —
Disintegrating patterns!
History roars. The crowds in towns,
Cerebral frontiers of nations, over mountains,
Actors in flesh and death and matter,
Dance to a gripless orchestra of masses ...

If Mr. Auden did not mince words in portraying the fear of
Death, it implied that his was an uncommonly sharp and pro­
found awareness of the contemporary predicament. Thus these
poets were realists whose purpose was to raise a note of awful
Warning:

Into this city from the shining lowlands
Blows a wind that whispers of uncovered skulls
And fresh ruins under the moon.
Of hopes that will not survive the season of this spring
Of blood and flames, of the terror that walks by night and
The sickness that strikes at noon.

They actively felt, pleaded and worked for the way of sanity
i.e. Hope, Love and Peace:

1. Stephen Spender, 'Collected Poems(1928-53)', Faber 1955,
p. 75; from the poem 'The Uncreating Chaos'.

2. W.H. Auden, 'Collected Short Poems', p. 142; from the
poem "At the grave of Henry James".

N.B. — Mr. Day Lewis in his famous critical work 'Hope
for Poetry', (p. 14) quoted from the Preface of
Wilfrid Owen's Poems and suggested that due to the
prevailing circumstances it had become necessary for
the poet of the new generation to act like a prophet
and forewarn.
But when the waters make retreat
And through the black mud first the -shad-
In shy green stalks appears;
When stranded monsters wade,
And sounds of riveting creak;
Their whorled unsubmitting
Majesty delights we dread to lose;
This privacy, need no excuse
But to that strength belong,
As through a child's rash happy cries
The drowned parental voices rise
In unalamenting song.

After discharges of alarm
All unpredicted let them calm
The pulse of nervous nations,
Forgive the murderer in his glass,
Tough in their patience to surpass
The tigress her swift motions.¹

The decade Nineteen Thirties was like a night of agony. It was a pre-war period marked by painful anxiety. Insecurity had encroached sharply upon human life. It naturally produced new poets who deeply 'cared'. They used the terms of actuality to reveal a unique imaginative insight into sociological problems and the psychology of war.