CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In the present civilisation it appals one to note that the unbridled warlord, though aged and blind, is yet agile and unappalled; with his retinue of diabolic dear darlings, a good part of the world has begun arms race, under one pretext or the other, which has led to an

1. (a) Down from palaeolithic age to the recorded history; 3000 B.C., aggression accelerated.
   CHARLES, H. SOUTHWICK: ECOSYSTEM AND QUALITY OF OUR ENVIRONMENT (D. VAN NOORDAN COMPANY, 1975), p. 120.

(b) 270 major wars from 1450 to 1940: Six wars on an average in every decade over a span of 480 years.
   QUINCEY WRIGHT: STUDY OF WAR, 1942.

(c) 'One war every year from 1940 to 1981'
   NIRMALA DEVI, KRISHNA KUMARI, S.K.U. 1980-81

(d) At the time of writing this study war is raging between Iraq and Iran.

2. (a) According to data available Germany lost 1.2 million people in the First and Second World Wars.

(b) Such wars had reduced land—scapes barren, which may persist for centuries; they also stimulated diseases and epidemics, and industries collapsed.

(e) Thermo Nuklearn. I.C. B.M., S.L.E.M.A.B. S.A.
   Total = 4,800.
unprecedented stockpile of armaments, quite unlike previous weapons, at a colossal cost. If there were to be a war now, it is quite likely, that the human race itself would end.\textsuperscript{1} A Nuclear War would mean reducing the earth into a darkened frozen planet.\textsuperscript{2} The nuclear arms pile-up has promoted war-phobia and has disturbed many, who are exploring a means to halt this situation.

Nevertheless, it is also a fact which cannot be ignored, that all through history, there have been wars and mankind has survived, in spite of them, and continued to become civilized. It is pertinent to remember that Alexander’s conquests established Hellenism, and spread the knowledge of the Greek language and preserved the cultural heritage of the Greeks. But for Alexander’s ambition to conquer the world, we would have perhaps missed the very best in Greek culture. Similarly, Caesar conquered Gaul and made Gaul a part of the civilized world and incidentally produced the French language which is so fascinating, and which has produced some of the best writers of Europe.\textsuperscript{3} Such examples

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{1} '...........to-day a great part of the world is like a big armed camp. A single match will set a hay-ric...'
  \item \textsuperscript{2} Non-Aligned Summit Report, 'The Hindu' (January, 1985.)
  \item \textsuperscript{3} Bertrand Russell: \textit{BERTRAND RUSSELL SPEAKS HIS MIND} (ARThUR HARRER Ltd., LONDON, 1961), p.36.
\end{itemize}
could be multiplied. Almost every war in the past has had a beneficial consequence also. A close study of history reveals that practically every country has experienced at least one war whatever might have been the causes leading to such a war; such wars have subsequently contributed to the promotion of art, literature, and a score of other component parts of culture. But the question remains, at what cost? And in to-day's world, the situation has changed enormously. In the two World Wars the finest of manhood were butchered, with a number of other disastrous effects. The only beneficiaries who enjoy a war are those who live comfortably at home. Men enjoy a war provided it is not in their neighbourhood, and not too bad; if it takes place in their own land, it is unpleasant.

Thirdly, to the question as to what causes war, Russell answers half-humorously that the cause of war is popular enthusiasm and spirit. A war is laudable for any reason. History often confirms this.

2. RUSSELL, BERTRAND: BERTRAND RUSSELL SPEAKS HIS MIND, p. 42.
On the other hand, it is frequently argued that war has its own dividends—otherwise it would not have been there. And so it does not come in the way of the progress of civilization. Yet on close study, it is noted that again and again, unfortunately, each fresh advance only increases risk and tension until at last it becomes unbearable and if there is anything better than this which can contain this positively, and which can do good rather than harm, is a solution to be sought after.

When war is justified, as it is at times, it takes a pride of place and gets mixed up in the component parts of culture. But culture as it has always been, does not but admit of higher values, which are fundamental, universal, stable and backdrops for the individual or collective forces, to foster faith when swayed by the disruptive forces of hatred and violence. War never compromises without that sort of hatred and violence, which means that war nurtures and promotes only negative issues. If culture does not cut war into size, decent humanitarian feelings of their own and of others which make virtuous and altogether delightful people, would not be there in times to come. If culture approves violence and the stockpile of weapons, it would mean to act upon the
probability of war, which, ingrained with violence, is not the sign of the progress of civilization. Such a stockpile has disheartened and frightened all the leading intellectuals and Non-aligned bodies who have warned and proclaimed that everyday we remain alive is a day of grace as if mankind as a whole were in a prison in the death cell awaiting the uncertain execution. This prevailing tension and war phobia has led to immense public concern and has initiated counsels for a practical key—better than war—to refrain from it, and any other direction to contain this threat.

Since recorded history, i.e., from around third century B.C., in the number of wars undertaken by Governments, crises were similar to the present and a keen advocate of peace invariably got the Governments to realize the gravity, made proposals to stop wars through matrimonial alliances, pacts, and agreements and thus put an enormous stop forward to achieve peace. In the two World Wars, out of the wretched experience, the League of Nations and United Nations Organization were established to bring the warring nations into their senses, and to ensure peace, which of

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2. Note: NATO : CENTO : CETO :
   Fact: Sult II, 1979 In VIENNA,
course would really be ideal. Ironically for the two bodies—the former became extinct, and the latter has found itself unable to meet the crisis at present. The U.S.C. has become a nominal authority. Aggression and violence are rampant. At the crux of the issue, to preserve higher values without exception, a way is to be found, so that wars do not recur, without resorting to violence. And pacifism seems to be that way, for it has all the virtues that every nation, both at individual and group levels, can put into practice, and with little cost.
It remains now to examine, that, if disastrous events were to occur, what is the writer's role in war? And more specifically, what is the poet's role? These are the questions that need asking, not because they have never been answered, but because they have been answered in a way prejudicial to the poet who seeks to produce, out of the depths of the self, some fragment of experience and places it within the framework of our imaginative order, as to have a positive impact upon our emotions and understanding. But convention assigns this task to a Historian, Economist, Sociologist, and Moralist — to study the course and implications of war; the study of war is their relevant branch, which envisages that the poet cannot write about war; even if he turns, say for instance, to economic implications of war, his thinking may turn to revolve around a theory of values. Granted. But readers, the passage of such poetry before them, are left to understand something else in it.


It is to deny oneself the pleasures of reading it; and envisages fear of being corrupted by its wrong ideas. Political Commitments and economic developments formerly were auxiliary regions; if they have become part of the poetry instead of merely helping to support the poet in a difficult job, something other than poetry emerges, resulting in the rejection of the poet; on the other hand the poets inevitably appear this way, either accept or propagate a particular political or economic programs. There have always been poets, from 'Piers Plowman' to date, who understood that the perplexed poet could by wondering if he is provided with ill-chosen means, which means to obliterate the truth. If he has to remain as a non-controversial, he would tend to become an alien with a negative capability. It would mean to deny oneself universality of being and interested in his own loneliness and uniqueness. Here is the crux of the issue. It is the unhappy sense of the gulf between the radical and the utopian, fantasy and illusion, to adjust to political issues proper; to be reactionary or a conservative. But in either case the poet must be truthful. If he dares not take the risk, mankind is engaged in a war, power-in intoxicated leaders, dictators, the advertisers, the public relations department, the composers of radio and

2. Ibid.: P. 19.
movie scripts catering to the established order, and the literary strong arm squad, protecting business as usual; stand between the poet and the common man; misguide and justify war and 'distill good from evil' and war goes into wicked hands. The poet should not any longer be interested in his own loneliness and uniqueness. In the circumstances of tragic complexities, a poet who is usually more than competent, later would not be a man to regret, owing to his imaginative order, giving the quality of life-sustaining peace that he may be able to and that has been his function always. Because of this significant function, the poet, not as ill-baked bread, or ill-woven cloth, not on the cheap melodrama and incidence, that is dramatic and helps to encash the situation, he cannot lead himself to propaganda. If he uses words in a servile way, he degrades himself and his fellows. He has to write convincingly and movingly of the dark and blind forces within and without. That the incidence of war cannot be like the account of the work of a tragic complex; he has to group them. He should not over simplify which would mean to twist the truth.

Poets are not, as Shelley claimed, the 'unacknowledged legislators of the world'. But they can definitely imagine

1. BEAUMONT DUETTO THE NEW REPUBLIC (December 7, 1942) p. 743.
2. Ibid p. 743.
3. BEAUMONT DUETTO THE NEW REPUBLIC (December 7, 1942) p. 743.
a different, less-wretched world, and prepare people to control the blind forces of war passions and gain a sense of preventability of war; when not a few enlightened ones are combating, to ensure peace, Sassoon has a soldier and a poet. War and its ramifications affected him deeply; besides presenting war in all its hideous worst, Sassoon has given us something fascinating by which he becomes the harbinger of peace.
SITUATION OF POETRY IN WAR TIMES

At the outset, it is a convenient point from which to start a brief examination of what wars have been to literature and, in particular, to poetry. The tradition of war in literature reminds us that war was not at all a dominant subject; it was treated as subordinate to a aesthetic element. It had an auxiliary function helping to support the writer in a difficult job; any examination of individual conscientiousness, both in terms of environment and in relation to the other individuals, is to strike a co-ordination between aesthetic and ethical function without any effort on the writer-poets. It is in this tradition that Homer and Shakespeare have written; it is also the tradition of many of Sassoon's contemporaries in the initial stages, at the outbreak of the First World War. But it is fairly clear that in England, before the outbreak and during the First World War, the subordinate role of war was eliminated in the literature that was in the main composed by civilian writers. But the trends of literature are not easy to observe; nor literature of a single a current. A luxurious imagination of what once was, made a departure for surprises and paradoxes; as it should since the world
war showed that war was not at all what literary convention assumed it to be; paradoxes, aspects of its uncouth scenes, surprises which were commonplace to fighting men but disturbing novelties to those who stayed at home; and this aspect took a new character; it is from such poets that we got the most revealing and most authentic vision, which, in its real character, is an unpremeditated response to its unforeseen demands. It illustrated, beyond dispute, how wrong the established notions of war turned out to be, when they were disturbed by the white heat and raw facts of war. The soldier-poets wrote with such things as resignation and bitterness and the impassioned return of the soul to dear memory in mind. One cannot impose on these things any further complication. It is clear that the pre-war school of English poetry rarely aimed at writing poetry of the kind - nearer to the bone - soldiers in barns, with one candle burning, and writing against evening landscapes, with guns flashing and thundering - but excelled in heroic mood. In this tradition Brooke had written; it is also the tradition of his greatest contemporaries. But the poetry of soldiers believed that death in the field might gain for the hero short, admission to Heaven; it was not a necessary qualification, though it was the tradition of


No single belief dominated during the World War. From time to time, they yielded to each other, modulated into each other, borrowed from each other, virtues, yet which are never to be mistaken for each other and form a dualism that contributed to poetry for a long time.

Innovation and tradition inevitably command most attention; poetry written in either form is full of a most moving dignity.

In those days the highbrow-view is sceptical of war; as a theme, its place in literature and, in particular, in poetry is questioned.

A brief survey, therefore, becomes necessary to show how to admire the poetry by soldiers for all its relevance to the present times, and to prove (also) that, if poetry in-depth from the front is read in a wrong-headed way, it is a debilitating influence and the prelude is not sound at all.

In the beginning, it would be proper to examine whether war is an enemy to creative activity. If war were to be the enemy to creative activity, all creative activities either make horrible things pleasing—here, war—investing...

1. C. G. Conolly: SPIRIT ABOVE WAR
   EDITORIAL COMMENT.
   HAMBURG: MAY 1940. p. 84.
in it heroism and nobility or cosmic wonder which means to turn away from the tragedy and obliterate the truth; it is an expression of false feeling and false thinking and mistaken judgement. Or indulge in genuine numerous recording of anti-sentimentalism; inclusion of everything coarse and brutal which would become political rather than aesthetic and to impose narrowing limits on the area in which the transition seems to be universal. In other words the right wing poetry which believed in tradition is artistic and aesthetic. The leftist eschewed "cosmic poetry" since its subject was war itself. In the attempt sometimes it never became poetry at all, but a private experience of one's own. In either way the contrast favoured rejecting war. Hence war was an enemy to creative activity; in this sense that war is an upheaval of civilization, a return to barbarism, which means death to all arts. Another point of view is that if war literature is to be an art, then it would become art by helping or permitting war to achieve grandeur through expression.

In the process, while condemning war as an enemy to creative activity, the rightist poetry is not sympathetic

1. BARETT, TEUTSCH: THE NEW REPUBLIC December 7, 1942, P. 743.

to the leftist which attempted to do away with war in a different way, giving the experience of its uncouth scenes, surprises, paradoxes, and with such themes as suffering and bitterness, in a raw and vivid manner. This unsympathetic trend has led to the reputation of the war-poet. An analysis of this attitude is possible here, with reference to a few examples. Yeats was of the opinion that passive suffering is not a theme for poets. An unusual combination of detachment and commitment kept their senses and

From soldiers, who in their stoic endurance or passive suffering, (and these heroic and noble terms were no longer a decent subject for poetry) — no less than their human tenderness, spoke with authority and understanding, for the victims alive or dead, in a war which had got out of human control, won their place, and gave a new twist and character to the theme of war. An unusual combination of detachment and commitment kept their senses and

1. Yeats wrote in 1936:

'.................' "war was not a subject; passive suffering is not a theme of poetry. Some blunder has driven his car on the wrong side of the road—that's all"—Quoted from FORBES, DAVID: HISTORY OF MODERN POETRY. p.267.
sensibility awake, and they refused to be enticed from the truth as they saw it.

W.D. Thomas drew the conclusion that war poetry is not poetry since it is photographic and sensational. The above remarks were not about war; W.D. Thomas was reviewing the technique of war poetry, and therefore an analysis is possible. The war was characterised from the beginning to the end by greed, deceit and false pride, blind in imaginativeness, selfish indifference to the sufferings of others, and a stupid slowness to learn from the front to the war-poets. They responded with shock and protest, not with the helpless moral anguish which characterised the pre-war state of mind. For instance, Hardy views from a distance and evokes an attitude that is both sympathetic and reflective. To traverse this distance by seeing the individual human fate within an immeasurably longer context—like in "Chunnel Firing", 1914. Later, Georgian poetry was unprepared to confront the mechanised

1. "... is just a record of sensation. This photographic
the photographer of devastation... as it was, the materials of which poetry may grow; but it is not poetry". W.D. THOMAS. "Far and the Peace Listener" 1 May 1941 EXTRACT FROM A. LARTER'S SPIRIT ABOVE BAR (Macmillan India, 1975), p.84.

2. DAVID HERKIES: HISTORY OF MODERN POETRY, P. 268.

horror. dense the dying young were "whom the God's" love.

For Rupert Brooke, war figures as a mode of redemption.

He characterizes the old life before the war as psychological illness, moral purposelessness, and shame; with the war, holiness, love, pain, horror and noblesse have returned.

He has simplified the crippling bodies and minds, the erosion of decent feelings, the spreading of cynicism and nihilism which are part of the cost of war; we hear nothing. The worst that war can bring are only pain and death; and death is not terrible to Rupert Brooke who had made his life a mess and a mess of life. He struck the thorn of immortality:

The soldier who dies for England is really not dead. (SOLDIER).

The soldier-poets who at first began as Georgians, changed as they undertook through the appalling conditions and experiences of combat in the trenches. One of the effects of war was that there was a poetic revival working upon a change of prewar Renaissance. The soldier-poets were perhaps too close to their subject which induced the possible tone and subject of poetry and it has never been similar since. Hence for all, professional soldier-poets, the writing of the poetry of war was a serious matter to be undertaken carefully and deliberately, an approach which has given it a unique objectivity, comprehension, clarity, proportion and control. They have become active shapers.
of experience, not simply passive, delicately tuned receivers of impressions. Their poetry is a harbinger and not a mere record of subtle impressions and ephemeral emotions; their eye caught war details, like Sassoon, which was to etch the bitterness of war (perhaps) with a distinct and unforgettable realism, vividly picturesque—soldiers in barns with one candle burning, wintry evening landscapes, the water tables, to dwell in such circumstances where men, which feed on the flesh of dead horses and unfettered guns boom and flash and cats flitting across the lines; men ankle deep in clay; they are all something other than poetry; this indeed was perhaps highly vitally, insensible to the accuracy of war. But the brutality of war, as experienced by those soldiers who were sensitive poets at heart, found its own inevitable expression. The sensibility of the poet was kept alive laboriously, and deliberately, assured the anguish and impersonality of war. Owen beautifully:

"We are toys of absent things— which are not even heard to exist in order to act upon."

This impossibility was achieved by adopting, when the Georgian was helpless to meet their requirements, the irony of Thomas Hardy and Masefield, and the stark realism
of Synge. The difference was between realism as an attempt to reflect life and realism with a further end, for a particular moral purpose. The purpose of Sassoon and Owen unites realism with satire and sometimes lifts it into grandeur. It is to be found in its direct statements, in its pertinent difficulties, shortcuts, silences, heights and fusions. The syntax of their poetry is different from the syntax as understood by logicians and grammarians. It is a poetry, eloquent in appeal for a kind of poetry that must reek of the human, and showing no loss of faith in the thought. The sensibility of Sassoon and Owen brought respect to war-soldiers for it had the moral authority that accrues to first-hand experience and personal suffering.

No civilian had the sure right to speak of the war, for he could not fully know what he was talking about. Therefore, it is unfair to call war-poetry photographic and sensational; it is a poetry of the stream-of-consciousness about war in a flashback. Their poetry thus brought about the final break with traditional poetry and inspired the social poetry of later times.

Realism in war poetry, as examined in the previous context, expressed a harshly disillusioned view of the war.

for the first time, and any number of readers who read such passages felt that it was something other than poetry and that such realities are common and everywhere, and questioned why the soldiers alone are to be pitied. Indeed the reaction as was carried on in the note referred to below, by Kaye, F.J. is acceptable since a variety of classic checks on human population made death imminent, that people went to their graves as if they were bed, or some [without access to] that privilege. 2

it is also argued that [death being imminent]

1. KAYE, F.J.: WUTHERING, LITERATURE AND WAR, p. 66
XIV, DECEMBER 15th 1928. KELVIN SUDAN

Note: the classic checks on human populations other than war were disease and famine. In 14th century 25% were reduced with epidemic of bubonic plague - 1348-1379 - (A.D.) English population was reduced almost 50% by Plague.

Walfor (1878) listed 200 famines in Britain between 10th and 1546 A.D.

Irish famine 1845-1846-1851-2000, 1600 famines.

In China - 4 million famine deaths 1920-1921.
5 million famine deaths in Russia-1918-1934.
2 million famine deaths in India 1943.

ELI AND LCH 1976.

CHARLES H. SOUTHEICK: ECOLOGY AND THE QUALITY OF OUR ENVIRONMENT (Second edition)

D. VAN NOSTRAND AND COMPANY,
(C ) 1976 LITTON EIN PUB. INC.

2. IBID: P. 171.
due to disease, famines and other causes, the population of
the world has increased as civilization advances despite
of the war. There is considerable agreement, however, on
the point that they have tragic effects on human population.
But, as envisaged in the note, the population would be doubled
by 2010: it would mean that medicine is making great strides
towards the conquest of disease; science is exploring the
ways to curtail certain natural calamities, and scientific
cultivation, irrigation and transportation are making it
possible to meet the challenges of famine. The future looks
bright. It is evident from this that disease and famine
were controlled with a determination and their tragic effect
might be rather due to physical distances and for want of
and communication. The emphasis here is that, besides housing,
the problem of clothing remained to be solved, and we have
still not recovered from that catastrophe—the second World
War—and many disciplines would be involved in the preven-
tion of war which stimulated disease, famines and epidemics
both direct and indirect, and wrought alternations both on
human and animal population, which is very tragic, pitiable

Note: 'Between the birth of Christ and seventeenth century,
the world population took approximately 1600 years to double;
the next doubling was achieved within 200 years; next from
1 to 2 billion people within 80 years; the most recent
doubling from 2 to 4 billion people was completed in 1975;
a span of 45 years; it will double again within 35 years: 2010.
Any number of deaths due to Malaria, Cholera, and
Poliomyelitis due to disruption of nature's forces; cyclones
etc. In modern life the daily toll is appalling due to
superfast vehicles, because of the glorious future that modern
technology in store.'
and real; meaningfulness of war in general, the young men's death-usually who form the component part of the war—is unnatural. It is the real fact. Hence the reaction to the hard facts that are revealed in the poetry of war might be due to ignorance or lack of first-hand experience and personal suffering. So civilised, it is they who speak, had the right to speak, when someone revolts against war which had come to be seen as an instrument of insane slaughter. Out of those feelings came the need to use poetry, to speak the truth about war.

J. d. Johnston was of the opinion that war-poetry lacked objectivity. Indeed, in 1914, poetry was practised among the volunteers, who tried to give expression to war as a poetry which naturally records those things which were seen and as they occurred; it records them regardless of their effect on the young minds of the world; regardless of their capacity for arousing anger against the recorder of anti-social enthusiasm directed at them. It dwelt on humorous incidents or celebrated it in terms of conventional patriotism. It is only later that war was experienced as a scene of horror, violence and omnipresent death, meaningfulness and futility of individual effort. The feeling that man is subject to an invisible authority, if it could once be
described in accurate language, the people would insist that war must be stopped. But at first they did not know and could not; the correspondents and the censorship wouldn't pass the truth on; the problem was how to create a myth as to the inner meaning of the crisis since the artist traditionally used war only as a framework; such experiences, one would imagine, must have turned one finally to anti-war poetry; not hatred but a protest against and desire to inform the public about the truth of war; the techniques adopted traditionally appear to be inadequate confronted by the conflict and to remove war from the behaviour of man; for the first time there was a new personal poetry of the war; something other than the aesthetic; and pacifist in nature. The mythology still existing in the countryside, generations, and habits were to be re-educated; the mind and language would be cleared; a large imaginative audience would come into being, with no earlier models; the poetry had to be created then in the field itself; this occasioned a magnificent literature with the object of removing war, with a new idiom, colloquial in nature; rhyme in unusual patterns; this was not the poetry of the old type. A new critical judgement was advocated:

New reading habits of war poetry become desirable.

F.R. Leavis, writing in another context, reminds us that war-poetry possesses no threat to the 'tradition,' and could hardly have remembered; and a host of others hold a similar view. Indeed, what they say has relevance; though great war occasioned a great deal of poetry, it has not resulted in the breathing of a new ground.

1. "The war, besides killing poets, was supposed at the same time occasioned a great poetry; but the names of very few war poets are still remembered ... even if they had been properly recognised at once, could have merely established a challenge to the ruling poetic fashion."

LEAVIS, F.R; NEW ESSAYS ON MODERN POETRY.

2. (a) "There is nothing to prove that the war has had any serious effect on the development of English poetry. It exists in the works of some of those writers as a thing which happens to have happened to them; just as they might have been by chance in a railway accident and have written about it.


(b) "Born as it was of a temporary mood of exaltation, was evanescent, like the poetry, men make when they fall in love."

ACritical History of English Poetry,
Chap. 40: The War Years, 1914-18, P. 496.
In 1914, when war broke out, it was greeted with enthusiasm, for it was felt that it was fought for a righteous cause, and some tried to give expression to this sentiment. They did not have any established reputation as poets; had no literary criteria or principles. That they did not understand was that this was not the war of the old type in terms of conventional patriotism. Their attempts failed to give a touch of novelty or direction. That source of literature had been debased into propaganda and used as a weapon; a large quantity of such material was read for inspiration. The early poetry from the war, thus, had not reached as anticipated. Simply the fact that it offered no correction, either political, aesthetic or experimental. It is in later war-poetry that poets made their contribution; they found themselves in a situation which, for them, in essence was non-human and non-universal. There could be no generic recognition, because the machine-genre of their environment of death itself was without a precedent. Only when this machine genre had been assimilated culturally, emotionally and imaginatively (could) war become a universal situation? and only then—be taken simply as material upon which a drama of human values could be based or even willingly entertained.

If war were to become human and a universal situation, all the species should practise it. But so far man alone has practised it with such consequences that defy our imagination; they should be first to cleanse it. There should exist no note of hatred. It is towards this situation that the poetry of the First World War made its contribution. It stripped war of all its tinsel and romance; and showed for all times to come what actually war is. Such was the poetry of Sassoon and Owen; since it stimulated the soldiers' feelings of separation and isolation.

It took a new character. It happened that the soldier-poets of the First World War showed that war was not what literary convention assumed, but it emphasised aspects of it which were common places to fighting men and disturbing novelties to those who stayed at home.

It is from such poets that we get the most revealing and most authentic picture of war with its real character and an unpremeditated response to its unforeseen demands.

It illustrated beyond dispute how wrong the established

1. FENIMORE, DAVID: A HISTORY OF MODERN ENGLISH POETRY
2. WILF... AND OWEN: A LETTER TO HIS FRIEND.
3. DOSRA MAURICE: THE POETRY OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR.
notions of war may turn out to be when they are disturbed
by the white heat of raw facts. The soldiers wrote with a
such theme, it may be said, without prejudice to the
convention, that war as a theme doesn't come in the way of
creative activity, and its place in literature has been
assured, with a fresh approach. Such writing (which
of and mastery) born out of suffering with the emotion of
an unforgettable spiritual drama in their work. It was a
kind of poetry of the first spontaneous notes with a mastery of
irony and of compassion. The outstanding ones of that
period such as Sassoon and Owen have built their verses
on actual facts about those who were involved completely
in the subject. Their message was that it would not only
be inhuman and wholly chauvinistic to admire such tragedies
which they affirmed should be prevented. They brought
about the final break with the traditional English poetry
and inspired social poetry, spoke with authority and
understanding of war. Poets like Sassoon have expressed
it so fully and finally that the succeeding war-poetry
became more imitative than original.

The experience of war and the experience obtained through it
builds up a mental picture to the reader, resulting in
emotional identification with human suffering. Good war
literature imposes upon the reader the wastefulness of human energies. Hazlitt says, in this regard, "the governing principle of literature is the expression; not self-expression, but the presentation of significant human experiences to possess the world."

Since war poetry was written in a particular social context, chiefly in soldiers' feelings, some perished before they were ripe, leaving behind them thoughts and images; "the proof of precious talents, and of a maturity born out of suffering. They are a group apart, a pathetic one—it remains alive, still astring with the emotion of an unforgettable spiritual drama... in the work."

Indeed that poetry written in a particular context, is too early to call it sociological documents whose interest will be negligible—when at a time war and peace were never so crucial as today, in an age of nuclear weapons, new technology and brave new thinking; man begins to think, war poses in a new dimension, of an alternative. As Roussea puts it, 'co-existence or no-existence', was also the same problem that engaged the minds of many writers in the First World War, and today it is worthwhile to remember them, those who made it possible for

their successors, the moderns, to take the problem of war with utmost seriousness. The fact for the ill-reputation of war-poetry is that traditionally war was not at all a subject of poetry and was treated as subordinate to a total aesthetic element for the examination of individual consciousness both in terms of environment and in relation to other individuals. In the light of this view traditional critical instruments cannot hold good. It is to be evaluated by competent scholars, and the outstanding ones ought to be acclaimed and enshrined in the hearts of this generation. It is unfair to treat war-poetry as temporary, photographic and sensational.

The outstanding ones of that period like Sassoon and Owen, who wrote in depth in their verses, gave imaginative treatment to that subject, for they were involved themselves in the war. Hence the study of Sassoon is relevant today.

PACIFIST POETS:

Years ago, when Yeats asked for a war poem, he wrote:

I think it better that in times like these a poet's mouth be silent, for in truth we have gift to set a statesman's right.
He has had enough of meddling who can please
A young girl in the indolence of her youth,
or an old man upon a winter's night.  

Auden later wrote:

Language may be useless, for
So words men write can stop the war
Or measure up to the relief
Of its immeasurable grief.

But this helplessness of a poet's feeling for his craft has been appreciated since long. Indeed in the history of mankind it has been difficult for the poet to exercise his function, he may hold his tongue, for the fear of being seldom so close to the people who knew little or nothing of the poetry. But they failed to take into account the fact that the gestation may be longer, for though the poet may be a violent dissident, his rebellion may not so readily become articulate; the truth is not easy to come at. And so what the poets produce must work with slowness certainly and indirectly on the understanding of the general reader. If a poet

1. Quoted by BASSETT DEUTSCH: THE POET AND THE WAR
   [NEW REPUBLIC, 1942], P. 741.
2. Ibid: P. 741.
3. BASSETT DEUTSCH: The Poet AND THE WAR
   THE NEW REPUBLIC, December 7, 1942.
were to write convincingly and movingly of public or private theses that must bring forth all his powers of understanding, of imagination, of craftsmanship; the whole tragic complexity should inevitably appeal to the heart; which has been his function always; as Wilfred Owen wrote:

'Above all .......... must be truthful'.

In the last war, the poets were slow in discovering it. The various factors (five) are emphasised in the other sections.

That the fact of war formed a subordinate thesis to a total aesthetic element invested with heroism and nobility is a natural attitude and is understandable, in view of the social governments of those times, the standard and values followed by the common man, the sense of law and the means to enforce it and unquestioned responsibility. But at this hour of civilization, this attitude to whatever causes fratricide has been replaced by indivisible peace. Arts and letters embracing the understanding of war as an unnatural force finds its most powerful expression in numerous poems advocating the removal of war and its preventibility. When the First World War descended on

2. SACCHETTI, DEBREN : THE POET AND THE WAR
and engulfed Europe, Sassoon wrote poetry which exposed the realities of war, and which became pacifist in nature and substance: it represents poetry from those soldier-poets who were converted into pacifism and it is relevant to study such poetry in the present context; in particular the poetry of Sassoon who was a pioneer and a prophet. A study of Sassoon as pacifist, indeed, should prove highly beneficial.

Chapter Division

The present study falls into six chapters. The introductory chapter establishes the relevance of the study and is subdivided into sections like the poet and the war; poetry and war; and the place of Sassoon and other pacifist poets. The second chapter discusses antecedents of violence and aggression, and the evolution of the concept of pacifism. Predecessors of Sassoon, their attitude to war and tendencies towards pacifism in their poetry form the subject of the third chapter. Contemporaries of Sassoon, and Sassoon's growth as a poet are discussed in chapter four. The fifth examines the evolution of Sassoon as pacifist. The last is an estimate of Sassoon as a poet and as an influence.

1. FALIK, REUBEN: POST-VICTORIAN POETS (J. J. DEUT AND SONS LIMITED, 1936.)