

ISAAC ROSENBERG: A CRITICAL STUDY OF
HIS PLAYS AND POEMS

Richard Andersen

Submitted for the degree of Ph.D. in
the University of Leicester
1974.

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THESIS
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X75-338632-0



R.ANDERSON. PhD THESIS 1974

SYNOPSIS

Isaac Rosenberg: A Critical Study of his Plays and Poems.

Isaac Rosenberg is by now a celebrated poet although very few of his poems are generally known. The purpose of this thesis is to trace Rosenberg's poetic development with close analysis, starting with a biographical study and then treating the poems in chronological order. Much space is devoted to the almost totally neglected Earlier Poems of 1905-1915, focussing on their unity and on evidence of Rosenberg's poetic growth: these poems are studied in thematic groups so that recurrent uses of words and ideas can illuminate each other. The unity of theme and treatment helps to underline the fact that in the Trench Poems the writer emerges as an artist, rather than primarily as a propagandist, which sets him almost alone among the poets of the Great War.

Rosenberg's published texts are in some instances incomplete and this study will aim to correlate what is published to the unpublished versions of Moses as well as manuscript variants of a number of his poems. Close examination of these throws light both on Rosenberg's methods of composition and some of the themes and symbols which give a certain unity to his work, from its rather imitative beginnings to its climax in the plays and Trench Poems. Rosenberg's relationship with his poetic contemporaries who belonged to a different ethnic background and came from a different class are considered, and it is suggested that his comparative isolation as a poet was more a source of strength than a cause of weakness.

In the course of this study it has been possible to make corrections of, and emendations to, Rosenberg's received text which, in some cases, clarify his meaning. Above all, this thesis is exploratory rather than evaluative: it was not undertaken without the realization of Rosenberg's early potentiality and final achievement as a poet.

ERRATA

For thesis entitled "Isaac Rosenberg: A Critical Study of his Plays and Poems."

1. Page 52, line 2: for "therefor" read "therefore".
2. Page 57, line 19: for "contemprary" read "contemporary".
3. Page 77, line 12: for "verse" read "stanza".
4. Page 81, line 6: for XII read XIII.
5. Page 85, line 10: insert comma after "foam".
6. Page 96, line 13: insert question-mark after "Women".
7. Page 103, line 3: for unambiguosly" read "unambiguously".
8. Page 106, line 25: insert "feeling" after "of".
9. Page 120, line 3: for "points" read "prints".
10. Page 122, line 20: for "in" read "of".
11. Page 127, line 14: for "occurs" read "occur".
12. Page 128, line 18: for "phrase" read "phase".
13. Page 132, line 15: for "assence" read "essence".
14. Page 132, line 19: for "sensual" read "sensuous".
15. Page 136, line 30: for "recalls" read "recall".
16. Page 138, line 23: should read "pages 294-295".
17. Page 143, line 10: for "anger" read "maenad".
18. Page 145, line 3: delete XI.
19. Page 146, line 22: for "fourth" read "third".
20. Page 149, line 21: for "line 11" read "line 10".
21. Page 152, line 17: insert comma after "aspiration".
22. Page 157, line 19: for "burn" read "turn".
23. Page 161, line 20: delete "(line 80)".
24. Page 170, line 28: for "old" read "cold".
25. Page 176, line 22: insert inverted commas round "dark-lit".
26. Page 179, line 21: insert "parched" after "pasture".
27. Page 180, line 28: should read "lines 11-12".
28. Page 183, line 24: should read "lines 4 and 6".
29. Page 197, line 13: insert "a" after "or".
30. Page 197, line 26: for "displaced" read "displayed".
31. Page 215, line 21: should read "Fragments (VII, VIII and IX)".
32. Page 215, line 29: should read "Fragments VIII and IX".
33. Page 216, line 3: should read "Fragment VII".
34. Page 219, line 35: for "of" read "or".
35. Page 244, line 25: should read "lines 79-81".
36. Page 246, line 29: should read "lines 79-85".
37. Page 247, line 9: should read "lines 96-112".
38. Page 247, line 25: should read "line 142".
39. Page 247, line 28: should read "lines 145-148".
40. Page 248, line 13: should read "line 148".

41. Page 248, line 22: should read "Lines 164-173".
42. Page 249, line 14: should read "lines 210-211".
43. Page 250, line 27; should read "line 219".
44. Page 251, line 1: should read "line 219".
45. Page 251, line 15: should read "lines 248-249".
46. Page 251, line 22: should read "line 256".
47. Page 252, line 6: should read "Line 263".
48. Page 252, line 21: should read "line 199".
49. Page 256, line 22: should read "289-302".
50. Page 256, line 24: should read "lines 145-148".
51. Page 256, line 26: should read "lines 150-163".
52. Page 257, line 18: should read "lines 209-218".
53. Page 258, line 10: should read "226-232".
54. Page 259, line 27: should read "lines 272-274".
55. Page 259, line 28: should read "lines 267-271".
56. Page 278, line 15: for "mange" read "manage".
57. Page 283, line 15: should read "lines 278-288".
58. Page 284, line 11: should read "lines 156-157".
59. Page 289, line 15: for "on Enoch" read "of Enoch".
60. Page 292, line 16: for "behavious" read "behaviour".
61. Page 294, line 30: for "horse" read "house".
62. Page 297, line 4: should read "page 272".
63. Page 303, line 28: should read "page 283"
64. Page 316, line 20: for "suffer" read "suffers".
65. Page 319, line 6: for "vilent" read "violent".
66. Page 320, line 26: for "Supermen" read "Superman".
67. Page 323, line 8: delete "in".
68. Page 333, line 19: for "wheter" read "whether".
69. Page 348, line 30: for "fifth" read "fourth".
70. Page 354, line 5: for "pastime" read "occupation".
71. Page 358, line 1: for "as" read "was".
72. Page 368, line 4: insert "to" after "to".
73. Page 369, line 1: for "then" read "than".
74. Page 369, line 21: for "description" read "destruction".
75. Page 372, line 2: should read "Mrs. Cohen".
76. Page 376, line 1: for "Euripedes" read "Euripides"
77. Page 381, line 30: insert "such/" before "as".
78. Page 382, line 13: insert "a" after "academic".
79. Page 382, line 7: for "and" read "an".
80. Page 394, line 14: should read "page 375"
81. Page 394, line 30: for "ibid" read "op. cit".
82. Page 397, line 1: for "conclude" read "suspect".
83. Page 412, line 19: insert "less" after "are".

84. Page 432, line 5: for "Madcap Jack" read "Mad Jack".
85. Page 437, line 3: insert "his" after "be".
86. Page 461, line 29: delete "against".
87. Page 495, line 34: for "the" read "they".

CP: Collected Poems of Isaac Rosenberg, edited by Gordon Bottomley and D. W. Harding (1949, 1962 and 1974)

LC: Catalogue of exhibition of Isaac Rosenberg's paintings, together with the text of unpublished material, arranged by Jon Silkin and Maurice de Sausmarez, and held at Leeds University (1959)

Georgian Poetry I: Georgian Poetry, 1911-1912

Georgian Poetry II: Georgian Poetry, 1913-1915

Georgian Poetry III: Georgian Poetry, 1916-1917

Rosenberg's spelling and punctuation is strictly adhered to in quotations throughout this thesis. These are often extremely eccentric and it seemed better to produce, silently, accurate text than to pepper the text with [sic] on every occasion, when there is no ambiguity of sense. More formal citations used to identify hitherto unpublished drafts of poems are referred to in the appropriate chapter of the text in the Appendix, where two unpublished drafts of Moses are reproduced.

Isaac Rosenberg's Personae

It may be convenient to the reader to have a brief biographical list of patrons friends and correspondents of Rosenberg, some, like Edward Marsh, still well-known, others

INTRODUCTION

Abbreviations and Syntax

For ease of reference, the following abbreviations are used in this thesis, after the first mention of the full titles of these publications:

- CW: Complete Works of Isaac Rosenberg, edited by Gordon Bottomley and D. W. Harding (1937)
- CP: Collected Poems of Isaac Rosenberg, edited by Gordon Bottomley and D. W. Harding (1949, 1962 and 1974)
- LC: Catalogue of exhibition of Isaac Rosenberg's paintings, together with the text of unpublished material, arranged by Jon Silkin and Maurice de Sausmarez, and held at Leeds University (1959)

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Dramatis Personae

It may be convenient to the reader to have a brief biographical list of patrons friends and correspondents of Rosenberg, some, like Edward Marsh, still well-known, others comparatively forgotten:

Lascelles Abercrombie (1881-1938): He began his literary

career as a reviewer for Liverpool newspapers. As a poet his main interests were mystical and metaphysical, and he won praise from Robert Bridges for his lucid exposition of difficult themes. He published, from the rustic peacefulness of Gloucestershire, a short-lived poetry magazine New Numbers, in conjunction with Rupert Brooke and Wilfrid Gibson. His richest period of poetic production ended in 1914; his verse was included in Georgian Poetry I and II. During the war, since he was unfit for active service, he became an examiner of munitions. Subsequently he devoted himself to prose and critical work, becoming a lecturer in poetry at Liverpool University, then holding Chairs of English Literature at Leeds and at Bedford College, London.

Gordon Bottomley (1874-1948): For most of his life he was a recluse, on account of ill-health. An elegiac poet, his work shows the influence of Rossetti and William Morris. Like Abercrombie, his work was included in the early volumes of Marsh's Georgian Poetry. Together with Abercrombie he shares much of the credit for reviving poetic and romantic drama in the Georgian period. Because of his isolation he was a prolific correspondent, and was a close friend of Edward Thomas and of Paul Nash.

Laurence Binyon (1869-1943): He worked at the British Museum for forty years, finishing as Keeper of the Department of Oriental Prints and Drawings. As a boy he had hesitated between poetry and painting as a means of expression. A cousin of the minor poet and verse-dramatist, Stephen Phillips (1864-1915), he was introduced by Robert Bridges to the unpublished poetry of Hopkins, and experimented with versification

He did much to influence the appreciation, early this century, of the drawings of William Blake as also of Japanese art. He translated Dante into English verse.

Mark Gertler (1891-1939): He came from Whitechapel, where as a child he drew still-lives on pavements. He was sent (on the advice of Sir William Rothenstein) to the Slade School of Art in 1908, where he won a scholarship in 1909. He was a popular and lively member of the Café Royal group, and he came to know Marsh, D. H. Lawrence, Lady Ottoline Morrell and Lytton Strachey: Gilbert Cannan's novel, Mendel, is based on Gertler's account of his own life. His best artistic works are typified by large and firm design, rich and harmonious colour.

Joseph Leftwich (born 1892): Writer and poet, he was a boyhood friend of Rosenberg. He has published collections of his own poetry in 1937 and most recently in 1959, and he has translated works from Yiddish and German, compiled and translated into English verse an anthology of Yiddish poetry, and has written books on Theodor Herzl and Israel Zangwill.

Edward Marsh (1872-1953): He was educated at Cambridge and was a close friend of G. E. Moore and Bertrand Russell: he championed Ibsen's first appearance on the English stage. From being a clerk in the Colonial Office he became, in 1905, Winston Churchill's private secretary and followed him through several government departments. He began his rôle as a patron of contemporary British painting in 1911, encouraging artists like Duncan Grant, John Currie, Gertler, the Nash brothers and Stanley Spencer. He devised and edited five successive editions of Georgian Poetry (1911-1922),

initially in collaboration with Rupert Brooke and subsequently with Harold Monro. A witty and voluminous correspondent with a fastidious and refined aesthetic sensibility, he gave generous but discreet financial assistance to many poets of the period.

Thomas Sturge Moore (1870-1944): Author and wood-engraver, brother of the Cambridge philosopher, G. E. Moore, he published his first collection of poems in 1899; he contributed to Georgian Poetry I and his last poems were published in 1939. In addition, he wrote books on Altdorfer, Dürer and Correggio, and had, in 1919, published an anthology entitled Some Soldier Poets.

Sydney Schiff: Another wealthy patron of the arts, who also published novels under the pseudonym of Stephen Hudson. He translated the last volume of Proust's Swann's Way after the death of C. K. Scott-Moncrieff. He is satirically portrayed in D. B. Wyndham-Lewis's The Apes of God.

Robert Calverley Trevelyan (1872-1951): He was the elder brother of historian George Macaulay Trevelyan, and youngest brother of Charles Percy Trevelyan, M.P. He published his first collection of poetry in 1898, and was included in Georgian Poetry I. He also wrote plays and made verse-translations from Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Theocritus and Lucretius.

Acknowledgments

The author wishes to express his thanks for the friendly and generous co-operation of the following individuals and institutions:

The late Lady Ruth Gollancz for her hospitality, her lucid

recollections and her helpful answers to numerous letters;
Miss Livia Gollancz for permission to examine unpublished
material in her possession, and for information on certain
details;

Professor D. W. Harding for his encouragement and for practical suggestions which clarified the undertaking of this research;

Professor John Kemp, for the answers to specific questions;
Mr. Joseph Leftwich, for patiently setting down for me recollections stretching back sixty years;

Mrs. Ray Lyons, for her kind hospitality on several occasions, her willingness to help in searching out points of detail, her frank and illuminating memories of family life and her great generosity in allowing unlimited access to her collection of material relating to her brother;

Mr. Ian Parsons, for his tireless response to questions, for allowing the author to examine the large collection of Rosenberg papers and pictures in his custody, and for much practical help in the collection of information;

Mr. Jon Silkin, for a valuable discussion of Rosenberg, for his replies to numerous letters, for kindly allowing the writer to read a draft manuscript of his own and other unpublished material;

Mrs. Diana Surman, for suggesting useful ideas and sources of information, for the loan of part of her own thesis and of a scarce book;

Mr. Charles Tomlinson and Mr. Bernard Wynick, for information which aided considerably the collection of material;

The staffs of The British Library, Reading Room and Department of Manuscripts (Bloomsbury), and of The Newspaper Library

(Colindale); and also the Librarian and staff of Nottingham University Library, for their prompt, courteous and helpful attention at all times;

The Curator of The Berg Collection, New York Public Library, for providing information and a microfilm copy of the Rosenberg letters in the Collection.

Finally, thanks are due to the University of Leicester for the use of their facilities, to Professor A. R. Humphreys and especially to Mr. G. S. Fraser, without whose encouragement, support and unfailing helpfulness this thesis would not have been written.

All quotations from the poems, letters and other copyright works of Isaac Rosenberg are included by kind permission of his Literary Executors.

CHAPTER I

LIFE AND DEVELOPMENT--A SKETCH

The aim of this chapter is not primarily to recreate Rosenberg's personality, but simply to provide facts and dates from which the reader can construct his own picture. He emerges as a person both shy and diffident who is yet proud and self-sufficient. Joseph Leftwich has written of the early days of his friendship with Rosenberg, formed about 1910:

Poetry was his obsession, not literature, he told us, but essentially, distinctively, poetry It was only in poetry that he felt he was worth something. His life outside poetry and the reactions from poetry were negligible. But in poetry he felt confident and thoroughly at home.¹

He was to show himself capable of close intellectual friendship with men and of admiration for young women like Miss Lowy. Despite the unprepossessing picture which Leftwich paints:

He was very short, sickly, plain-featured, awkward and shuffling in his walk, his voice was monotonous and he stammered a bit (ibid).

--his unconscious charm, his sincerity, or maybe even pathos aroused the protective interest of those who were to become his patrons.

¹ Article entitled "Isaac Rosenberg" in The Jewish Chronicle Supplement of February 1936

Nonetheless, factual evidence about Rosenberg's life is rather sparse, although his last years are fairly well-documented by his letters. The Biographical Note printed at the front of the Complete Works and Collected Poems contains in its first paragraph almost all the extant details of his early life. He was born in Bristol--the second of six children, and a surviving twin--on 25th November, 1890, to Barnett and Chasa Rosenberg who were at that time living in the Jewish area of the city called Temple. His father had arrived in England only three years before this, a refugee from the Russian pogroms. Rosenberg's younger sister Annie--who was devoted to him and his early artistic tendencies--recalled that their mother was artistic--"always making things in needlework and other ways"--while his father retained an interest in writing and studying and wrote some poems in Hebrew and Yiddish.²

When Isaac was seven the family moved to London and settled in Whitechapel, which at the time was a congenial because crowded area: the Jewish community there was tight-knit and thriving and was to produce some successful poets in Lazarus Aaronson and A. Abrahams. John Rodker became a close friend, and is best remembered for his translations as much as for his connections with the Eliot-Pound circle of writers. Young Isaac attended various elementary Board Schools, in the East End, one of which was in Baker Street Stepney (where, in 1902, he received an award for good conduct --on display at the Leeds Exhibition of 1959). The success

² Interview with Annie Wynick published in Jewish Affairs (South Africa), December 1952.

of his youthful drawings is indicated by the fact that while still at school in Baker Street he drew a picture of one of his younger sisters, Ray (now Mrs. Lyons). This was displayed in the classroom and on her way home one day she was stopped by two of her brother's classmates who had recognised her from his picture.³ Two years later, at the age of fourteen, he left school because the family needed another wage-earner: his father's takings as a licensed hawker were barely sufficient for their needs, but in any case this was then the normal age for leaving school. So Isaac found a job as apprentice-engraver with the Fleet Street art-publishing firm of Carl Hentschel, a job which was arduous and repetitive and yet his endurance and stubbornness helped him to stay there for six years:

My mind is so cramped and dulled and fevered, there is no consistency of purpose, no oneness of aim: the very fibres are torn apart, and application deadened by the fiendish persistence of the coil of circumstance (Letter to Miss Seaton, before 1911: Complete Works, page 363).

During this period he was sustained by attending evening classes at Birkbeck College Art School as well as by his friendship with John Rodker and Joseph Leftwich. The "fiendish mangling-machine" of toil did not succeed in dampening his enthusiasm for art, for he wrote appreciatively of the exhibition of Japanese painting at Shepherd's Bush in 1910:

The thoroughness is astounding. No slipshod, tricky slickness, trusting to chance effects, but a subtle suggestiveness, and accident that is the consequence of intention (CW, page 366).

³ Interview with Mrs. Ray Lyons, May 1974

In 1911 three generous Jewish ladies, Miss Delissa Joseph, Mrs. E. D. Lowy and Mrs. Herbert Cohen, paid the fees for him to attend the Slade School. How he came to their notice is not known, but it is enlightening to append here Lady Gollancz's explanation of how her aunt (Mrs. Lowy) came to make Rosenberg's acquaintance. They were both in the National Gallery on a day when Queen Mary paid it a visit; Rosenberg in fact was painting there. When the Queen passed through the room where he was at work, Rosenberg was the only person who did not rise deferentially to his feet in the royal presence: so engrossed was he in his work that he was oblivious of royalty. Mrs. Lowy witnessed this incident and was sufficiently intrigued to make conversation with him.⁴ With hindsight we can now appreciate how valuable to him was this power of intense concentration for it was later to be his defence against the brutal reality of army life.

Rosenberg made several friends during this period: Mark Gertler and David Bomberg (who began as a model at the School) he came to know quite well but Stanley Spencer (another contemporary) remained at a distance. That these friendships lasted through several years can be seen from the letters he wrote to them from France, and earlier from South Africa:

Ive just written to Cokeham; I hadn't his address so sent it to Cokeham on Thames. I hope he got it. His⁵ brother is very lucky. I also just wrote to Gertler.⁵

⁴ Interview with Lady Ruth Gollancz (formerly Ruth Lowy), December 1970.

⁵ Unpublished letter to Marsh, October-December 1914: Berg Collection of New York Public Library.

From his letters at this period we can deduce that he was persisting in writing poetry, an occupation Mrs. Wynick states he began almost as soon as he had learnt to write. His earliest extant piece is dated 1905, and a glance at Complete Works or Collected Poems produces at least forty poems which have survived from 1912 or earlier. But the success of publication was to elude him for some time yet: the English Review was not the only magazine which deferred judgment on the poems he had submitted (op.cit., page 331). The result of this was that in 1912 he published at his own expense a pamphlet of poems entitled Night and Day.

As an art student Rosenberg was more successful than as a budding poet, for he was awarded a First Class Certificate at the Slade during the academic session, and his letters to Miss Wright (one of his teachers at Birkbeck College), Miss Seaton--a friend from the days of his apprenticeship--and Mr. Lesser during 1912 (CW, pages 328-341 passim) all display his enthusiasm, diligence and optimism over his future in this work. But his naturally withdrawn manner persisted: in a photograph of his class for the year 1912-13 (in which Gertler, Nevinson, Bomberg and Spencer also appear) Rosenberg is seen crouching on the left, apart from the group, already an observer, foreshadowing the role of his own "sardonic rat". The Slade, Lady Gollancz remembers, was not an altogether kindly place for those who were different: there was, apparently, some victimization of less attractive men, in particular of Stanley Spencer, but Rosenberg did not suffer physically in this way.

But by the end of 1912 some confusion had arisen between Rosenberg and Mrs. Cohen over the payment of his fees, and, as one passage relates, his benefactors were very concerned that he should conform to certain criteria:

I must thank you for returning my letter as it gives me a chance of doing that which you said ought to be done--of throwing it in the fire. I am very sorry that you noticed it as of course I did not, or I shouldn't have sent it. I said what I had to say, and had done with it, it must have been quite an accident its smudging. I don't think any other letters of mine are in that state. No stranger could receive such a letter of mine as I never write to strangers (CW, pages 333-4).

This difference rapidly deteriorated into a rift between personalities and views on art. His next letter to Mrs. Cohen is a dignified defence of his right to pursue his own course, but one or two remarks point to the probable origin of the conflict:

. . . if one does say anything in an excited unguarded moment--perhaps an expression of what one would like to be--it is distorted and interpreted as conceit--when in honesty it should be overlooked. I am not very inquisitive naturally, but I think it concerns me to know what you mean by poses and mannerisms--and whose advice do I not take who are in a position to give--and what more healthy style of work do you wish me to adopt? (CW, pages 334-5)

His conclusions indicate the way which was to lie ahead of him:

I feel very grateful for your interest in me--going to the Slade has shown possibilities--has taught me to see more accurately.--but one especial thing it has shown me--Art is not a plaything, it is blood and tears, it must grow up with one; and I believe I have begun too late (ibid).

During this period Rosenberg had left the family home then at 159 Oxford Street, Mile End, and had found lodgings in Carlingford Road, Hampstead, but this had also contributed to his current state of unrest:

The isolation there so preyed on my spirits that I don't think I'd be far wrong if I attributed the unfinished state of my picture to the mental and physical looseness so caused (CW, page 337).

Nonetheless he is concerned that the Jewish ladies should not misunderstand his predicament:

You can call me rude, ungentlemanly ungrateful etc -- but you know it is only my honesty in not concealing what I think that leaves me open to this. You know I am not in a position to gain anything--I mean I can only be the loser by being so. Naturally I am concerned at being thought all this by people I respect, but as I, being ignorant of the existence of the qualities that go to make the opposite, can't be expected to agree with them, I certainly don't feel conscience stricken [sic] (ibid).

There is a disarming sincerity in these words to the ladies who doubtless did find it difficult to understand and appreciate what Rosenberg was doing at their expense. This crisis was certainly to his financial disadvantage, but freedom had its compensations. Miss Wright was given a gloomy picture:

I have thrown over my patrons they were so unbearable, and as I cant do commercial work, and I have no other kind of work to show, it puts me in a fix (CW, page 338).

but he nevertheless stayed on at the Slade till about Easter 1913, investigating the chances of his obtaining a grant from the Education Aid Society.

A postcard sent to his mother in February 1914 came from Bournemouth, which suggests that he may have been advised to "take the air" for his tubercular condition (CW, page 341). The likelihood that this winter was a particularly bad one for him is strengthened by his decision to go to South Africa, ~~and~~ first mentioned in a letter sent to Marsh, probably in May, and omitted from the Complete Works collection:

I am about to sail for Africa as I have been told my chest is not strong and I must live away from towns.

If I get the chance I may work on a farm for a year or two as I am young enough to afford it. I might also this way get ideas for real things. One is so cramped up here and one must either do cubism or what I propose to do to avoid the rut etc.⁶

The dating of this letter is aided by its references to Marsh's proposed Georgian Drawings--a projected companion volume to Georgian Poetry which was stillborn as a result of the war--on which Marsh was working in May of 1914.⁷ At the same time he was asking Mr. Lesser whether the EAS would make him a grant of twelve or fifteen pounds towards the cost of the journey. The fare to South Africa at that time was twelve pounds and Rosenberg was impatient for a decision as "I am convinced of the importance of not stopping here" (CW, page 341).

Marsh was helpful in obtaining detail about emigration requirements, and in a letter postmarked 15th May Rosenberg gratefully acknowledged this help:

. . . Im sure my sister could put me up for some months during which I could turn out enough work to make some sort of stir. I have no tuberculosis as far as I know, but a weak chest (CW, page 290).

There were other relatives as well as his married elder sister Minnie: his uncle Peretz had been a rabbi in Johannesburg since 1905, and Rosenberg felt no qualms about what he would be leaving behind him:

I dislike London for the selfishness it instils into one, which is a reason of the peculiar feelings of isolation I believe most people have in London. I hardly know anybody whom I would regret leaving (except, of course, the natural ties of sentiment with one's own people); but whether it is that my nature distrusts people, or is intolerant, or whether

⁶ Unpublished letter to Marsh, c. May 1914: Berg Collection of New York Public Library.

⁷ Christopher Hassall: Edward Marsh--a Biography, pages 279-80.

my pride or my backwardness cools people, I have always been alone (CW, pages 367-368).

This passage strikes the note of characteristic self-awareness.

Just before he sailed for South Africa in May or early June he wrote to Marsh, outlining his plan for "a little book called 'Youth', in three parts". Obviously Marsh was providing the money for publication and amidst his thanks Rosenberg pointed out that his aim in printing them was more to preserve his verses rather than to create any great literary stir:

My notion in getting them printed is that I believe some of them are worth reading, and that like money kept from circulating, they would be useless to myself and others, kept to myself. I lose nothing by printing and may even make a little money. If you like you can have my three life drawings for the money if you think they're worth it (CW, page 293).

On arrival in Cape Town he plunged into artistic and social activity on an unaccustomed scale, and was most enthusiastic about the place and the people. However, euphoria evaporated during these first weeks and his hopes of making some artistic impact began to fade:

I am in an infernal city by the sea. This city has men in it--and these men have souls in them--or at least have the passages to souls. Though they are millions of years behind time they have yet reached the stage of evolution that knows ears and eyes. But these passages are dreadfully clogged up,--gold dust, diamond dust, stocks and shares, and heaven knows what other flinty muck . . . But nobody seems to have money here, and not an ounce of interest in Art (CW, page 296).

What he planned to do, and in fact did, was to give a lecture on Art (subsequently published in the December issue of South African Women in Council) which is lucid, informative and sufficiently individual to be stimulating. With commendable succinctness he moves from defining a work of

art since classical days to tracing the outline of painting from Giotto via the Italian renaissance schools, Velasquez, Rembrandt, and Ingres, touching on Impressionism and post-Impressionism (Degas, Monet, Pissarro and Cezanne) and ending with vorticism and futurism. There is a final section in which he evaluates the English tradition stemming from Blake and ending with his contemporaries, Augustus John and Stanley Spencer. In the course of his remarks, one or two stand out as having particular relevance to his own practice as a painter and poet. The quality of the later Trench Poems is, for instance, foreshadowed in comments like:

. . . art is an intensification and simplification of life, which is fragmentary and has no order and no coherent relationship to us, until it has passed through the crucible of Art (CW, pages 244-5).

--and the pre-eminence of order (there is nothing casual in his own poems) is stressed in a critique of Impressionism:

Vitality is expressed by patterns of clear form (CW, page 252).

While he made no great stir in the South African art world, Rosenberg at least benefited in respect of creature-comforts, as he wrote to his family:

Im living like a toff here. Early in the morning coffee is brought to me in bed. My shoes (my only pair) are polished so brightly that the world is pleasantly deceived as to the tragedy that polish covers. I don't know whether there are snakes or wild animals in my room, but in the morning when I get up and look at the soles of my shoes, every morning I see another hole. I shan't make your mouths water by describing my wonderful breakfasts--the unimaginable lunches--delicious teas, and colossal dinners. You would say all fibs (CW, page 342).

Something of the impact Rosenberg himself made in South Africa is recorded in a letter to Joseph Leftwich of 15th May, 1936. The writer is David Dainow, then editor of The Zionist Record, (and brother of Morley Dainow, the

Whitechapel Librarian who encouraged Rosenberg with his verse-writing as early as 1905); after remarking how well he knew Rosenberg in Stepney, he continues:

It is strange too that when he was in Cape Town he was absolutely unappreciated. I asked the leading Jewish minister of religion in that city whether he came across Rosenberg and all he remembers was having met that 'meshugganah' on an occasion.

This word literally means 'madman' but Leftwich is probably right when he suggests, in a letter to the present writer, that the Rabbi meant "feckless, not living according to ordinary sane ideas". It is a pity that more evidence about Rosenberg's African trip is not available.

On his return, life was no easier than before, and he spent some time carrying his pictures around with him in the hope of selling some: in his depression he told Marsh:

First I think of enlisting and trying to get my head blown off, then of getting some manual labour to do--anything--but it seems Im not fit for anything. Then I took these things to you. You would forgive me if you knew how wretched I was (CW, pages 299-300).

--an outburst he rapidly sought to stifle.

During 1915 he was contemplating volunteering for active service, though his family were confirmed pacifists:

. . . dont say anything of my being away as my people are Tolstoylians [sic] and object to my being in khaki (CW, page 349).

An incomplete letter to Ezra Pound (CW, page 346) obviously refers to a discussion between them on the merits of an artist turning soldier:

. . . I think the world has been terribly damaged by certain poets (in fact any poet) being sacrificed in this stupid business. . .

and this resolve was strengthened in a letter to Schiff written at about the same time:

I feel about it that more men means more war,--besides

the immorality of joining with no patriotic convictions (Leeds Catalogue, page 10).

and on 8th June he wrote to the same correspondent:

I am thinking of enlisting if they will have me, though it is against all my principles of justice--though I would be doing the most criminal thing a man can do-- I am so sure my mother would not stand the shock that I don't know what to do (LC, page 8).

Even at the end of that year he was still explaining his actions to Schiff:

I wanted to join the RAMC as the idea of killing upsets me a bit, but I was too small. The only regiment my build allowed was the Bantams (LC, page 12).

In April he wrote a note of sympathy to Marsh on the death of Rupert Brooke from the family home in Stepney and in about July he was writing to Schiff about the prospects for a posthumous show of Gaudier-Brzeska's work--a passionate artist who had displayed similar reservations about joining the army and who had been killed on the battlefield on 5th June:

I believe they are getting up a show of Gaudier's work --at least they are talking of it but nothing is settled as far as I know. I do not know his work but I met him once. He gave one a good impression. It is awful bad luck (LC, page 8).

Rosenberg had experienced a lack of public interest in his work which was akin also to Gaudier's experience, but in June of this year he had had the second pamphlet of poems published, under the title of Youth and had sent a copy to Schiff with a comment on his own 'apprenticeship':

What people call technique is a very real thing, it corresponds to construction and command of form in painting My technique in poetry is very clumsy I know (Letter dated 8th June, LC, page 8).

This linking of the two art forms shows how he used his knowledge of one form to view the other.

He was not oblivious of the continuing war and as an

escape from his conscience as well as from being in the doldrums with his painting he once again took up a job with a firm of printers, 'preparing blocks for the press'. He was not especially enthusiastic about it, but proposed to learn the "honest trade" properly by attending evening classes, and he was obliged to ask Schiff's help with the class fees:

I hope you will not think this impudence but all my friends seem to have disappeared (LC, page 9).

A conjectural dating of October 1915 is offered for this letter by Silkin and if so this comment suggests that Rosenberg was one of the last of his group to join the army. But join he did, towards the end of 1915, and the military life was as unpleasant as he could have feared. He became a member of the Suffolk Bantam Battalion, then stationed at Bury St. Edmunds. There were physical discomforts, partly of his own making:

. . . while Im waiting for my kit Im roughing it a bit having come down without even a towel I dry myself with my pocket handkerchief (CW, page 300).

--partly of others':

I have to eat out of a basin together with some horribly smelling scavenger who spits and sneezes into it etc. It is most revolting, at least up to now--I dont mind the hard sleeping the stiff marches etc but this is unbearable. Besides my being a Jew makes it bad amongst these wretches (LC, page 10).

There are other difficulties too, as the last sentence indicates. Rosenberg scarcely ever complained of anti-Semitism in his letters and only one of his poems-- "The Jew"--reflects this feeling. The initial unease was increased by the fact that he had joined up without the prior knowledge of his family--a step taken to obviate the disapproval he would incur:

The only thing (and it is very serious to me) that troubles me is my mother is so upset about me. It was this thought that stopped me from joining long ago (LC, page 12).

Rosenberg set the army separation allowance that his mother would receive above any higher idealism:

I never joined the army for patriotic reasons. Nothing can justify war I thought if I'd join there would be the separation allowance for my mother (CW, page 305).

--and it was typical of his misfortune that his family at the beginning received nothing. There is also a moment of self-revelation in an earlier comment about this to Marsh:

I left without saying anything because I was afraid it would kill my mother or I would I would be too weak and not go (CW, page 303).

Another irritation was the stiff abrasiveness of new boots which blistered his feet and rubbed "a clean hole about an inch round" in one of his heels. He commented wryly that the only offers of help were made after he had suffered (CW, page 302).

In December of 1915 he was in hospital for a few days with badly-cut hands as the result of a fall, and he wrote to ask Schiff for some home comforts, rather than make "my mother to feel I haven't everything I want":

With cigarettes I could make myself more liked, and eatables I'd like myself (LC, page 13).

(The first part of this sentence drew from Dannie Abse the understandable comment that "if this doesn't reveal a ghetto predicament nothing does"⁸ : though in fairness Rosenberg's social difficulties could have been just as much personal as racial.)

⁸ Dannie Abse: "Homage to Rosenberg" in The Jewish Chronicle of 7th August, 1959.

The stoical optimism in this letter was to carry him through worse experiences:

One might succumb be destroyed--but one might also (and the chances are even greater for it) be renewed, made larger, healthier (LC, page 13).

It was while he was in hospital that he sent Marsh the hint that painting for him would now take second place. This was not a decision based on the practical difficulties of obtaining materials while in khaki--for Schiff had sent him paints and a sketchbook during his enforced inactivity. Yet ~~as a way of life~~ Lady Gollancz recalls that Rosenberg had been tempted to abandon painting because of the expense of materials and his inability to obtain any return on his outlay. His change of emphasis arose from his deepening awareness of the dedication required to become an artist:

I believe in myself more as a poet than a painter. I think I get more depth into my writing (CW, page 303).

Once more out of hospital he sent Marsh "my little play" which "I mean to work at when I get a chance". This is a clear reference to Moses and we can appreciate that Rosenberg did not have to look far for the original of Abinoah, the bullying overseer: only that month he had mentioned to Schiff:

The doctor here too, Major Devoral, is a ridiculous bullying brute and I have marked him for special treatment when I come to write about the army (LC, page 11).

Before he came home on a few days' leave he was offered the chance of promotion:

I must be looking smart, for I was offered a stripe which I declined (LC, page 13).

Whatever his reasons for refusing promotion, it might have brought him a minimal respite from drudgery and a fraction more time to himself.

In January 1916 Rosenberg transferred to the 12th South Lancashire Regiment in barracks at Farnborough, but found the new surroundings no more congenial:

If I had got into a decent reg that might not have mattered, but amongst the most unspeakably filthy wretches, it is pretty suicidal (Letter postmarked 5th January, 1916, CW, page 306).

This is a very strong contrast to the feelings of Wilfred Owen whose letters express the good-fellowship he discovered on joining his regiment. It comes as no surprise, therefore, that when he sent Marsh a copy of "Marching" in a previous letter he commented:

I sent this one as well [to Abercrombie] which I like. But it is something else I want to write about (CW, page 305)

To Schiff he admitted:

I have food sent up from home and that keeps me alive, but as for the others, there is talk of mutiny every day. One reg close by did break out and some men got bayoneted (LC, page 14).

Moses was printed in May and Rosenberg took the proofs round to Raymond Buildings for Marsh to see, feeling amused at the printer's errors:

The printer is superb. He's made quite an original thing of it, and given me a million hints for new things.⁹

He planned to have copies sent to Schiff and to Abercrombie, and in both these letters he asks his correspondents to keep the news of his going abroad to themselves "as it would pain my mother".

Soon after his arrival overseas Rosenberg moved regiments again, this time to the King's Own Royal Lancashire

⁹ Postcard to Marsh, postmarked 19th May, 1916: Berg Collection of New York Public Library.

Infantry in the 40th Division, and was able to relay to Marsh favourable reactions from R. C. Trevelyan on the poems Rosenberg had sent him within the preceding month. It was at this time too that Rosenberg established contact by correspondence with Bottomley, who had written to compliment him on the poems he had received via Trevelyan. Thus Rosenberg was now being exposed to more professional literary opinions than ever before, and it was an experience he relished.

Yet he was still not free from physical discomforts, and his comments to Miss Seaton during this period are more personal:

I lost all my socks and things before I left England, and hadn't the chance to make it up again, so I've been in trouble, particularly with bad heels; you can't have the slightest conception of what such an apparently trivial thing means. We've had shells bursting two yards off, bullets whizzing all over the show, but all you are aware of is the agony of your heels . . . (CW, page 370).

By July he was working with the Salvage Corps of his Division and he appreciated the increase in his leisure, for some queer change in my military programme has taken place, and now I do get time to read (LC, page 15).

Near the end of the summer he was discussing Georgian Poetry I with Schiff, and his letter contains some penetrating insights as well as indications of his own aims:

I mean to make my next play a model of lucidity . . . I do not think there is any modern poet with the subtlety and energy of mind and art that Bottomley has. John Drinkwater, I could never read, he seems so dull to me and Rupert Brooke has written one fine poem with depth, 'Town and country'. I don't like his other work much, they remind me too much of flag days . . . There is so much unessential writing one puts in a novel and yet which must be there, at the same time makes me regard novel writing as a mistaken art (LC, page 16).

1[inc]

(This is an interesting anticipation of much discussion about the "reality" in Virginia Woolf's novels: whether the accumulation of realistic detail can convey the feeling of life itself. It also relates to Aldous Huxley's Denis in Crome Yellow who intended characters in his novels to be "all minds").

At about the same time he was feeling straitened in his own work by circumstances:

I am always afraid of being empty. When I get more leisure in more settled times I will work on a larger scale and give myself room; then I may be less frustrated in my efforts to be clear, and satisfy myself too (CW, page 371).

His work with the Salvage Corps continued into August, and he enjoyed his relative security:

It is more healthy but not absolutely safe from shells as we get those noisy visitors a good many times a day even here (Letter dated 6th August, 1916: CW, page 311).

One letter to Miss Seaton, dated 15th November, was written in hospital, though the reasons for his going down the line do not emerge in this or any other letter of the period. The next traceable letter which he sent was to Trevelyan, postmarked 20th November and in it he assures Trevelyan that "poetry is still alive in my brain" after "some rough days in the trenches", thus the hospital visit must have been a minor and brief one.

During the early weeks of 1917, Rosenberg's sister Annie and Marsh were both engaged in trying to obtain his transfer to a less exposed occupation because his weak chest was causing his family concern. The details of the exchange of letters will be found in a subsequent chapter (pages 403-404 below), but the upshot was that an M.O. pronounced him absolutely fit so he had to remain where he was. Rosenberg himself was not very complacent about his own condition,

but somewhat ruefully commented to Marsh "I suppose we'll stick it" (Letter postmarked 8th February, 1917, CW, page 315).

At the same time he was explaining to Bottomley:

Ever since November, when we first started on our long marches, I have felt weak; but it seems to be some inscrutable mysterious quality of weakness that defies all doctors. I have been examined most thoroughly several times by our doctor, and there seems to be nothing at all wrong with my lungs (CW, page 374).

By the April he had discovered that attempts to keep the body warm only increased the activity of the lice; he had also suffered from chilblains and the rigours of harsh boots. When he wrote to Marsh at the end of the month he is too enthusiastic over Marsh's efforts to make Moses known to do more than give his physical weakness and tortured feet a passing mention (CW, page 315). With the easing of the cold and damp he suffered less discomfort and was able to expend more letter-space in discussing his own work currently in progress. Hence during May we discover from his letters to Marsh that he has drafted lines which were to emerge finally as "Dead Man's Dump", while he had been working on "Daughters of War" during the last seven months: between now and July he was to devote the bulk of his effort to the play which began as The Amulet and developed into The Unicorn. July also offered him a respite from the trenches, but a letter to Bottomley (postmarked 20th July, 1917) holds out little hope of obtaining a longer respite in the form of leave: Rosenberg's studied casualness about his poetic efforts emerges very clearly in these lines:

We are more busy now than when I last wrote, but I generally manage to knock something up if my brain means to, and I am sketching out a little play (CW, page 376).

Yet in September he was on leave and writing to Trevelyan to thank him for a copy of his play and an anthology of poems. This letter is accredited with the date of 26th September, 1917 for reasons which are nowhere stated--but the conjecture is supported by the dating on a letter to Bottomley, if it is reliable. The latter date in question is 21st September, and Rosenberg writes his regrets that he was unable to meet Bottomley, and has just received his letter, but is unsettled:

I am afraid I can do no writing or reading; I feel so restless here and unanchored. We have lived in such an elemental way so long, things here don't look quite right to me somehow; or it may be the consciousness of my so limited time here for freedom--so little time to do so many things bewilders me (CW, pages 377-8).

His next letter to Trevelyan from France is dated 18th October and was written from hospital where he had presumably been sent because of his run-down condition. On this occasion he was to stay there till December and he made use of this lull to work on some pieces for The Unicorn (CW, page 378).

After this there is a break in the published correspondence until Rosenberg's letter to Marsh which is postmarked 26th January, 1918 (CW, page 320): this is without doubt the bleakest of his wartime letters, telling as it does of the present difficulty of writing even letters, of the mud and his own unfitness, and containing that scored-out passage which is later deciphered with the help of one of D. W. Harding's own letters (see page 405 below). For once the remarkable self-control wavers and one agonised cry escapes--"It is breaking me completely". He followed this on 14th February with a letter to Miss Seaton in which the despair is barely beneath the surface: his bold resolve not

to "leave a corner of my consciousness covered up, but saturate myself with the strange and extraordinary new conditions of this life" has exacted from him as an artist a terrible price:

Sometimes I give way and am appalled at the devastation this life seems to have made in my nature (CW, page 378).

--an exhaustion of spirit he confides also to Bottomley in the apparently undramatic "since I left the hospital all the poetry has quite gone out of me" (Letter postmarked 26th February: CW, page 378). It is some indication of the difference in relationship between himself and Marsh and that which he enjoyed with Bottomley (whom he never met) and Miss Seaton when we notice that it is only to the last-named pair that he can unburden himself without defensive irony: the tone of his letters to Marsh--the one exception being that of 26th January, 1918--is uniformly non-personal, as often sardonic as earnestly aesthetic. Clearly the expansive personality of Bottomley and a similar warmth in Miss Seaton made them into friends while Marsh remained more aloof, a mentor.

By the end of the first week in March he was writing to Marsh of his hope of being transferred to a Jewish battalion. At virtually the same time he was telling Bottomley that they were about to move up the line again after an interlude and his depression has cleared to such an extent that he can deny feeling anxious about the prospect of death. Two letters printed by Silkin in his Leeds Catalogue, and undated by Rosenberg, belong to this period. Proof of this is offered by Rosenberg's address, which he usually incorporated in the body of a letter--whether he had been

recently transferred or not--so that his correspondent would have one excuse the less for not replying. In both these letters (printed on page 20 of Leeds Catalogue), one to his mother and one to Rodker, Rosenberg gives his address as 8 Platoon of B Company, a unit which his letters in Complete Works (pages 320-1) prove he joined only after January 1918. Thus Silkin's conjecture of 1916 for the letter to Rodker is unfounded. This letter bears the date 23rd February and in it Rosenberg maintains his interest in current literature, talking as he does of Hueffer and "Elliott", ~~(could this be the most celebrated surviving poet of his generation?)~~
~~T. S. Eliot's first Poems were published in 1915 in Ezra Pound's Catholic Anthology and "Prufrock" appeared two years later).~~ But his conclusion resembles that of the other letters in January and February--a restless resignation to circumstance:

When will we go on with the things that endure?
The accompanying letter to his mother also offers internal evidence for a dating of March 1918 in its reference to the failure of his application for transfer (most likely that to the Jewish Battalion) already mentioned to Marsh. Any discomfort of his own is generalized by being transferred to the large political manoeuvres following the October Revolution in Russia, when she began the negotiations which culminated at Brest-Litovsk; the comment is a revealing one, for Trotsky was a Jew and Rosenberg might have had parental relatives still alive in Russia at this time, although his sister (Mrs. Lyons) cannot recall any knowledge of them:

I hope our Russian cousins are happy now. Trotsky,
I imagine will look after the interests of his

co religionists--Russia is like an amputated limb to our cause and America is the cork substitute: I doubt whether she is more (LC, page 20).

A note on Rosenberg's failure to date his letters seems relevant here. The simple explanation is that he never knew the date of any particular day--one of the minutiae of life which escaped him. His peacetime letters are no better defined in this respect than the wartime ones, though he did offer Schiff an explanation for this shortcoming of his which trench-life had exacerbated:

I am sorry I cant date my letters as you ask but I never know the date and one can't choose your own time as to sending letters. I generally write when I see the postman coming to collect, if I get the chance (LC, page 17).

Within a few weeks of these letters the despair is beginning to close in round him, the despair of a frustrated artist. Even though he is having a rest period,

it is quite impossible to write or think of writing stuff now, so I can only hope for hospital or the end of the war if I want to write (CW, page 359).

His last letter to Miss Seaton (written on 8th March) contains a prophetic remark:

I do not feel that I have much to say, but I do know that unless I write now it will be a long time before you hear from me again, without something exceptional happens (CW, page 379).

--but also records his dread of the return of the wet weather so detrimental to his feet and lungs. At the end of March his section was back in reserves after an active spell, and it was from here he wrote the last two surviving letters, one to his brother Dave (CW, page 360), and the other to Marsh (CW, page 322). This letter records his latest move to 6 Platoon in B Company and sends a copy of "Through these Pale Cold Days" to Marsh--there is no discernibly firm ground

for supporting the claim of Robert Ross¹⁰ (see page 399 below) that the poem included was in fact "Returning we hear the Larks". "Through these Pale Cold Days" was, on the evidence of this letter, written with "one or two things in hospital about Xmas time" and it does have a definably clear and close relationship with "The Destruction of Jerusalem" and "The Burning of the Temple": "Returning we hear the Larks", by contrast, has no similar companion-pieces. Rosenberg told Marsh that he was quite pleased with some sketches he had done, the first for some time and lamented that

Ive seen no poetry for ages now . . . (CW, page 322). --which must mean that the last poems he read were those in Georgian Poetry II, those which he saw while in hospital near Christmas. To write a poem like "Through these Pale Cold Days", with its sparse but vibrant imagery, was no small achievement, and it remains a touchstone of his poetic integrity. For a biographer or critic, it provides a satisfying pause in that Rosenberg's poetry has momentarily come full-circle by referring to the Judaic history which inspired his earliest-dated poem.

Rosenberg was killed on 1st April, 1918 in a German attack on the British lines and is buried in an unmarked grave in France.

Like any serious artist, Rosenberg developed his powers over a period of years. To spend at least the last thirteen years of one's life in writing poetry suggests a committed

¹⁰ In his The Georgian Revolt.

sensibility, and such was Rosenberg's. From the earliest surviving verse (Fragments, and a poem dated 1905) Rosenberg's work can be seen to follow a steady progress which moves slowly but unmistakably in the direction of improvement: despite the inevitable failures there is never any doubt that Rosenberg was from the beginning dedicated to his craft. From the first poems' reference to Judaism, Rosenberg began to look at the social injustice visible in contemporary society and uttered a plea for the human dignity of the less fortunate.

Despite the fact that he did not derive from a "bookish" background he had developed a taste for reading poetry which was to leave its traces on his early verse:

You mustn't forget [he once told Miss Seaton before 1911] the circumstances I have been brought up in, the little education I have had. Nobody ever told me what to read, or ever put poetry in my way. I don't think I knew what real poetry was till I read Keats a couple of years ago. True, I galloped through Byron when I was about fourteen, but I fancy I read him more for the story than for the poetry. I used to try to imitate him. Anyway, if I didn't quite take to Donne at first, you understand why. Poetical appreciation is only newly bursting on me. I always enjoyed Shelley and Keats (CW, page 364).

Reading through Rosenberg's poems of 1912 and earlier we catch glimpses of other men's minds and techniques--Browning, Byron, Macaulay, Donne, to name but a few. But these are not slavish imitations: Rosenberg is using the concepts, forms, and expressions of earlier poets to see whether he can fit them to his hand; he is acknowledging the guidance and influence of earlier writers at the same time as exploring the possibilities of their approaches. Thus, in the earlier poems especially, the vestiges of declining romanticism, the epithets beloved of Swinburne or of the early Yeats are thick

upon the page in poems which deal with death, isolation or a woman's beauty. Occasionally in these pages we also find the polite and polished album-piece--invariably little more than an empty flourish--whose main interest for us lies in what was considered accomplished and appropriate soon after the turn of the century.

Rosenberg seems to have had little success in close relationships with women, and the fact that the majority of his friends (in life as in correspondence) are men may mean that he did not feel particularly at ease in feminine company. With the exception of Mrs. Cohen's daughter Sonia and Mrs. Lowy's niece Ruth, both from considerably more affluent backgrounds than himself--none of his surviving correspondence reflects much acquaintance with girls, though his relationship with the Lowys was very friendly and he used to take Ruth and other girls into the park to sketch (for which instruction he was paid). This apparent lack of first-hand experience did not prevent him from composing many poems on the theme of love (its joys and sorrows, its obsessions and aversions), though the women who populate them are more ideal than real. Dennis Silk, in his essay on Rosenberg in Judaism, makes much the same point when he says:

It is difficult to believe that Rosenberg's early love-poems, with their impossibly idealized conception of a woman's nature, were written for a real person
(page 468)

As we turn the pages of the 1913 group the eye is caught by the variety of form and length with which Rosenberg was continuously experimenting. Although he soon developed a certain facility in rhyme and rhythm he did not often allow himself to be restricted by them. It was not until almost exactly a year before his death that he expressed his view

on metre in a letter to Marsh:

Regular rythms [sic] I do not like much, but of course it depends on where the stress and accent are laid (CW, page 317).

--but by this time he had already made the point by his own poetic practice. What he is doing here is differentiating between sense-accent and stress-accent, and a metricist would probably regard this as an intuitively just remark. In his own practice he had gone some way towards substantiating the claims of F. S. Flint, who in reviewing Ezra Pound's Exultations in January 1910 asserted that:

the old devices of regular metrical beat and regular rhyming are worn out . . . for the larger music verse must be free from all the restraints of a regular return and a squared-up frame: the poet must forget his rhythm according to the impulse of the creative emotion working through him (Quoted by Wallace Martin: "The New Age" under Orage, page 153).

The opening chapters will indicate how Rosenberg's earlier verses tend to group themselves round several nuclei of interest. Thus, many of these poems deal with the traditional poetic subjects of love and beauty, but both these subjects produce some poems which are not in the familiar romantic strain: there are moments when love is overwhelmed by animal passion, or when beauty evokes a sensual rather than a chivalric response. What this suggests to a reader is not that Rosenberg was a cynical observer of nature, but simply that he is concerned to record many shades of experience, many levels of human responsiveness. It is the response, rather than the quality of it, which Rosenberg was to see as his basic criterion for a meaningful life, a criterion which emerges with full force only in the undercurrent of Moses and The Unicorn. Mingled with this portrayal of impulses are many female figures who seem to be more like mythical symbols

than recognizably fallible humans: this concern with the intensifying of an emotion to a superhuman level was to remain with him and it contributes in some degree to the visible self-restraint displayed in the Trench Poems, to the surface obliquity of the verse-plays where the harshness of experience is objectified and so made more bearable. Not content with creating myth-like figures of his own, Rosenberg makes use of characters such as Lilith, who may be either a fertility figure, or ~~else is~~:

Lilith is the Semitic name for the beautiful and licentious unmarried harlot who seduces men in streets and fields (Stephen Langdon: Tamuz and Ishtar quoted by Mario Praz in The Romantic Agony, page 300).

--and near the end of his life this preoccupation is evident: we find "Daughters of War" and Titanic lovers in close proximity to Rosenberg's interpretation of legendary moments in Judaic history. Such a preoccupation with myth in several forms suggests a kinship with Pound and Eliot, who were contemporaries but not collaborators.

Two further groups of poems centre round the ideas of God and of the poet as artist. As a Jew, brought up against a fairly traditional background, it was predictable that Rosenberg would consider man's relationship to God as a worthwhile subject (but in other respects he pays little attention to such traditional beliefs as the separateness of the Jews from other races or their historical intolerance of goddesses and fertility gods): the nature of this relationship was, to begin with, unexceptionable--God is good and man is fallible and dependent. Later in his life this link was to be increasingly modified, for Rosenberg had sufficient humanism to entertain the possibility of freewill giving room for opposition. Ultimately, this opposition was

to develop into open revolt against and rejection of the deity.

The poet's duty, as Rosenberg saw it in 1912, was to discern God's purpose in creation and endeavour to produce a reconciliation between God and man. From this it was a short step to view him in Shelleyan terms as one of the "unacknowledged legislators of the world", aspiring and isolated yet aware of his own shortcomings, until the artist emerges as a figure of superhuman and revolutionary tendencies whose task is to cleanse society both politically and spiritually. It is possible that this view of the poet's importance was born of Rosenberg's own battlefield experience. For if a poet is to be a leader of men he must not flinch from the violence which his campaign against entrenched, decadent conservatism will necessarily produce.

One characteristic which was to remain with him, already evident by the time one has read through to the 1913 poems, is his cannibalising of his own verses, his returning to a problem or an idea more than once presumably because the earlier attempt was not altogether satisfying. This is why two or three poems with the same title exist, and a comparison of the stages through which one of the poems passes is instructive about Rosenberg's technique. More will be said about the alternative versions of poems later. The fact that these variants survive at all derives largely from Rosenberg's untimely death as well as from his sister's and his correspondents' solicitous care of all the completed poems or jottings he sent to them.

This reverting to once-used themes is also reflected in Rosenberg's fondness for certain phrases or images

(occasionally whole lines) which recur in several poems. One might see this as a sign of Rosenberg's weakness, as if he had run out of new ideas: but in reality Rosenberg's re-using of phrases and images adds layers of meaning to the original conception, so by the time that a phrase has appeared in two or three poems it brings rich accretions and associations to its next use.

The poems of 1914-15 show forth many of the qualities and preoccupations noted in earlier poems. What is surprising is that even as late as this many of the poems are conventional and so rather dead in diction: however, mingled with the turgid there occur highly individual and emotive uses of language which render them uneven and somewhat cryptic in texture. In subject-matter, too, these poems are a combination of the traditional lyric to love or beauty and insights into self-doubt, exile, hostility and darkness which are more subjective and consequently have greater immediacy. The same basic preoccupations underlie these poems as they do the earlier ones, but in the matter of style and diction Rosenberg shows clear signs of development.

It is here for the first time that we are presented to a noticeable degree with the elliptical structure which so often led Rosenberg to be branded as obscure. His use of symbols or emblems becomes idiosyncratic rather than popularly acceptable, and this creates a problem for the interpreter. When reading Rosenberg we should resist the temptation always to press him hard for a crystallised or coherent meaning: to seek this too diligently may well falsify what is on the page. And it is only to readers who demand an

instant, clear paraphrasable sense in all the poems they read that Rosenberg is bound to seem not richly suggestive, but hopelessly obscure: such readers should ponder the definition he sent to Bottomley of

Simple poetry,--that is where an interesting complexity of thought is kept in tone and right value to the dominating idea so that it is understandable and still ungraspable (CW, page 371).

Rosenberg's concern is patently the same as that of T. S. Eliot who in his "Four Elizabethan Dramatists" implies that the artist's role is more concerned with creating than with conveying a meaning when he writes that the artist's task

is a task in the same sense as the making of an efficient engine or the turning of a jug or table-leg (Selected Essays, page 114).

To "understand" (even if not wholly to "grasp") this is to accept that Rosenberg wrote in order to suggest rather than to state, that much of his pre-war poetry is inchoate, despite a number of fine lines and striking images. His intention, then, is to make the distinction between meaning and signification. This purpose of Rosenberg's will emerge clearly in the pages to follow, but there is no doubt that these pre-war poems mark steady stages in the progress of a poet who did improve, a poet who produced more poems of the first order than is generally acknowledged. The volume of his pre-war poems testifies to Rosenberg's dedication to his craft, and the total quality of the best is beyond anything achieved during the same period by Sassoon or Owen. Compare, for example, with Rosenberg's poems of this period, the conventional, polished lyrics of Sassoon such as "Dream-Forest" and "Alone", or Owen's immature "On My Songs" or "The Imbecile".

It is not unfair to Rosenberg to see these pre-war poems as a preparation for what he was to write during the next three years.

The published pamphlets also record Rosenberg's poetic maturing. Night and Day was, for the most part, redolent in both subject and diction, of the 1890s. Youth, (published three years later in 1915) is characterized by a riddling quality in much of the verse, a reflection of Rosenberg's acquaintance with the Metaphysical poets. The achievement of these two, however, pales beside that of Moses where for the first time Rosenberg's energy and insight are displayed untrammelled by earlier influences: here he is his own master, sure of his direction even if his technique seems exploratory. The publication of Hardy's The Dynasts in 1905 seems to have little relevance to Rosenberg's drama, but affinities with some of Yeats's plays will be noted later on.

By this time he is primarily concerned to scrutinise power, a concept which is central to all the plays. In Moses, as in the later The Amulet and The Unicorn Rosenberg's aim is to examine the role of the leader of a revolt, a revolt against settled indolence and injustice. Because of the circumstances under which he had to work, Moses survives in two versions which antedate the printed text (these are to be found in the Appendix) and this accident enables us to see very clearly Rosenberg's methods of revision, his attempts to refine his technique and to deepen his insight into the presentation of character.

Why he chose the form of blank verse play is uncertain, but his choice was probably influenced by the recent successes of Bottomley and Abercrombie in this genre: a glance at his

letters (see CW, pages 292, 311, 318, 354 etc.) will demonstrate his instantaneous enthusiasm for Abercrombie's poems and Bottomley's drama (King Lear's Wife in particular).

Before this period he had tried his hand at dramatic monologue, but his technical resources were insufficient to maintain the reader's interest: at least in the accepted dramatic form the interaction of personalities should help to maintain life in the verse. For the most part, this calculated gamble pays off, and the exchanges between individuals more than compensate for the moments of potential stagnation when one character is soliloquizing. The poetry is dramatic, the language often violent and immediate, and yet the plays lack that variety of incident which would guarantee success on the stage. The plays are "dramatic poetry" rather than "theatre". In Rosenberg's defence it should perhaps be added that there is no evidence that he intended his plays to be staged. They remain as drama for the study rather than for the market-place, but this does not imply anything "precious" or esoteric about them.

The protagonist in both plays derives in part from the Nietzschean superman, for he is motivated on one level by a Dionysiac intensity to destroy in order to rebuild a better society. But this altruism is tempered by more human considerations. Moses is evidently ambitious for himself as well as for his people, while Tel experiences in person the frustration and desire for procreation which drives his followers.

What is increasingly obvious is Rosenberg's partiality to myth, as mentioned earlier (pages 27-8). If the Earlier Poems show Rosenberg holding at a distance his experience of love,

then these plays can equally be seen as on one level therapeutic creations as Rosenberg can sink into them the personal element of his own nature as well as his own personal problems--to know what these were we only have to read his letters during the early days after enlisting (violence, strength of personality to resist it, the attempt to harmonise one's nature with one's surroundings--all are bodied forth in the dramas).

In The Dial of November 1923, Eliot makes the following comment on James Joyce's use of myth, which is equally relevant to Rosenberg: myth, he says,

is simply a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history . . .¹¹

As will be argued later on, it was this very ability to withdraw behind a layer of apparent impersonality which gives to his Trench Poems their curiously oblique quality as well as enabling Rosenberg himself to survive artistically almost thirty months of militaristic brutality. When in March of 1918 he informed Miss Seaton "I mean to put all my innermost experiences into the 'Unicorn'" (CW, page 379) there is no reason to suppose that this process had not already begun: thus in it violence seems acceptable as a means to an end, while those who remain passive to Fate fall--by virtue of abdicating their will--as victims to such violence. Neither alternative is especially attractive, and both courses of action derive from equally selfish impulses. In other words, the lesson of war is--trite though it may seem now--that

¹¹ Quoted by R. Langbaum: The Poetry of Experience, page 11

neither side can appropriate to itself right or altruism: that hostility calls out at once both the heights and the depths of human potentiality. The gentleness of the Nubian develops into the messianic ruthlessness of Tel. But this ruthlessness, as Rosenberg presents it to us, is amply justified by its motive, which is the simple instinct for self-preservation and the wholly commendable desire for racial regeneration.

In the group of war poems which Gordon Bottomley and D. W. Harding (the editors of CW) entitled Trench Poems this violence and brutality receives no such justification. Rosenberg does not seek to explain the carnage but confronts as a fact ~~of~~ the "strange and extraordinary new conditions of this life" which he himself was experiencing. Rosenberg resorts once more to myth in several of these poems, but does not use it as an escape from what he called "all the devastating forces let loose by an ambitious and unscrupulous will". Myth is employed here as a means of interpreting this violence, to bring out the significance of it as a universal and perpetual element in human nature.

The poems in this group have clear images, the language is sparing and articulation precise. Rosenberg is by now certain about what he wants his poems to do; but because he truncates his arguments or thought-processes the verse often appears highly condensed. The indirectness of his approach to the subject of war is a quality often commented on disparagingly by critics such as Joseph Cohen. But knowing what we do of his earlier development and hardships we can appreciate that the war merely confirmed and strengthened his natural tendency to objectivise (or mythify) those areas

of experience which deeply involved his feelings. To distance through art a disagreeable experience is, to a small degree, to exorcise it. If we mistake the surface calmness as denoting a lack of sensitivity we do Rosenberg a disservice, for we have ignored the strength of the control which suppressed any tendency to "plaintive caterwauling". Rosenberg's tendency to make an artistic pattern out of what must have been extremely uncomfortable situations is not a deficiency but a token of his artistic integrity. In this group a large number of the poems bear the marks of a major achievement, and these are certainly the most accomplished, most successful, the least flawed and convoluted of his poems. There is little doubt that these poems (along with the plays, more ranging, but less finished) are Rosenberg's major achievement. With the Trench Poems before us we can see with clarity and ease how the preceding years and earlier poems were an apprenticeship in technique, expression, and personal experience for what Rosenberg was able to produce during the last two years of his life.

Unhappily, as his time in the trenches went on Rosenberg became more and more submerged in the processes of war--

I've seen no poetry for ages now . . . (CW, page 322)
--and we have no evidence of the direction in which his thoughts would have turned after the war. What we can say of him with assurance is that the war was merely one more interlude (though fatal) in his life, an interlude that he entered into unwillingly and of which he was for ever hoping to see the end: he had blossomed as a poet before the war, however, and though he reached his peak in the Trench Poems, the war was not an indispensable factor in his growth as a

poet as it was for Wilfred Owen (whose pre-war poems are bad), or for Siegfried Sassoon, whose pre-war poems are pleasant but rather trivial.

The pages which follow will chart in detail the progress Rosenberg made, during fifteen years of writing poetry, towards "finding his true voice and achieving mastery of his material" as Sassoon describes it in his preface. What has been asserted in the preceding paragraphs will be proved by the thoroughgoing study of his poems at all the stages of his development. The reader may well feel that from this study Rosenberg emerges as his own best advocate: if we set aside for a moment whatever light is shed on his work by analysis of individual poems and a close study of related groups of poems, Rosenberg's glancing and occasional remarks about his own poems and poetic purposes show--in a very condensed way--a really profound critical intuition. This is no less than just to Rosenberg, both as a man and as a poet.

CHAPTER II

THE APPRENTICESHIP

This study will devote more space to the earlier poems than to the plays or to the acknowledged masterpieces among the Trench Poems in order to emphasize the continuity of Rosenberg's development. In this sense, poems which are themselves failures provide valuable evidence of his poetic growth. His poetic vocabulary is curious--almost code-like at times--and it often carries unusual or eccentric connotations. These Earlier Poems are important, for when two or three versions of the same poem survive they throw light on the process of composition and on Rosenberg's development of his technical mastery. The technique of this thesis is, once more, exploratory rather than evaluative, being mainly concerned to trace the connection between the publisher of slender verse-pamphlets and the writer of the later masterpieces. Textual criticism does not, however, make easy reading and the reader will need to use this study in conjunction with either Complete Works or Collected Poems. Page-references to Complete Works are accordingly supplied and manuscript textual variants are also recorded.

Rosenberg's civilian poems form the largest proportion of his output and they cover a period of about ten years, as the earliest surviving complete poem~~s~~ is dated 1905 (when he

was fifteen). Some of the themes which are evident in his later work make their appearance here: his attitude towards God, for example, or his thoughts about being a Jew, or expressions of isolation and a sense of loss recur throughout this group of 186 poems. We would also expect to find examples of Rosenberg's apprentice work, and therefore the influences of Donne, Blake, Keats, Byron, Browning, Rossetti, Swinburne and the 'decadent' 1890s are noticeable; none of these, however, makes more than a few passing appearances, for Rosenberg was working towards a style and diction of his own that, by the time of the verse-plays and Trench Poems, owes no direct debt to any individual or group.

Not all of this group are complete poems, for Complete Works (1937) and Collected Poems (1949) include sixty-one Fragments, and there are four others at present uncollected (three of them among the manuscripts in the British Museum) which Jon Silkin has printed in his Leeds Catalogue; yet two more are in the Library of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. Some recently-discovered material in the possession of Miss Livia Gollancz and Mrs. Ray Lyons will be discussed under a separate sub-heading. The editorial grouping of the Earlier Poems is logical--Night and Day pamphlet (1912); Youth pamphlet (1915); Fragments; "Unpublished Poems" subdivided into "Before 1912", "1912", "1913", and "1914-15"--but it seems more practical to treat them here as a single large group which contains within itself certain centres of interest or groups of subjects which illustrate the stages of the poet's progress. This section, therefore, will not work steadily through this whole group in chronological order, but will instead subdivide it into such

themes as Love, Beauty, God; a good many of the poems are of concern only as evidence of Rosenberg's developing technique and self-awareness, thus this examination will not aim to discuss every single piece, though all of significance will be treated.

The most evident preoccupations in the earlier poems are the twin traditional themes of love and beauty, and they run through all the sections into which Complete Works and Collected Poems divide these poems.

Beauty

The earliest appearance of the idea of beauty is in two lightweight pieces, "Lines Written in an Album" and "God Looked Clear at Me through her Eyes". The first is sufficiently explained by its title for it is a tribute in verse to a particular girl's charm, and echoes of Swinburne can be seen in "jewelled", "The lilies and the roses" as well as in the movement of the lines whose pleasant sound carries the poem onward without any real development of thought to accompany it. Yet there are unexpected moments which make a reader's eye pause, as in lines 19-20:

. . . Thy laughing eyes might hearken

To sounds sweet visions wrought, . . .

and again in lines 29-32 where the metaphysical technique of mingling senses and sensations is probably an echo of Donne--whom Rosenberg had been reading when he wrote to Miss Seaton about 1911:

I have read some of the Donne; I have certainly never come across anything so choke-full of profound meaningful ideas. It would have been very difficult for him to express something commonplace, if he had to (CW, page 366).

Interesting also is the less obviously derivative image of the last four lines and the curious juxtaposition in line 28 of "idly" and "prying", linked by assonance as much as by their mutual opposition.

"God Looked Clear" is the first formulation of one of Rosenberg's abiding ideas, that a woman's beauty is a manifestation of the spirit, in this case the divine spirit. God here is not specifically Jewish or Christian, but at least he is beneficent--the same presence in whom the poet is to trust for guidance in the later "Night and Day". The regular rhyme and steady tetrameters show a degree of formal accomplishment that Rosenberg was to move away from as time went on, though the tyranny of rhyme produces the tautology of "remote and far" in line 14 and the feebleness of "mysterious/imperious" in lines 13 and 15.

"Now the Spirit's Song has Withered" exhibits a pleasing delicacy of touch, and it deals with the ephemerality of beauty, the realisation that in our physical world all glimpses of harmony are doomed to dissolution. But the suggestion remains that these moments are those of 'life-significance', those of "the spirit's song". The search for "spots of time" must not lead the individual to reject the physical world, as "The Nun" declares. "Soul's meekness" is a sign of weakness, not of inner purity. It calls to mind Milton's strictures on "cloister'd virtue" as well as Browning's belief that effort and use alone confer beauty and nobility ^{on} ~~to~~ life. Despite its concern with beauty, this poem's directness of approach is more akin to Blake than to Swinburne. It also has a concentration of imagery which is more characteristic of the later poems, and this is best

exemplified by the image of the last two lines:

. . . While soul rays light to soul
In one God-linked sun.

One other point to be noted is that this poem marks the first appearance in Rosenberg of "amorous", an epithet which was later to acquire sinister connotations of corruption and dissolution--as in "At Night" and "A Worm Fed".

The quality of verse in the 1912 section of poems is very variable and this is well illustrated by "We are Sad with a Vague Sweet Sorrow", which shares with early Yeats "the old tale that beauty dies". Apart from this and its regular rhythm and rhyme it is deficient in interest, for it is vague and lacking in the immediacy of "Now the Spirit's Song".

When Rosenberg is writing of beauty in these early poems the shadow of Blake is never very far away, and in "Like some Fair Subtle Poison" the canker in the rose commonplace pervades the poem. But though the underlying idea of the poem is Blake's, Rosenberg's treatment of it is in the erotic tradition of the 1890s. A woman's beauty has become a snare and she herself a femme fatale in that she lures a man on to his perdition. (This is akin to Swinburne's vision in "Anactoria", lines 115-116:

Ah, ah, thy beauty! like a beast it bites,
Stings like an adder, like an arrow smites.)

Indeed, the speaker appears as a more than half-willing captive in the woman's "amorous net"--the second appearance of this epithet already suggests something more than mere affection. The regularly-rhyming hexameters are handled with much skill and subtlety, there is the elegant assonance

of "sinous rhythms" (line 12); but the whole poem has the hothouse atmosphere of a fervid daydream. The degree of over-dramatization is clearer when, with hindsight, we can compare it with the brutally concrete equivalent to this fantasy which Rosenberg was to develop in "Returning, We Hear the Larks". What the poem leaves us with is evidence of his submission at this stage to the faded conventions of an earlier decade.

"Night and Day"--a poem dealing with the relationship of an artist to society as well as to God (a benevolent life-force), and hence a search for self-identity--invokes once more the idea of beauty as it appeared in "God Looked Clear at Me" (page 41 above). In "Day" the personified Beauty sings to the aspiring poet a "fair song/Of the Eternal rhythm" which advocates his ending a dependence on bodily senses since the significance of Beauty is intellectual rather than physical. Beauty emerges as the impulse in all created things to praise their Creator; it is finally identified as "the voice of God", having some kinship with the music of the spheres. What is clear is that Rosenberg at that moment considered beauty as a moral force, thus as an essence it is antagonistic to its manifestation in human beauty. Yet it is characteristic of him that his artist is left in suspense at the end of the poem--he is convinced of the ultimate benevolence and sanative quality of Nature, yet whether he will follow these inner promptings and so become a prophet and leader of men is left in doubt.

The ephemerality of beauty is treated again in "Twilight" (II), the earliest of the 1913 group of poems. A slight variation on the handling of this theme, which differentiates

it from its earlier appearance in "Now the Spirit's Song", is the link with Platonism which the second stanza makes unmistakable--"all these things are shadowed gleams of things beyond the firmament". But the beauty in question is romantic and intangible as it was in "Night and Day". The slow-moving heptameters and end-stopped rhyming lines contribute to the poem's lyrical lament, while the use of roses, stars and an innocent moon in particular recalls Yeats.

Alongside this reflective consideration we find the more traditional praise of a woman's beauty, as expressed in "Apparition"; but the enjoyment of such beauty cannot be simply an objective appreciation. It seems that for Rosenberg, to praise feminine beauty was to acknowledge its power and hence to admit to a degree of subservience to it: the woman's gift is ambiguous. So here lines 1 and 2 foreshadow Lilith's ensnaring of Tel, and in the second stanza the image of captivity is reinforced by reference to a woman's eyes as liquid prisons for the unwary soul--an idea which Rosenberg was to employ again in "Song", "The Blind God" and in the later two versions of "My Soul is Robbed". This idea was not original to Rosenberg for we can find an earlier expression of it in Measure for Measure (IV:i:1):

Take, O take those lips away,

That so sweetly were forsworn;

And those eyes, the break of day,

Lights that do mislead the morn . . .

"Twilight" (III) represents the final version of this poem, and here the beauty which the onset of night seems to destroy is transferred to night itself. Rhyme and regular line-length have vanished and night is personified as an

attractive woman. From this point it is a relatively short step to see night as at once alluring and perilous, and so to find it (in "Returning, We Hear the Larks") as both protection and menace. The beauty of night is "a vaster splendour" than that of day because it is more mysterious and so to Rosenberg more elemental. The phrase "enormous pearl maiden" is remarkably similar to a passage in Ford Madox Hueffer's The Rash Act (not published till 1933) where he describes a negro girl:

Since the light from the upper sky was intense she was not in silhouette and her skin was indeed nacreous as the dark girl said. Like mother of pearl The shadows beneath her arms, armpits, breasts and knees reflected the blue of the sky; there was a little pink on the base of the neck, the ribs and the lower limbs. But most of the flesh was rice-white A Hellenic figure done in nacre! The dark girl was like a drop of luminous blood!

The image also appealed to Rosenberg for he was to develop it more fully (and more erotically) in his "Night" (see pages 47-8).

The last two poems in this section which refer to beauty are negligible pieces, part of a group of four poems which cluster round the central image of a woman singing. "As a Sword in the Sun--" was, like the other three, included in Bottomley's 1922 edition, but there was entitled "Beauty". It again reverts to the ephemerality of beauty, related this time to the evanescent beauty of song. "Song" treats of a lady's beauty in cosmic terms--"heavens", "God's battle-place"--or as a star which inspires the poet's thought. The neat paradox with which the poem ends--a star's beauty can be caught by reflection of an earthly pool--was another idea which Rosenberg was to re-use. These two pieces are poetically conventional, being written in smooth,

regularly-rhyming trimeters.

The mystical power of a woman's beauty reappears in the 1914-15 Poems in "I Know you Golden" where the girl's beauty, as natural as it is ephemeral, grants the speaker's spirit insight into the grand abstractions of life--love, living itself, time and space. The peculiar quality of beauty noted here is its combination of frailty with immense influence. This poem is in neat, rhyming dimeters, whose expression is economical without being difficult--its meaning is (so far as this is true of any of Rosenberg's poems) on the surface.

"Sacred, Voluptuous Hollows Deep", which immediately follows the above poem, is altogether different, in both tone and form. The rhythmic pattern is tetrametric, but the rhyme is structured differently within each stanza, for each of the four is of differing length. This is a sensual poem of frustration, which begins with a rhapsodic examination of the shadow-patterns on a girl's face. Her appearance leads to a moral paradox Rosenberg meets on other occasions when writing of woman--"chaste impurity". In lines 10-16:

Where our thoughts nestle, our lithe limbs

Frenzied exult till vision swims . . .

.

While molten sweetest pains enmesh

The life sucked by entwining flesh...

the sexual references are explicit, physical pleasure being mingled with violence, yet we are left with the feeling that a moral judgement underlies this headiness--an "expense of spirit in a waste of shame". Possibly here (as also in several poems in Youth) the intensity of this experience

offers the speaker an opportunity to escape from self-awareness through love--an idea which will be examined under a subsequent heading. The third stanza lapses into feeble incantatory "O's" and terms of worship--"incarnate", "glory", "seraph", "paradisal" and reverts to the notion of lust, which is here seen as a pervasive inhibiting factor. Swinburne's influence is apparent in the powerfully suggestive opening lines of the fourth stanza:

As weary water dreams of land

While waves roll back and leave wet sand, . . .

Rosenberg took some trouble over the formulation of this image, as can be seen from earlier workings in Fragments XVIII and XIX. But the ending offers little comfort, for the speaker's attempts to absorb the girl's personality within himself will not succeed; thus, by implication, he too cannot escape himself by absorption into her.

"Night" develops from these poems, for while they deal with sexual feelings for a woman, this one (by a process also evident in the changes made between the two versions of "My Soul is Robbed") distances the emotion by mythologizing the subject--night is transformed into a sensuous woman. The musical intensity of the last two stanzas echoes the language of the "Song of Solomon" but by this time the poem has lost direction. The moment at which this occurs is pinpointed for us by the unrhymed tercet at lines 9-11:

The straining lusts of strenuous amorists,

Smoking from crimson altars of their hearts,

In burning mists are shed upon my dreaming. . .

--for up to this point Rosenberg has adhered to his original intention of treating night as a Titanic goddess (reminiscent

of the Amazons in "Daughters of War" as also of "The Female God")--though line eight hints at the new direction the poem is to take:

. . . You smouldering pyres of flaming aeons of love.
For with the mention of "love" the poem has deserted the personification of night in favour of "fervid fancies" about some sexual encounter. Although stanza four re-invokes the paradox of "Sacred, Voluptuous Hollows" in line 14--"Thy loathesomeness and beauty ", and the fifth stanza is a fervent hymn to the naked body of beauty, the final picture is confused: the image in the closing stanza of a woman's breasts as fruit becomes over-complicated and thus incoherent and this leads us to look for the last explicit reference to night, which occurs as far back as stanza two. This is an ambitious poem which comes to grief, although it shows signs of Swinburnian eroticism (as in "Laus Veneris":

. . . There is a feverish famine in my veins;

Below her bosom, where a crushed grape stains

The white and blue . . .

--while "lithe" (line 15) is also a Swinburnian favourite, occurring, for example in line 233 of "The Triumph of Time":

Your lithe hands draw me, your face burns through me . . .)
There are also echoes of Yeats' predilection for such words as "glimmering", "pale" and "fade". With greater control of his material as exemplified by "The Female God", Rosenberg was able to achieve a much more individual and convincing representation of the eternal predatory female.

The poem which follows it, "What if I wear your Beauty" is weakened by its self-indulgent motive, for the posture of humility on receipt of a girl's love is not one that Rosenberg

could attempt without sounding insincere. The diction is at times embarrassing (as in lines 8-10):

. . . From the first dazzling daystream, the enfolden
Sweet thirst, a mother prattle
To a new babbled birth. . .

and the frequency of archaisms such as "hath", "enfolden", and "gotten", does nothing to alleviate the awkwardness. The last four lines, however, contain a concrete image which is the poem's only bright moment:

. . . burdened
With new rich fears of pirates
I droop dark pendulous sails.

"The Female God" is an important poem, for it fuses Rosenberg's thoughts on female beauty with those of man's relationship to God. It celebrates the passionate woman, who exercises quasi-divine powers. In both "God Made Blind" and "The One Lost" a girl is seen as a means of escape, of revolt against a tyrannical God, but here she has herself become mythified--the completion of the process begun in "Beauty" (I) and "I am the Blood"--and has taken on God's (by now) persecutory function. Like Jon Silkin (Out of Battle, page 291), we can see a connection between this poem and "Daughters of War" in which malign female deities dominate.

Each of the first three stanzas--rhymeless and with lines of irregular length, as throughout--spends its first two lines on the insatiability of this female's eyes and its second pair on the snare of her hair: this last idea is also to be found in Swinburne (lines 51-52 of "Fragoletta"):

Thou hast a serpent in thine hair,
In all the curls that close and cling . . .

(This image also looks forward to "Returning We Hear the Larks" and by mention of trees again in lines 7-8 to "Daughters of War"). Lines 9-10:

Like a candle lost in an electric glare

Our spirits tread your eyes' infinities...

display awe towards this being, but whether on account of her animal power or of her terrifying innocence remains uncertain: the possibility of this God's being innocent is reinforced by "rose-deaf" at line 23. Line 10 itself reappears recognizably in lines 1-2 of "My Soul is Robbed" (I) and (II), Fragment XXVIII (lines 3-4), "The Poet" (III) (lines 19-20), and The Unicorn (line 145). The following stanza apostrophizes her as "Queen! Goddess! Animal!" whose dreams are powerful enough to battle with men's souls: line 15 echoes "Returning We Hear the Larks" again. In stanza five she appears as the woman in the Book of Revelation who has been released from the tyranny of the male, whether human or divine, and so she demands the "appalled submission" --to quote Dennis Silk (in his essay on Rosenberg in Judaism, Fall 1965)--of the speaker as of all men.

The nature of the God in this visionary poem remains undefined beneath its rhetoric, save for her predatoriness; like the Daughters of War she possesses "no softer lure", her beauty is horribly fascinating rather than romantically attractive. Only her complete dominance is asserted, a dominance which turns creation into "Your World". "Rose-deaf prison" is an eye-catching phrase; "rose" may here suggest innocence equally as well as passion itself. The God's (why not Goddess's?) hardness and carnality strongly suggest that the rose has more of passion than of innocence

about it. She complacently resists man's plea for release from her tyranny--a tyranny largely undefined save for its being a universal and supernatural erotic force discernible somehow in human activity. Whether Rosenberg approves of this force is uncertain, but the terms of his description treat it as an opponent rather than as an ally, a source of ennobling contest.

The ephemerality of beauty already noted in earlier poems such as "Now the Spirit's Song" and "Twilight" (III) (pages 41 & 44 above) makes another appearance in "A Bird Trilling its Gay Heart Out", where it is manifested in the careless song of a bird and in sunlight. The speaker feels he will regret losing this beauty, but a new element here is that this beauty reveals an ugliness in the world and in the speaker that might otherwise have remained hidden in the darkness of ignorance. On a personal level this ugliness could well be the arousal by beauty of animal passions.

"Her Fabled Mouth" marks a stage in the mythification of a girl, which culminates in "The Female God", an impression reinforced by the repetition of "fabled" in lines 1 and 11. Her beauty is described in the traditional manner, and this is coupled with the sense of loss so noticeable in the poems of this period, as in the "faded Eden" of line six. The reality of this particular girl is shown by the final stanza where the opening of her eyes gives the lie to the old story of love being painful--she makes the myths seem wrong. There is a certain pleasing ambiguity in "wronging of love's fabled pains" which prevents us reaching too simple a conclusion: there seem to be three possibilities--either the

pains of love are not real, or they are not fabulous and therefore are real, or possibly the sense is that we wrong love's pains which are not fabled, thus they should not be treated contemptuously for they are worth enduring. Such a reversal of accepted attitudes calls to mind the Blakean approach.

"Summer's Lips are Aglow" is another small, regular poem, about a windswept beauty, her "hair a blowing flame", who arouses his love and then laughs at his dreams; the sense of loss here is tempered by the last two lines which suggest that the speaker no longer needs dreams now that he has acquired a real love of his own.

The mythification of woman finds expression in the next two poems in this section. Rosenberg seems in this group of poems to be reversing the more common practice of starting from an idealised picture and working towards a real experience. As mentioned earlier (page 26 above) this method may have originated from Rosenberg's unsuccessful personal relationships--this art has become a means of defence as well as of re-living his experience in a suitably objectified form. The speaker in "I am the Blood" is seeking the closest possible relationship with his lover, so he imagines himself successively as the blood of beauty, on which she will prey like a vampire--a figure currently popular since the publication in 1897 of Bram Stoker's Dracula, which had run into its ninth edition by 1912--then the air which beauty breathes and finally the death which she has produced by sucking his blood, so that the girl (now equated with beauty) becomes his monument. This poem's lack of rhyme sets it apart from those which immediately precede it, though like them it

possesses stanzas of regular lengths, ranging in size from trimeters to pentameters. As a poem, it lacks the feel of a logical progression, and it is probably fair to invoke Swinburne again as an exemplar of sound outweighing sense.

"Beauty" (I) is the earlier version of a poem which makes a second appearance in this section; here it takes the form of alternating pentameter and trimeter in four-line stanzas, and it presents the 1890-ish figure of a beauty-searcher. Beauty here is a supernatural quality, unaffected by earthly weaknesses--a predominantly Romantic view, which is strengthened by the Keatsian equation of it with Truth in line four. The ornate figure in line six--"the flushed night of the nun solitude"--is suggestive ("nun" implies chastity, while "flushed" suggests the opposite), but also leads to the heart of the poem. Adam was prepared to reject life in Eden for the sake of this "nun", but ultimately man is driven to look into himself to find beauty's dwelling-place. Thus this chaste angel, this "nun", is the source of inspiration; the fact that this figure of beauty is female may derive from the poet's desire to create for himself an anima to complement his own masculinity. In this way his sexual fantasies can be transformed into art. The poem poses many questions but offers few answers, Over-written and inflated, its image-pictures are vague and less concrete than those of version (II).

The second poem bearing this title is written in a single 20-line stanza of tetrameters rhyming in pairs until the final four lines which rhyme alternately. Like the earlier version it too is dated 1914, but it was published in the December 1914 edition of South African Women in Council at the head of Rosenberg's lecture on Art, thus it

may well have been written in South Africa. Yet this poem, with its mellifluously flowing lines, is not wholly intelligible. At the outset, beauty burns like a purifying flame, shining through the forests of history. This flame is akin to the brightness of day which in turn is related to the "burning bush", a source of joy and beauty and maybe (as for Moses) a manifestation of God's presence. Summer flowers, the product of joy or divine love kissing the earth, remove the ashes of gloom and frustration from us, and by this action of beauty on us we become purified in soul through its aesthetic force; our souls in their turn shine through their "soul's sack", burning with constant and intense purity.

The conclusion to be drawn from this pair of poems is that Rosenberg was moving away from his conception of beauty in terms of women, and coming full-circle back to the belief of "Day" that beauty is essentially an aesthetic rather than an emotional quality, attributable ultimately only to some divine power. This sets them in sharp contrast to the rest of the poems in the 1914-15 group, where divine power is rarely invoked, this being one stage in Rosenberg's progress to regarding God as indifferent (Youth pamphlet) or downright malign (Moses poems).

As far as beauty is concerned, the story is almost over. Though it is a concept central to The Amulet and The Unicorn, it disappears in single poems after 1915, save for one poem in Youth, a few Fragments, and certain moments in Trench Poems. The Youth poem--"A Mood"--is a slight piece, rhyming regularly in trimeters, which nevertheless relates beauty to urban corruption in a way that harks back to the social

concern of the early "Ballad of Whitechapel". It begins pleasantly enough, with an appreciation of the fragility of a girl's beauty, but in the second stanza critical comment appears in "loveless" and "impure". "Frail fairy of the streets" is unconvincing, but the implication of stanza three is sufficiently clear: in a city the appeal of beauty is to the body, not to the spirit--hence the appeal at the end to "liliated meadows fresh". This, of course, was a part of Rosenberg's plan for Youth, and it reminds us of his comment (CW, pages 292-293) that youth is "just sense".

Fragments XV and XVI relate both to one another and to The Amulet through their concern with the power of woman's beauty (paralleled by lines 78-80 of The Amulet). In XV this power renders her lover quasi-divine, as she is herself --she has caused another Fall, since she carries Eden in her eyes and so has deprived the angels of it. Fragment XVI, in regular pentameters which rhyme uniformly save for unrhymed dimeters of lines 10 and 20, extends the range of beauty in XV and in The Amulet, and its ideas are also found in The Unicorn at lines 147-148:

Beauty is music's secret soul,

Creeping about man's senses.

Beauty is here the roots of a tree whose influence reaches to all men and from here its quality is seen to be boundless and elemental. Finally, in stanza three, it can be a source of danger, producing unexplored passions--an idea treated at length in The Amulet and The Unicorn and in Trench Poems such as "Returning, We Hear the Larks". The move towards a mythification of beauty and its human possessor is very obvious here.

Man's simultaneous desire for and fear of beauty appears once more in Fragment XXXVI. Its theme is by now familiar to readers of The Amulet and The Unicorn that beauty is both alluring and awe-inspiring: the first line--"I know all men are withered with yearning"--appears very recognisably as line 151 of The Unicorn.

Love

Beauty is traditionally linked with the emotion of love. In the early stages of Rosenberg's development it comes as no surprise to find love for the divine mingled with love for a woman. This is how it is expressed in one of the pre-1912 poems, "God Looked Clear at Me through her Eyes", a minor lyric which has been already noted (page 41 above).

The most considerable poem in this earliest section, "A Ballad of Whitechapel", is a poem which functions on several levels; it is a poem of compassion, of idealistic anger at social prejudice, and is concerned with the brotherhood of man. In the terms of this latter category, the speaker's meeting with and attraction to "A girl in garments rent . . . forgot of God" is not set forth as a sexual or romantic encounter. Her eyes reveal a thirst for spiritual nourishment, and the speaker goes with her, for he feels her to be essentially untouched by the sordid urban materialism all around them. The emotion in this poem is a spiritual love as the source of strength in adversity, and it is expressed, despite the poem's weaknesses, with an intensity which Rosenberg was later to rationalise and reduce to a more conceptual way of thinking. Its value in this context is that it is the first poem to express a personal emotion, rather than a generalized one.

"The Key of the Gates of Heaven" is an over-elaborate poem which seems to relate how the speaker can release his lover's voice by a word. This could, however, be operating on a metaphorical level, as an illustration of how poetry seems to liberate the spirit. But as a whole, the poem lacks restraint--"golden" in the first stanza is repeated too often in an unqualified way to have any effect, while the description of the girl's opening mouth is embarrassingly self-conscious (lines 11-14):

And words that throbbed and burned,
Sweet birds from the shine of love,
Flew clear 'tween the rosebud gate
That was parted beneath and above, . . .

(But see page 134 below).

Connected to the preceding poem by the theme of spiritual liberation is "The Cage"; once again the poem's idea is couched in language redolent of unrequited love. These three stanzas of hexameters rhyming in pairs also resemble the contemporary "The Poet" (I); where the image of the body as a prison recurs in lines 12-13:

For swiftly sin and suffering and earth-born laughter
meshed his ways,
And caught him in a cage of earth, but heaven can hear his
dewy lays.

The search for escape from the temporal demands of life is bound to lead to failure and frustration, but the poem suggests that a partial solution lies in spiritual unity with a woman. Yet it is characteristic of Rosenberg that her essential spirituality is presented in specifically physical terms (line 9):

O splendour of radiant flesh, O your heavy hair uncurled,
--these attributes are for him symbols of her inner desirability, as Lilith's "small dazzling face" was later to express the lure she held for Tel.

"Don Juan's Song" treats love in a very different way. Initially it seems to Don Juan in love that the universe is suffused by the same emotion, but this is a delusion for the succession of moonlight and daylight is controlled by time, as in the waxing and waning of love; love carries evil within itself, for shadows blemish the light of love, extra sensitivity suspects "death in each vain word" and so security is destroyed. The final stanza contains the rich image of a humble stream reflecting heaven, which is worth the rest of the poem. Affection is often delusory as are the petals which fall on to and ripple the stream's surface and its reflection of heaven, without disturbing heaven itself. Possibly Don Juan sees these frail blooms as women, borne up for a while on the stream of masculine love, and their love is similarly destined to perish in the natural order of things--such a gloss fits in with the male arrogance of a traditional Don Juan. Yet line 17:

. . . Though deep within too far on high . . .
shows his love to be more than mere amorousness--though deep within himself it is beyond reach (and so beyond control).

A pair of poems which share much of each other's material are "You and I" and the later "Love to Be". Of the two, it is the earlier one which seems, contrarily, to be a development from the other--for the latter is written in 14-line pentametric stanzas and it contains many Elizabethanisms like "doth belate" in lines two and three (this one also has a

Hardyesque ring about it), "laggard at the gate" in the following line, and "long-wished" in line four. Such forms as "distrest", and "bedrest" (lines 5 and 8 respectively) can be accounted for as metrical requirements, in the sense that Rosenberg presumably spelt them in this archaic way to ensure that they were pronounced as disyllables. As in the earlier version, Rosenberg is dramatising an abstract thing, a feeling (as also in the earlier "Nocturne") while "she roaming" (line 13) pleases by its bold ellipsis; yet the poem lacks a heart--there is no pressure of personal commitment, but instead a self-stylisation detectable in such consciously euphonious phrases as "sad sea". Lines 15-28 of "Love to Be" reappear verbatim as the Song of Hope in "Day" (lines 201-214):

By what far ways shall my heart reach to thine?
We, who have never parted--never met,
Nor done to death the joys that shall be yet,
Nor drained the cup of love's delirious wine.
How shall my craving spirit know for mine
Thine, self-same seeking? Will a wild regret
For the lost days--the lonely suns that set,
Be for our love a token and a sign?
Will all the weary nights, the widowed days
That, sundered long, all point their hands at thee?
Yea! all the stars that have not heard thy praise
Low murmur in thy charmed ear of me?
All pointing to the ending of the ways,
All singing of the love that is to be?

Which poem is their origin remains an open question. The second stanza carries greater conviction than the first,

questioning as it does whether the speaker will know his love when he meets her and whether their ultimate union will be achieved as the reward of their mutual "weary nights, the widowed days". But here too the quickening interest is dampened by the decorativeness--"love's delirious wine", the 'ninetyish* flavour of "wild regrets" (coincidentally picked up later by Owen as a title for one of his own poems), the change from the direct "I" and "you" to "thee" and "thine".

The earlier poem is relatively more successful, being cast rhymeless free verse and stanzas of varying length. "Gate-lips" has a metaphorical compactness which recalls the "word-hoard" of Beowulf, while the general mixture of colloquial and formal language calls Hardy again to mind, as does the mirror-image figure in the fourth stanza. The somnolent alliteration of lines 5-6:

I have seen you somewhere, some sweet sometime,

Somewhere in a dim-remembered sometime . . .

is really mere padding, while Donne is the detectable source of the belief that the lovers' souls can commune without actual physical contact (as in "The Exstasie"), and also of the poem's conclusion that from such communion the speaker and his lover will be reborn--compare with this:

. . . were we not wean'd till then?

But suck'd on countrey pleasures, childishly?

("The Good-morrow")

Lines 19-20 reappear, more economically, as "self-same seeking" in "Love to Be". But for all its minor pleasantries, this remains a curiously uneven poem, much of which is hollow rhetoric. As in its companion-piece, Rosenberg seems to be

taking refuge from the real concerns of love in a poetic world--an uncommon sign (in him) of immaturity.

One other complete poem in this group which deals with love is "Even Now Your Eyes are Mixed in Mine", where again the presence of Donne can be felt in the opening metaphor of eyes and in the poem's treatment of its theme. What differentiates this poem from the others is the density of its texture, which makes judgement of it difficult--the ambiguity of "he", "this stricken gaze" and "him", which all appear in the first stanza, set the tone of what follows, as the speaker attempts to trace the beloved woman's appearance in the breeze which has touched her, in the grass which bends at the sound of her voice, in the air which enfolds them both. The final stanza is the most significant for it deals with the inadequacy of words for conveying the subtlety of experience of lovers' communion; words which tell of this experience are "bruised"--not fresh like the experience itself--and they may also bruise the recalled experience by inadequately rendering it. Words, by their nature, can only convey one element of a complex situation, the conceptual, verbal semblance rather than the essence of passion--thus "Colour, not heat, is caught": the leap of a pulse has no verbal equivalent. This poem thus comes to be important for expressing Rosenberg's conviction (later borne out in letters and in poems) that experience cannot be reduced to words, but only be "essenced to language". This poem affords glimpses, in its last stanza, of evolving into a good one, for there is much potential richness here.

"Psyche's Lament" is a musical poem, outstanding in neither subject nor treatment. In form it is a lyric lament

in regular iambic tetrameters, bearing little direct relationship to Keats's "Ode to Psyche" beyond the similarity of subject and the occasional phrases like "honied praise" and "my tears like flowers"; it is far less musical and evocative than that of Keats, but emulation is clearly not Rosenberg's objective. His Psyche laments the loss of the actuality behind the words of love, and in stanza two Rosenberg invokes the Blakean valuation of night as the time of goodness and innocence, while day is "dreary"--an idea which is most appropriate to its context. The closeness of the last two lines:

The fruit that sorrow did not sow

She turns to poison in her cup. . .

to Keats's "Turning to poison while the bee-mouth sips" supports the conclusion that this poem is in fact much nearer in feeling to the "Ode to Melancholy" than that to Psyche. But in conclusion, this poem deserves noting as an early example (1912) of Rosenberg's using myth--though here he is simply treating it illustratively, rather than creatively, as he was to do later.

The last poem in this group to be considered, "Raphael", is more concerned with being a workmanlike imitation of Browning's "Andrea del Sarto", and with revealing the predicament and aspirations of an artist, than it is with the theme of love. Yet as Browning set his monologue against a background of personal crisis, so Rosenberg's artist is seen in a personal relationship with his model--but this is not very convincing. Raphael is talking to the girl and praises her beauty, but during the middle section he forgets her existence entirely for some thirty-five lines, and as he

settles himself to sleep near the end he discovers she is already asleep--probably as the result of his monologue, for he had noticed that she was tired as far back as line twenty-five. This is an interesting poem, however, the love-relationship being certainly the least successful element in it. In his unpublished thesis E. O. G. Davies¹ claims that this poem was inspired by Rosenberg's deep love for Ruth Lowy, who was sitting for him, but there seems to be no evidence to support this. Lady Gollancz, for her part, denied any knowledge of the poem.

Six of the poems in Rosenberg's first published pamphlet, Night and Day treat love in differing ways. "Tess" is a lament of unrequited love, uttered by a girl who feels that the man who has rejected her is not suffering to the same extent as herself. One idea which is to recur makes an early appearance here--that the angels watch the human drama with indifference (later Rosenberg was to replace the angels by God). Jon Silkin in his book, Out of Battle (page 267), sees a connection between this minor piece and the more interesting achievement of "God Made Blind" (published in Youth), which lies in the idea that the growth of love--God's gift--can burst the human heart which strives to contain it. Like all the small poems in this pamphlet, this one rhymes regularly.

"Lady, You are my God" was reprinted in the Youth pamphlet. Five pairs of couplets, ending alternatively with "God" and "Heaven", present an ingenious snippet of dialogue, but there is little to it. "In November" is only a little

¹ Isaac Rosenberg: Nottingham University M.A. thesis, 1954.

more notable, being a quiet, undramatic account of how love brings summer into winter. The rhythm and rhyme are patently simple, but the notion of "withered sun" in line six evokes an echo of Hardy's "Neutral Tones":

. . . Your face, and the God-curst sun, and a tree,
And a pond edged with grayish leaves.

Another unremarkable poem is "When I went Forth", momentarily redeemed by the evocative image of lines 10-11:

The instant and unanchored gleams across

My soul's mirror that holds you there for aye; . . .

The underlying idea is merely that the memory of his girl haunts the speaker on his daily round of tasks. Rosenberg has tried--mistakenly, it would seem--to bestow significance on a simple idea by clothing it in archaisms such as "clangoured the busy chaunt/Of traffic," or indulging in a fulsome metaphor for the girl's speech--"your ruby gaolers' loss"--(which is a variant on ". . . the rosebud gate/That was parted beneath and above", the description of a girl's speech in "The Key of the Gates of Heaven"), or by resorting to clumsy inversions as in lines 4 and 13. "Your robes' undulant flaunt" is, however, a neat parallel to Herrick's "The liquefaction of her clothes". Yet the touching but naïve tastelessness which is so evident here was to grow into something much greater as poetry.

"Heart's First Word" (I) was the first version of a poem that was published in the Moses pamphlet. This first copy expresses love for an ideal woman, couched in suitably exalted phrases. By comparison with the later poem, the progression of this one is linear. Rosenberg handles the regularly rhyming tetrameters with assurance, though the repetition of

"sweet" in line 18 does not achieve the gain in intensity which was presumably intended. The poem is preoccupied with seeing (as in lines 7, 11 and 15) which links it to the second version. This later poem has a strongly visual opening, the painter's eye contrasting the girl's dark hair with her pale face. Its regular trimeters rhyming in pairs mark it as being earlier in style than the other poems in the Moses pamphlet. We are presented in lines 7-8 with a very compressed statement of how the world of physical nature pales in comparison with the sensation of love, which increases vulnerability and sensitivity to pain:

... And flower and fruit and tree
Were under its sea.

So strong is the emotion in the heart that sky and earth are no longer differentiated; the heart creates and peoples its own world. But the poem declines into cloudy mystery, of which the only distinguishable features are the kisses still to come. We may reasonably conclude that this pair of poems was written at nearly the same time, but since the second one is completely out of keeping with the sombre tone of the Moses pamphlet, it was possibly included as a contrast to the rest or as a sop to the less adventurous.

In "Day", lines 201-214 are identical with "Love to Be", and in this instance they are referred to as Hope singing a song of love, but the love under consideration here is "the radiant smile of God". Thus human relationships are not involved; love is simply one element in a vaguely pantheistic vision of the divine spirit in nature, which acts as both consolation and inspiration to the poet.

The only resemblance to a poem on love in the 1913

section is "A Careless Heart", which is a light piece, touching on the difficulties of communication. Its nursery-rhyme rhythm and rhyme state that prayers are only breath, that tender thoughts can be forgotten by a careless recipient. But it is hardly serious enough to deserve longer treatment.

The next group of unpublished poems--those of 1914-15--contains only a handful of poems on this subject, as by now Rosenberg's poetic energy and interests are dispersed over a wider field than that occupied by the nineteenth century romantics. Of these, the earliest--"Girl's Song"--is one which appears fragmentarily in other related poems. Lines 5-6, for example:

Thin branches like whips

Whiten the skies . . .

resemble lines 16-17 of the second unpublished version of Moses as well as lines 121-122 of the published version: the first and third lines, "The pigmy skies cover / . . . The flat earth foams over . . ." reappear substantially as lines 1-3 of "The Poet" (III), while the eighth line--"Calling for my mad lover"--contains the germ of the final line of "Sacred, Voluptuous Hollows". Its dating does not preclude it from being an early version of Koelue's song from Moses (lines 199-204)--in which connection see also Fragments VII, VIII and IX. A manuscript version of this poem in the British Museum, entitled "The Moon", corresponds with the first seven lines of the published text: variations only occur in line two--"No mood in my simple eyes" and line four--"With pallour [sic] when I first rise".

The poem's central idea has already been detected in

"Heart's First Word" (I), namely that emotional feeling can loom larger to the individual in love than do the impersonal forces of nature. The girl has the remarkable ability of condensing the whole meaning of her life into a single kiss: thus her range of emotional experience and capability is beyond anything her lover could have experienced or expected. Rosenberg's dominant, sensuous female makes an early appearance in this poem, but on this occasion she is more concerned to bestow pleasure than to assert her superiority. One curiosity in the poem deserves a passing comment--the word "gibbous" in line eight. The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary offers "convex, rounded, protuberant" as synonyms, thus the meaning Rosenberg intended is that the girl's mouth is straining open in the effort of calling for her "mad lover", her lips appearing like an incompletely rounded moon: the word is uncommon and has an ugly sound, which suggests that the sight it describes is also ugly--this girl has no allure.

"My Soul is Robbed" was to be published also in Youth and a comparison of the versions throws light on the way in which Rosenberg reworked his poems. It also may be seen as a refining or sublimation of "Night" which follows it (referred to on page 47 above), and as such has many similarities to it. The rhyme of the opening pair of pentameters is an eye-rhyme, rare in Rosenberg's work, but found often in Yeats and traceable back at least as far as Donne (compare "rise / infinities" in lines two and three of "At the Proud Earth's Imagined Corners"). "Intricate infinities" is itself a memorable expression whose precise articulation must have pleased Rosenberg's ear, for it recurs in version (II) of this poem, in "The Poet" (III),

"The Female God" as well as in Fragment XXVIII: the first two lines of this version in fact appear verbatim in version (II), while the third line echoes the first line of "April Dawn". Once again, it can be seen how economical Rosenberg was with his material, or how unwilling he was to abandon an idea or expression before he felt he had got as much use out of it as he could.

The striking opening statement is at once complicated by the fact that the speaker enjoys his soul being ravaged by his girl's eyes: Rosenberg may not have encountered the image of cruel eyes in ^{Petrarchan poetry} ~~Cavalcanti~~, ^{no} but its appearance here may owe something to his reading of Rossetti, whom he obviously approved of (witness his letters in CW, pages 325-326 and 345-346) or possibly ^{there is an affinity with} he read some of Binyon's ^{later} version of The Divine Comedy. There is at least a similarity between the off-stress rhyme in Rosenberg's second couplet:

Some pale light hidden in light and felt to stir

In listening pulse, an audible wonder . . .

and the cadences of some of Binyon's translations from the Italian (for example, his translation of Canto XXXI of the Purgatorio contains this:

Then when my heart restored the faculty

Of sense, the lady I had found alone

I saw above me, and "Hold," she said, "hold me.")

At the same time, "Some pale light hidden in light" may arouse a chance echo in the reader's mind of Eliot's "Ash Wednesday":

End of the endless

Journey to no end

Conclusion of all that

Is inconclusible

Speech without word and

Word of no speech . . .

Lines 10-11 show the speaker as overcome more by her beauty than by his feelings for her. There is a bold truncation of syntax in line 9:

Alas! if God thus, what will hap to me?

--while the sense of line 12 would be clarified if "glance engendered" were hyphenated. Lines 12-15 are virtually identical with lines 11-14 of the second version:

Not yet, that glance engendered ecstasy,

That subtle, unspaced, mutual intimacy,

Whereby two spirits of one thought commune,

Like separate instruments that play one tune.

The following simile of instruments playing a tune is reminiscent of Donne, but here the instruments are not evenly balanced; there has been no mutual exchange of hearts, for he has been robbed. The concept of love as treachery is common in Rosenberg and also in Shakespeare's sonnets, as is the tone of regret for loss of innocence, neatly condensed into the seeming paradox of the final line. The gaze of her eyes both transforms his innocence and so subverts his sense of moral values that he sees his former "honour" as a crime against love and against the freedom of the individual will: in this way the speaker is able to express both adoration and resentment.

The later published version is more organised than the earlier one, the lines rhyming throughout in pairs and being arranged in stanzas of four, six and eight lines. Verbal resemblances between the two have already been noted. God's presence has been substituted for that of the sun, whose

rays dissolve the cloudy walls of its prison in the same way that the girl's looks derange his senses: this idea foreshadows the reactions of the Nubian and Tel to Lilith. The concentrative quality of love (as in "Girl's Song") is coupled with the earlier image of instruments playing in harmony: the union between a couple is the closest possible intimacy ("unspaced" conveys just this feeling very accurately), yet its effect reaches outward to new and untried experiences.

Version (I) is more involuted than (II). In the latter, much is clarified but the poem loses the personal immediacy--the whole problem of surrendering to love has become less pressing. We have already noted a tendency in these earlier poems of Rosenberg to mythologize the figure of a woman (referred to on page 52 above), and the same process is visible here. Maybe Rosenberg is, by these means, escaping from the pressure of his adolescent sexuality by his mythologizing and distancing of excitements and experience. At the end of his life he was working on myth again, but the pressures on him at that time were very different. Version (II) is smoother and less dense than its predecessor--though it too has the compressed image of lines 11-18; it has an aesthetic unity and tightness but is lacking in interest as the subjective illustration of a sexual dilemma.

The poem which follows this--"I Have Lived in the Underworld too Long"--is sombre and unhappy, suggesting an opportunity or a chance of a relationship missed: it is a very personal poem which seems to open up a view into an intimate social underworld. "The Female God" might be seen as giving a picture of the conflict between Self and a chance

to escape from Self by a surrender to voluptuous love, and in this poem the question of identity of the Self is inescapably raised (as Frederick Grubb notes in his A Vision of Reality, page 88). The speaker regards himself as inadequate--but Rosenberg makes the notion concrete, as so often in the past: his emblem for his guilt is darkness, while the girl who bestows her love on him is, inevitably, a creature of light. This very darkness renders him incapable of freeing himself, while her fruitless and brief approach to him only makes his sense of isolation the worse; this proves to him that love is both pain and beauty and terror. The final line offers a very good visual image, with its suggestion of a Miltonic spirit's flight through Chaos. In Bottomley's 1922 edition this poem was entitled "In the Underworld" and it has four minor variants on several lines, none of which are of any significance, though the comma printed after "found" (in line 5) in the earlier version does alter the sense.

"Auguries" seems at the outset to have little to do with love. The apparently unschematic mixture of unrhymed tetrameters and trimeters--though the shorter lines contain the emphatic statements from which the poem hangs--is a hint that this poem will be less linear in its development than many of more regular form, and so it proves to be. After the paradox of the opening line (which echoes line 1 of "April Dawn" and may also derive from Swinburne's "A Song of Italy"

. . . From the sweet sombre beauty of wave and wall

That fades and does not fall (lines 633-634)),

the first sentence accumulates a series of repetitions which make the point that seeming ephemerality has a lasting

inward significance--they are all rebirths of a kind: the tree of life itself grows, and grows towards heaven. The metaphor of the trees of memory being ravaged by time was to form a complete poem--"Past Days are Hieroglyphs".

"Thunder-stricken", taken with the dating of the poem (1914) indicates the presence of war, so in this case "fruit" stands for any contrasted meaningful, peaceable activity, such as a love-affair (an idea confirmed by the last fifteen lines).

The love-story begins at line 13. The boy and the girl hold fruit for each other (not a sexual metaphor, so much as an image for the two complementary halves of a whole). In their separation each seeks in vain auguries from the moon. As in the earlier "Love to Be" there is small doubt of whether they will recognize one another, and natural growth moves always towards fruition which is perfection--in "Creation", moreover, "Perfection is always a root". The syntax of lines 24-26 is rather difficult to explain:

No blossom bursts before its time

No angel passes by the door,

But from old Chaos shoots the bough . . .

One possibility is to read the successive "No ... No ... But" as a condition, that their coming-together will only be achieved by a series of supernatural developments. But since the poem dwells to such extent on the concept of natural growth and fruition, it is more consistent to take the meaning as being that no supernatural happenings will precede or mark their union, for the outcome is as inevitable as blossom to the shoot: out of a barren chaos (and perhaps only from chaos) a new hopeful growth will spring. This new hope in lines 26-27 is not some heavenly apotheosis, despite

the hint of the last line:

. . . While we grow ripe for heaven.

The culmination is the heaven-on-earth of fulfilment, the 'earning' of a thoroughly satisfying relationship.

In "Wedded" (II) we have the unpublished version of a poem which Rosenberg had printed in Youth. As mentioned earlier, Rosenberg was trying in successive versions of Moses to simplify and expand his initial conception, and the result is a dilution. With this pair of poems the same process is discernible, for the published version (I) is much simpler in form and treatment than the one under consideration here. Version (I) deals with the same subject as Version (II), namely that the permanence of marriage kills love (a clear reference to Blake, here): the regular rhyming tetrameters are a traditional form, but they offer one more proof that by this stage of his development Rosenberg was handling earlier conventions confidently. This was one of the poems that Bottomley--in his first letter to Rosenberg of 4th July, 1916--picked out as being one he liked, though he offers no specific grounds for his choice. Love without responsibility is compared to Eden, and it results in a similar fall: outside Eden, Adam and Eve had become mere mortals, their kisses accompanied by guilt, and the insights granted to them by love will cease and they will grow asunder so that "Their last green interchange" becomes merely a lost memory. There may be an echo, in Rosenberg's "bared trees" of Keats's "Too happy, happy tree":

Thy Branches ne'er remember

Their green felicity . . .

("In drear-nighted December")

By inverting the chronological order of stanzas one and two

Rosenberg achieved a more effective opening, but otherwise this poem would have been a very 'safe' version to publish, so far as acceptability was concerned.

Version (II) is by comparison completely secular in tone and much less consciously mannered and consciously "poetic" in technique than this, although the appearance of rhyming tetrameters in four-line stanzas seems to suggest otherwise. Immediate comparison between them becomes possible if we consider the economy of the first four lines describing love as a restriction on freedom. Mundane obligations deaden romance and physical passion alone soon palls. The Donnian quality of lines 9-10:

But hush! two twin moods meet in air;

Two spirits of one-gendered thought . . .

recalls lines 14-15 of "Auguries", both of which probably find their origin in "The Exstasie". The last line quoted above seems to be a small crux, for if the spirits are "one-gendered" this implies that they are sexless, which is surely not what Rosenberg intended to convey. It is likely that he meant to use the phrase "one-engendered", which would then mean "generated from one source" and so refer to the mutual decline of love and growth of discord. Bound indissolubly together, the lovers will exchange their passion for mere "Kindness like death's", in which the appearance belies the reality. The disillusionment in both these poems need not have any reference to Rosenberg's personal fortunes if we remember the tripartite arrangements of poems which Rosenberg planned for Youth: but, surprisingly, whereas "Wedded" seems to belong to "The Cynic's Lamp" section, Rosenberg intended it to join the idealistic verses under "Faith and

Fear".

"Love and Lust" in Youth does not simply draw the expected contrast. Despite the smoothness of its surface it looks beyond the tension in man between physical and spiritual, to see love as 'non-human joy', lust as 'human joy' (akin to the German "lustig", meaning "healthy, joyful"); in other words, man's aspirations are beyond humanity, though he himself is mortal. These two elements in human nature are complementary and the second stanza equates them in a notable way: when man's mortal life is gone, it will then be irrelevant as to which of the two goals he aspired (love or lust)--for neither spiritual nor physical qualities will prolong physical life (hence "love was lust") and the possibility of any after-life does not arise. A bitter and pessimistic poem, it was well-suited to its inclusion in "The Cynic's Lamp" section of the pamphlet. It is very condensed and not enough clues for its complete explication are provided. The conflict between love and lust at the end of the poem recalls the comment of old Mr. Emerson in A Room with a View that "Love is not the body, but it is of the body." In this connection, the meaning of the last stanza may be simply that once lust has been lived through, it is impossible to recapture uncontaminated love. Finally, lines 5-6 may reflect Rosenberg's enthusiastic reading, for:

O lust! when you lie ravished,
Broken in the dust, . . .

does recall Shelley's:

When the lamp is shattered
The light in the dust lies dead--

Two poems which share the same rhythm deal with difficulties in a love-relationship. "If You are Fire" laments the alienation that arises between a couple. In terms reminiscent of Abercrombie's "Vashti", Rosenberg asks how it is that the fires which lovers are do not cleave to each other: they have a common source, but each is a "separate bough" and communication between them is difficult, if not impossible. When Bottomley saw this poem he considered it "first-rate".

"Break in by Subtler Ways" has less to do with love than with real communion between people: "dulled closeness" is not sufficient, and the solution suggested here is absence and change which can re-harmonise a jaded relationship.

Two earlier versions of "The One Lost" survive in two letters written to Marsh in 1914:

How's this for a joke?

You cleave to my bones,
Prop and hold in a noose
One of the lives God loans.
Sinew of my sinews!

What will the Lord say
When I shall nowhere be found
At the judgement day,
My life within you being wound?

(CW, page 291)

and again--

Dont you think this is a nice little thing now

The one lost

I mingle with your bones.
You steal in subtle noose
This starry trust He loans,
And in your life I lose.

What will the Lender say
When I shall not be found,
Sought at the Judgement Day,
Lost--in your being bound?

(CW, page 293)

and a manuscript version in the British Museum differs slightly from the Complete Works text in that the first two lines each contain the first word of the following line. The notes to Complete Works indicate that this printed text differs yet again from that originally published in Youth, for Rosenberg revised and added to the poem after printing it and this final version is the one preserved. The striking opening continues the concern of the last two poems with the relationship between lovers, the search for union. The metaphysical presentation of this union is reminiscent of Donne--"a bracelet of bright haire about the bone" ("The Relique") as does the paradoxical final ^{stanza} ~~verse~~ (consider here "Nor ever chaste except you ravish me"). Bottomley enthused about this poem, finding it even better than "April Dawn" or "If You are Fire": "It has utterance of the really great, simple kind." It is a sister-poem to the following "God Made Blind" and so shares with it the theme of revolt against God. It begins with the assertion (stanza 1) of Self-surrender which traditionally accompanies love: the communion of spirits and subsequent diminution of individual identity being expressed in a memorably physical manner in the first line:

I mingle with your bones.

From this point, the speaker imagines the amusing situation that might arise if he had no body to be resurrected on the Day of Judgement. God becomes a trifle more menacing and patriarchal as he hunts "throng'd wards" (a strengthening emendation of the 1922 edition's "through wards"--which was possibly a misreading). While "wards" quite unambiguously means "confines", the later "dole" (line 12) is less easy to

explain. God seeks to recompense the soul for its lack of goodness, thus "dole" means firstly "payment", but also suggests "pain" (by its resemblance to "dolour"), which is a means of expiation for sin. The idea of cheating God is to prove a fruitful one, and even by the end of this poem what began as a lovers' union has turned into a form of romantic revolt. No longer is the poem--by the time stanza three is reached--concerned with the mystical union between lovers, for it comes to see this as a source of strength, an act of Self-assertion rather than one of Self-denial. The Biblical "In service is perfect freedom" is given a new twist and this points straight to "God Made Blind" in which the deception of God is no longer the accidental consequence of something else, but a wilful act of defiance. If the speaker in this poem intends to escape God, he no less intends to escape the obligations of Selfhood by absorption into his loved one: he envisages himself safe as if once more in the womb. This is an ingenious and economical poem of great clarity and force, and it is hard to see the justice of Silkin's comment in Out of Battle (pages 257-258):

There is one instance of his recasting a poem, "The One Lost", in such a way as to draw Marsh's approval. The result is an unwitting parody of the Georgian manner.

The last poem in this pamphlet to relate to love is "God Made Blind", in which it figures only as a means and weapon to a very different end--an end already pointed out by "The One Lost". The regular rhyme--and stanza--pattern trace and elaborate on the antagonism of the earlier poem. God is here equated with Fate initially and is seen as being unmitigatedly malign, the reason for this divine hatred lying in our human capacity for joy: our security would lie

in our ability to conceal this beneath a mask of resentment.

Stanza two contrasts human love with God's joyless bleakness and He pierces our "dolorous clay" with his light of eternity ("dolorous clay" awakes an echo of "dole" in the previous poem), but this is a scrutinizing light lacking the warmth of love (see also "Even Now", lines 19-20); humans are therefore the source of heaven's heat because they possess this capacity for love. Thus humanity has now assumed the characteristics of the 'enemy' which it could never defeat in a frontal assault. Cohen, in his essay "Romantic to Classic" (Tulane Studies in English, 1960) aptly reminds us of Hulme's assertion that a finite being achieves perfection by becoming God himself; but the God whom the poet opposes is hostile and dominating, not the Father of Love. This cosmic revolt of a romantic hero is to receive its fullest treatment in "God" (published with Moses, it provides a justification for Moses' opposition to God and his attempt to assume the God-like power of creating a new race of souls). This figure of the envious deity also looms forward into the Trench Poems where Silkin has located it (them) in "Daughters of War".

Finally, when love and our joy in it has grown so pervasive that it can no longer be hidden, then we can defend ourselves against Him by reminding Him that we have grown into one of his own manifestations--so how can He hate Himself? Such a deception will only work if we forget that God at the beginning of the poem was jealous of our love and see Him as an embodiment of it in the closing lines--a point made by Silk in his essay. Furthermore--a small matter--we have to blur the distinction between human and divine love.

The conclusion of the poem is optimistic insofar as the possibility of God hating Himself is not seriously considered: the implication therefore is that God will be obliged to acknowledge our cleverness and independence, thus a new relationship can be forged. This is in sharp contrast to the conclusion of the later "God".

The poems published with Moses are--as noted earlier (on page 65)--uniformly sober in tone, the one exception being "Heart's First Word" (II), which has already been compared with its companion-piece (page 64 above).

Love appears, finally, as the subject of half-a-dozen fragments, whose date of composition is taken by Bottomley and Harding to be in the 1914-15 period. Fragments XVIII and XIX are clearly related, the former being a condensation of the latter, which survives with its variant readings. The central image of the sea eroding the shore reached its final expression in "Sacred, Voluptuous Hollows" which is most probably contemporary with it (see page 46 above). Fragment XIX is dated 1914 and Complete Works notes indicate that it was published in The Spectator of 27th July, 1934. This image comes close to the cliché of a girl's heart being as hard as rock, so the speaker's love is the vast sea which can engulf it by a frontal assault but not penetrate to its heart. The second stanza of XIX is incompletely developed, for the idea of 'depth' in the girl's eyes is left only half worked-out: possibly the combination of the depth of eyes, sea and heaven became too involved to continue. Fragment XVIII refines on the first stanza of XIX by introducing the idea of the self-destructive yet self-perpetuating nature of desire.

Fragments XII and XIII are connected by more than just a common theme: reworking is suggested by the echoing of the first line of XIII:

In half delight of shy delight . . .

by the fourth line of XII. Both are dated 1914 and share the same metrical pattern. But while XII deals with a girl's concern about the mystery of love, the later Fragment brings out the realization that love is not an end in itself but a way by which humanity can reach "love's bliss", which is God. There is, however, some uncertainty about the juxtaposition of "God" and "love" in this way. If the two words were linked by a hyphen this would clarify the sense, for otherwise the reader is left wondering which of the two words is the subject and which the object. Rosenberg was, in fact, aware of the occasional grammatical weakness as a letter written to Marsh during 1914 about the interpretation of "Midsummer Frost" (which is discussed on page 100 below) makes clear:

If in reading a thought has expressed itself to me,
in beautiful words; my ignorance of grammar etc,
makes me accept that (CW, page 294).

Even these minor pieces have a momentary interest, for in lines 6-7 of XIII we can see Rosenberg using the verb "plait" deliberately with two disparate objects ("hours" and "curls")--a typical mannerism of his (noted also by Silkin in Out of Battle, pages 275 and 279).

Closely linked to these two pieces are Fragments X and XI, where the former's derivation from the latter can be clearly seen. Once again they resemble one another in form (a single unrhymed stanza of trimeters) as well as having lines in common (compare lines 8-9 of X with lines 7-8 of XI).

They are both concerned with a girl's hesitation about committing herself to the responsibility of love, and the last four lines of XI present the kernel of "I Have Lived in the Underworld"; the "change" that these lines demand is a change she will not willingly make, and the notion that this change could involve a commitment to some sort of responsibility is strengthened by a glance at the similarity of phrasing in lines 22-23 of "You and I":

. . . New waves of life rush blindly,
Madly on the soul's dumb silent breakers.

Loss

The sense of loss, linked with an awareness of personal or artistic isolation, is a note frequently sounded in these earlier poems. It appears before 1912 in "Now the Spirit Song has Withered", a poem already encountered on page 41 above, in which the deprivation is one of the harmony which the poem finds to be as fleeting as the glitter of sunshine on a dragonfly's wings. The physical world is like a barrier between the spirit and its goal, which effectively negates the chances of a lasting fulfilment.

Another early poem which has also received attention (on page 42 above) is "We are Sad", a copy of which was sent by Rosenberg to Miss Wright somewhere between September and December 1912. This lament for the loss of beauty, however, is uninspired in both form and content.

In the first section of "Night and Day" it is God's benevolence which is withheld--"God gives no June", and thus the Poet rather self-righteously concludes that his gift of insight into the causes of man's deprivation will have to be paid for by his atonement for the self-seeking of others.

The sense of loss in the last four stanzas of the poem also expresses the dilemma of the artist as leader, for his sensitivity incurs social responsibility.

In the 1913 group only one poem takes up this theme-- "A Warm Thought Flickers". Stylistically, this poem is linked with the preceding "O be these Men and Women?" as both share an irregular rhythm and stanza-length, together with an absence of rhyme. The eye is caught by the unusual metaphor in the third line--"Being is one blush at root"--which evokes simultaneously the colour of dawn as well as a glowing skin: its sense is that thought and emotion are inextricably linked together. The rich imagery of the second stanza presents more of a puzzle: time is a harsh dictator, thus--it seems--it deprives the speaker of a loved face that in its turn is compared to a leaf which by reflecting the light of the sun keeps its beneficent rays from the clover whence bees collect their honey. The inference is that the face of his lost love would be as welcome to the speaker as sunlight would be to this clover. Only in stanza three does the feeling of deprivation emerge unambiguously, where grief renders unheeded the proffered consolation (healing) of the passage of time as indicated by the phases of the moon or the coming of spring. The "opaque thought" of line 13--clearly that of isolation--stifles the inconstant "warm thought" of the opening line, which offers hope. In this way this "opaque thought" refers back to the "hard bright leaf" which hides what is desirable. The "warm thought" hovers around the clover but is repelled by the leaf just as effectively as if by words which lips--maybe too tired from desire--are unable to form. The ending of the

poem is almost abrupt, a weary admission that the speaker will no more plead for reunion, for defeat is acknowledged. Although the treatment of the subject has been oblique, the loss of an opportunity is keenly felt and conveyed with an impressive strength and economy.

A romantic view of loss is offered by "At Sea-Point", the earliest of the 1914-15 group, which retains both regular rhyme and metre. The loss refers to an individual woman and hence to the opportunity she offered for a meaningful relationship. All creation may now disintegrate since the speaker had met this woman who had broken her promise of fulfilment: "the breathing sea" and "the shining skies" may speak of such fulfilment (be it the achievement of God's or woman's love) but because of their association with her they have abetted in her betrayal, no less than the heaven of stanza five has done. In this state of frustration, the physical witnesses to life and beauty assume a lower level of reality than spiritual events (an equation Rosenberg has used earlier, as in "Heart's First Word" (II), considered on page 65 above). Despite its formal regularity, this is a poem of real intensity, no longer dulled by the rhetorical decoration of earlier writings: it shares the immediacy of Gray's sonnet on the death of West--"In vain to me the smiling mornings shine."

"Wistfully in Pallid Splendour" and "Have We Sailed and Have We Wandered" are variants on the same theme which differ little from one another. The first of these poems opens very vaguely; "pallid" well describes its overall colour, while "dim" is a favourite epithet of the 1890s, and "the lonely infinite" suggests a fragile female spirit--the

poet's anima (as in "Beauty" (I) above) which escapes from him while he is asleep. The future is revealed as glimpses of "promised lands", while stanza three (the most evocative in the poem) recurs in its companion-piece:

Ghostly foam of unheard waters,
And the gleam of hidden skies,
Footsteps of Eve's whiter daughters
Tremble to our dreaming eyes.

The "unheard waters" are reminiscent of Keats's "ditties of no tone" and "magic foam", while the "sad wraith of joy lips parted (line 13) is similarly derived. In the final stanza, the combination of difficult syntax and unemphatic punctuation renders paraphrasing difficult, but it seems most satisfactory to connect the "sad wraith" to "the lonely infinite" and then the "they" of line 14 refers to her lips. The last two lines reiterate the notion of sleep, as the speaker confesses that such dreams as these make him broken-hearted. The connection of "dreams", "betrayal" and "Eve" suggest a lost innocence. However vague and ambiguous the expression, this poem has a melancholic and wistful tone; its sense of loss is more pressing than in the following poem, where some of the technical weaknesses are remedied.

This seems an appropriate moment to recall the editorial comment on Rosenberg's punctuation which appears in the Introductions to Complete Works and Collected Poems, pages xiv and 2 respectively:

Rosenberg gave little attention to punctuation, and his frequent but quite unsystematic omissions and irregularities would have been only a source of distraction if they had been preserved. A few changes of punctuation, sufficient merely to prevent this distraction in reading, have therefore been made. In general only the comma and the full stop have been used, these being the points Rosenberg himself chiefly relied upon.

Although this goes some way towards explaining the ambiguity of the present poem, Rosenberg was able to remove it more effectively by re-casting (and so re-directing) the final stanza of "Have We Sailed".

One stanza shorter than the preceding poem, "Have We Sailed" is still identical to it in both rhythm and rhyme. Stanza one is much more tangible than before, presenting as it does the archetypal metaphor of life as a sea-voyage which holds out hopes of fresh opportunities to come, however much of innocence and of promise may have been squandered in the past. The second stanza--very close in appearance to stanza three of the previous poem, but slightly tightened up by the substitution of "See" for "Ghostly" in its first, and of "Flash between" for "Tremble to" in its fourth line--expresses these objects of aspiration in the same images of intangibility as above. "Eve's daughters" are presumably "whiter" because they hold a promise, as the incarnate ideals of romantic womanhood. The ending of the poem becomes more clear-cut than earlier by its turning into a lament for the loss of childhood's innocence, together with the realization that this can never be recaptured. This is a form of nostalgia which has not emerged till now.

The passing-away of beauty which opens "A Bird Trilling its Gay Heart Out" links it to these poems at present under consideration, yet its subject is beauty and so it has already been considered in that connection (see page 51). The poem rapidly moves away from loss towards the arousal of darker emotions by the influence of light.

Similarly, the contemporary "Her Fabled Mouth" touches on loss while passing on to the mythification of beauty:

"the hues of faded Eden" are a nostalgic desire for a return to the innocence of the "primeval dream", the lost childhood of man. This regret for the irretrievable past also makes a momentary appearance in line nine of "Summer's Lips are Aglow" where it is joined to disillusionment with the present. Like the two preceding poems, this one also appeared in the section on Beauty above.

"Auguries" is, as has already been noted, a poem dealing with natural growth towards love, but it too sounds this note of yearning for the relative serenity and orderliness of childhood. Out of context this explanation of lines 10-12 may seem far-fetched, but in their setting the image conforms to the 'register' of the rest of the poem:

Has my soul plucked all the fruit?

Not all the fruit that hung thereon--

The trees whose barks were pictured days.

This reverie of the soul is short-lived, as the poem turns towards the future.

"The One Lost", despite its title, is really more concerned with unification than with deprivation, and so the final reference to this theme is found in "First Fruit", which was published with Moses. Its basic rhythm is trimetric and it has a regular rhyme-pattern. The manuscript version of this in the British Museum has variant lines, especially for line 6, which seems to have caused Rosenberg the most trouble. The deleted workings for this line comprise both:

. . . And the roots under earth murmur 'falsely starred' . .
as well as:

. . . And the hid roots sing no daisies of ours are
starred . . .

while the undeleted version which survives runs:

. . . And the hid roots sigh no daisies of ours are
starred . . .

This is accompanied by root-images for expansion or work-points, such as:

. . . murmer earth daisy starred . . .

and:

. . . no daisys of us are starred . . .

Line 5 is also represented by:

Beneath the roots (^{murmer}inner fall . . .

This illustrates the trouble Rosenberg took over a single image and how he persevered with the related ideas of daisies and stars before abandoning them in favour of another recurrent symbol, that of the root.

The poem is clearly a lament for a missed opportunity, expressed in terms of one of Rosenberg's favourite metaphors (as seen in the earlier "Auguries"). Wintriness has forced inactivity on the speaker and falling "flake-blossoms" neatly epitomize the link between petals and snowflakes, the one negating the other. The second stanza opens with images of unnaturalness which underline the desire of the fruit-opportunity to be picked, but the chance of fruition (or liberation) has passed and so "shut hands" are obliged to remain unsatisfied, their being closed shown as the result of either stubbornness or indolence (or both). Thus the poem outlines the frustration on feeling a lack of commitment--which could equally be referring to love or to art. A similar idea appears in Housman's "Loveliest of Trees", though his attitude is predictably melancholy. Rosenberg's attitude reflects the carpe diem motif of Henryson's

"Robene and Makyne" (lines 91-92):

The man that will noch quhen he may
Shall haif noch quhen he wald.

Isolation

The finding of oneself to be a solitary among men is clearly akin to that of loss, but differs from it in kind. Most frequently the sense of loss in these poems has been a wistful longing to recapture something now beyond reach. But the feeling of isolation is not retrospective: it is both present and pressing, and is customarily related to Rosenberg's thoughts on the position of the artist, of the social outcast (whether on grounds of creed or poverty), or of man's feelings towards God.

The earliest example of this theme, "The World Rumbles by Me", presents what seems more like an artistic pose than a real affliction, an impression strengthened by the precise regularity of rhyming couplets. The speaker has withdrawn to his own level of 'reality', and is romantically pre-occupied with love and death:

For the youth at my heart beats wild and loud;
And raves in my ear of a girl and a shroud.

As often occurs later, this girl's eyes are the windows of her soul, just as in "Heart's First Word" (I), lines 15-16:

Her eyes that swept me as a wave
Shine my soul's worship to fulfil.

Meanwhile the sensuous desire to experience love prefigures the yearnings of "Bacchanal". With regret the speaker resigns himself to surrender to "the world", but still will keep aspiration in his heart:

If I stretch my hand, I may clasp a star.

This self-imposed aloofness is a quality also to be found in "The Poet" (I) and (II).

The earliest version of this poem, dated 1912 and sent in a letter to Miss Wright (CW, page 338), sets out the tension in an artist between his spiritual aspirations and his physical limitations. Like the Poet in "Night and Day" he is imprisoned by his senses. He is singled out for isolation on two counts--for he is separated from the rest of mankind by his ideals and debarred from paradise by his physical confines. That this is a characteristically English Romantic view of the artist is supported by Frank Kermode's assessment in the first chapter of The Romantic Image:

The alienation of the artist and (this) despair at the decay of the world are two sides of one coin; the present age is the one that hates art, some earlier age loved the poet without corrupting him. (page 7).

In line six occurs the first use by Rosenberg of "alienated"--a notion which runs detectably through these earlier poems and less obviously up to the lives of Moses and Tel--by which he means "strictly alone". Not only is the poet cut off from others, but he is also a man with a "divided self" which corresponds to his spiritual desires seeking escape from his body or "soul's sack" (a picture of the artist widely accepted in the 1890s), hence the force of "Himself he has betrayed". In the closing four lines the poet becomes an almost Miltonic Adam-figure, his aspiring spirit trapped in "a cage of earth". The full-rhyme pattern falters in lines 1-2 ("eyes/sacrifice"), 3-4 ("seen/in") and in 10-11 ("heaven/bereaven"), perhaps showing us the young poet as

unable to handle both good rhythm and ideas at once: as now, so in the future, for the rhyme will become of secondary importance. Yet despite Rosenberg's predilection for sense rather than sound, "dewy lays" remains a striking phrase (reminiscent of the Blake of Poetical Sketches), and his mock-Swinburnian metre is an appropriate vehicle for his sonorous phrases.

By the time Rosenberg had redrafted the poem which is included in the 1913 group, the sense of isolation has given place to the Shelleyan picture of the poet as "High Priest of the Imagination". The truism that such a man can make us aware of matters we knew nothing about or can transmute the ordinary into the significant is conveyed in a notable metaphor in lines 5-7:

. . . And his brow dips
In amber that the seraphim
Have held for him and hold.

Thus the poet combines the roles of prophet, seer and teacher who bursts the enclosures of our world to provoke a wider awareness and who finally brings fresh illumination from Parnassus. By this stage of his development, Rosenberg handles his accurately-rhyming tetrameters with unobtrusive ease. The final version of this poem, as will be seen later (on page 134 below), changes in both emphasis and mood as well as in externals.

In "O! in a World of Men and Women" (which was included in the Night and Day pamphlet) the isolation is not that of the artist so much as that of an individual cut off from the world by his grief of love: he cannot tell whether such feelings are peculiar to himself alone, or whether the rest

of mankind is more impervious to suffering than he. The self-dramatizing pose is apparent, but the poem forms an appropriate conclusion to a pamphlet one of whose dominant themes has been isolation.

The strongest expression of solitariness in these earlier poems is to be found in "Spiritual Isolation", regardless of whether we consider the feeling to be a personal one or to be a reflection on ethnic divisions. It is subtitled "A Fragment" and in the Night and Day pamphlet, as in Bottomley's 1922 edition, the final stanza was omitted, which would have lessened the pervading sense of desolation. The opening image of the leper is memorable: God has deserted the speaker because he is unclean and unworthy, and the hyperbolic "so hold I pestilent supremacy" does not seem out of place. Silkin's observation (Out of Battle, page 266) is accurate, that in the early stages of a deteriorating Man/God relationship Rosenberg assumes that the deficient partner is man; later, as in "God", the roles are reversed. In the 1937 and 1949 (Collected Poems) editions, line nine appears as:

. . . My burdened feet may best withouten rue . . .
but in Bottomley's 1922 edition (entitled simply Poems), "best" appeared as "haste", which surely makes better sense, even if it were only a conjecture of Bottomley's; but if the more recent version is correct, then its sense is "may do best without remorse". Not only can the speaker derive no consolation from books, but his own instinctive self-love and even his will have already left him for God. Thus paralyzed by despair, he can change nothing. The spirits which, in a state of grace, he would have been able to see,

are invisible and he can only feel them flying about beyond his reach since he is "phantasm'd" (deluded). In Bottomley's edition, line 22 was explicit:

Air, legioned with such, stirreth . . .

but in 1937 Bottomley and Harding presumably had some authority for departing from this: the line as now printed is very difficult to scan:

Air legioned such stirreth . . .

The final stanza tells of the man possessed by Furies who batten on his troubles. These spirits may themselves be malign (as this stanza suggests) or they could be spirits of those to whom God has extended his favour, so that mere knowledge of their existence makes him feel wretched. A glance at lines 25 onward confirms the likelihood of the first alternative:

Strange glimmering griefs and sorrowing silences,
Bearing dead flowers unseen whose charnel smell
Great awe to my sense is

Even in the rose-time when all else is well.

Here the sense is that these spirits bring with them such an overwhelming sense of decay that it stays with him even into the traditionally cheerful Spring. His only way of escape has been to try dreaming of eventual release from "this hanging death", but such grief destroys his attempts "to reach to joy through gay attire". This annihilation of hopes finds an echo in the contemporary "Aspiration" and the closeness of the present line 35 to the second line of that poem illustrate the degree of overlap. Compare:

. . . And breathed upon the buds and charred the leaves.

("Spiritual Isolation")

with:

. . . And the tinsel leafed branches of the charred trees
are strewn . . . ("Aspiration")

This separation of the individual from God is a recurrent idea in Rosenberg's pre-war poems; it is most clearly developed in "God Made Blind" (referred to on page 78 above) and it culminates in "God" (see pages 122-7 below). This can be seen as an extension of Rosenberg's youthful view of the artist as isolated from the rest of mankind (as in "Night and Day" immediately below) and it may well be rooted in a personal sense of the isolation incurred by being a Jew--though in fact Whitechapel was at this period a thriving Jewish artistic community. Horace Gregory (in "The Isolation of Isaac Rosenberg")² appropriately remarks that the poem transcends the emotions of mere self-pity and achieves a Job-like quality. Since we know that Rosenberg later made Moses the central figure of an extended verse-drama and after that had thoughts of writing about another Jewish hero, Judas Maccabaeus, such a comment on "Spiritual Isolation" is enlightening. In passing, we might notice that Rosenberg's fondness for epithets such as "glimmering" and "pale" was one shared by the younger Yeats, and it recurs in his other poems of the period (such as "Aspiration", "Dawn", "Night", "The Female God", "The Mirror" and "Dusk and the Mirror").

Turning next to "Night and Day" it is comparatively easy to see Rosenberg's Poet as the solitary artist. At first sight the poem-sequence deals with the conflict between a sensitive artist and an insensitive society, or on a deeper

² Poetry (Chicago), Vol. LXVIII, 1946.

level between the body and soul of an artist as it has already emerged in "The Poet" (I) and (II) above (see pages 90-91). There is no suggestion that these things should not be so, but simply a framing of the question. Isolation is established at the outset by the Keatsian tone of the Introduction to "Night", in which the Poet

asks himself whether he is the scapegoat to bear the sins of humanity upon himself, and to waste his life to discover the secret of God, for all.

In that of "Day" the Poet

feels endowed with a larger capacity to feel and enjoy things.

The poet is restricted by the "trammels of the flesh" which keep him earthbound, yet he recoils from the rawness and sensuousness of human life:

They feel the skeleton rattle as they go,
'Let us forget', they cry, 'soon shall we know,--
Drown in life's carnival fate's whisperings.'

Foul heat of painted faces, ribald breath,
Lewd leer, make up the pageant as they flow
In reeking passage to the house of death.

The first of these lines possibly owes something to Blake's "marriage-hearse" and the whole passage finds a visual equivalent in George Grosz's "Funeral". After such a contemptuous outburst, small wonder that the Poet feels he alone possesses insight and so only he can atone for the shortcomings of humanity which have made God suspend his compassion:

God gives no June, and Heaven is a wall.

On the analogy of the divided self it is a short step to see the tension as arising from an individual's unsuccessful

attempt to reach closer union with God through annihilation of the 'flesh' or Self. What impedes such fulfilment is that the recognition that he alone is capable of such an act of reunion renders the very efforts to escape his all-obtrusive Self futile. Such a quasi-Freudian interpretation fits the poem neatly enough, but there is no tangible proof to recommend it above a 'surface' interpretation of the poem.

In "Day" this self-indulgent pessimism dissolves and the approach of light brings new confidence to the Poet who actively takes steps to discover methods of achieving such a union with God. Thus the feeling of desolation evaporates.

"O, Be these Men and Women" takes up the theme in the 1913 group and in many ways it echoes the earlier "O! in a World of Men and Women" (see pages 91-92 above). The rhyme of the earlier poem has disappeared, as has its regular stanza-length, but we are left with a regular metre. Initial doubt about the reality of other human figures is phrased in a manner echoed later by lines 7-9 and 29-30 of The Unicorn:

This is no mortal terror ... spectres wail,
Stricken trunks' and beasts' spirits wail across to mine
And whirl me, strew me, pass and repass me . . .

.

Phantoms and nomads

And balls of fire pursuing . . .

Another image likens them to flames running away from their source, to scent blown far away from its source in the flower and so doubtful about its continued existence, to the colour of grass that remains in the memory. The matter of

alienation is handled much less subjectively here than in "O! in a World", though in the second stanza the question of whether the speaker is the only one to feel this way is raised again. Here Rosenberg is not concerned solely with a man's separation from his fellows as from the essence of life ("root") itself, an essence manifested in terms of nature. The poem ends on a querulous note, asking whether "you" are not more sensitive than the speaker so that his dreams can be observed; can "you" follow the lost spirits of "these men and women" even if they fade from the speaker's perception? Not a particularly satisfying poem, this one is the first to express doubts about the nature of reality--another problem to which Rosenberg would return: while the concern with alienation--already noted in "The Poet" (I) on pages 90-91 above--looks forward to Eliot. "A Warm Thought Flickers", which was treated on page 83, shares something of this feeling of solitariness though in this case it takes the form of frustration.

Earlier comments (see page 84) will suggest a sharing of this theme with "At Sea-Point", which is more suffused with emotion than the preceding poem, and the only real moment of isolation emerges at lines 13-16:

A lie with its heart hidden
Is that cruel wall of air
That held her there unbidden,
Who comes not at my prayer.

--where the resemblance to line 14 of "Night"--"God gives no June, and Heaven is a wall"--suggests the same kind of powerless resentment as emerged before.

By the time Rosenberg wrote "The Exile" his musings

about isolation were to be transformed into physical experience during his months in South Africa. Remarks in his letters home, such as that in Complete Works, page 297:

Do write to me--think of me, a creature of the most exquisite civilization, planted in this barbarous land...I meant to write to Gertler myself, but so far I've not been able to get away from my own people here to write. They don't understand the artist's seclusion to concentrate, and I'm always interrupted.

--indicate that the bitterness expressed here had some biographical basis, possibly related to the rabbi's view of him as a "meshugganah" (page 11); the evidence that it was written in (or soon after returning from) South Africa is wholly internal. The archetypal symbol of the tree in the first stanza harks back to Yggdrasil while it is premonitory of "Daughters of War": Hardy had, in "Drummer Hodge", successfully used it, though in a more limited reference than here. The opening line offers a vivid evocation of the nostalgia caused by detecting a European intonation in speech, while the remainder of this stanza corrects the English misconception that the traveller is enjoying a tropical paradise for he is in a climate alien both physically and socially. Africa is "torrid", devoid of the refreshments of love or kinship: the sun's "scorching glory" is too fierce for pleasure, while "bleak wintriness" neatly condenses the English season into the exile's isolation. The sun also proved exasperating to him as an artist, as he told Marsh in a letter written during the summer of 1914:

The climate's fine, but the Sun is a very changeable creature and I can't come to any sort of understanding with this golden beast. He pretends to keep quiet for half an hour and just as I think, now I've got it, the damned thing has frisked about. (CW, page 296).

The final stanza concludes that the land is indifferent to

him--the scenery is rugged, uncompromising and infertile, its vastness so inhospitable that the exile's thoughts cannot even traverse it to communicate with England (the scenery has a demoralizing effect, though in the letter (CW, page 297) quoted above he had remarked that the African mountain scenery "makes one think of savagry and earthquakes --the elemental lawlessness."). The wind, which could be a messenger, merely shrivels up his anxious expectancy.

For a poem of such individuality and power it is somewhat surprising to discover the complete regularity of its form, which extends to a complex pattern of end-rhymes, assonance and alliteration. Even if the poem is considered on a non-autobiographical basis, it nevertheless achieves a very satisfying aesthetic unity and is a highly successful portrayal of an individual adrift in a hostile environment.

The tenor of "I Have Lived" has already been discussed earlier (page 70). In that particular instance the continued feeling of deprivation is suddenly intensified by the pang of loss. The only afterthought needed is to record that the inclusion of a comma at the end of line five noticeably alters the sense. Whichever way this second stanza is read, this poem strikes a very personal note and the rigours of Rosenberg's own family in the East End lend credence to the notion that speaker's "underworld" could be social just as much as psychological.

Only two other of these early poems deal with the theme of isolation, and both of these were printed in Youth. "Midsummer Frost" is more interesting than "If You are Fire", to which reference was made earlier on pages ~~76-74~~. The first of these was a poem on which Rosenberg expended some

time and trouble. He clearly had sent a copy of it to Marsh who had asked for the clarification which he included in a letter in 1914:

You are quite right in the way you read my poem, but I thought I could use the 'July ghost' to mean the Summer, and also an ambassador of the summer, without interfering with the sense. The shell of thought is man; you realise a shell has an opening. Across this opening, the ardours--the sense of heat forms a web--this signifies a sense of summer--the web again becomes another metaphor--a July ghost.--But of course I mean it for summer right through, I think your suggestion of taking out 'woven' is very good (CW, page 294).

Rosenberg's patient explanation is of help to the general reader for the poem is--like "The Exile"--an intensely personal one.

The poem opens in depression, with the spirit in a state of winter, even though the external world is enjoying summer. Skilful use of alliteration and dissonance in the first two lines vividly evokes suspenseful anticipation:

A July ghost, aghast at the strange winter,

Wonders, at burning noon (all summer seeming) . . .

"July"--as earlier in line 73 of "Night"--(see pages 47-48)--is Rosenberg's personal symbol of fulfilment as well as "the Summer, and also an ambassador of the summer". The second stanza intensifies this feeling of isolation for the "dead heart" cannot respond to a sudden touch of midwinter spring:

Hidden as a root from air or a star from day;

A frozen pool whereon mirth dances;

Where the shining boys would fish.

What make this situation the harder to endure are the haunting recollections of former joys, of a once-felt knowledge of God which has now evaporated:

Like blind eyes that have slinked past God . . .

the slightly archaistic form of "slinked" reinforces the sense of the past being irrevocable. The re^jjoicings in their security of those unafflicted increases this despair until it sinks to the level of impenetrable passivity-- "the stagnant pool remains." In this impasse, the spirit in the final stanza can envisage its own death in surroundings of summer which are totally alien to its own "night hanging forest of eating maladies".

From this paraphrase two points should emerge. The first is that, like "Night" and "Aspiration" this poem operates on a psychological level, portraying as it does the struggle of a personality to submerge its ego in some objective reality, the sensuality of July: the Self's attempts to achieve Self-forgetfulness are thus foredoomed to failure. Secondly, the significance of this spiritual crisis may be deduced with care, but Rosenberg's expression of it is at times intransigent; clauses are dislocated, as in:

Like blind eyes that have slinked past God,
And light, their untasked inheritance,
(Sealed eyes that trouble never the Sun)
Yet has feel of a Maytime pierced. . .

--and the tone is (despite the images) unashamedly intellectual and "hard" in the manner of Donne.

In Scrutiny D. W. Harding interprets this poem (as he does the following "Love and Lust") as offering an opportunity to reach "possibilities beyond those of humanity". The soul, he maintains, responds to the warmth of ordinary life, but the defeat of higher aspirations dooms it to sadness, thence to stagnation and finally to death, "Starved by its Babel folly" of settling for something less than the

superhuman possibilities it had glimpsed. This is reasonable, but it seems to miss the intensity of personal involvement which permeates the poem; Harding's gloss makes the poem seem like an objective analysis, which it so clearly is not. The intensity of this personal statement is what makes it at the same time striking and mystifying, and Bottomley's interest in it was tempered by a practical caution on clarity:

I like the quality you get in "Midsummer Frost"; but you get it at the expense of definition, and the beautiful suggestions it raises do not make their full effect because they do not make the reader feel quite as assured as you are that you have your team well in hand and are sure of the way you are going.³

It is hard to escape sympathy with such a view, though it illustrates the problems Rosenberg encountered when trying to render his ideas "essenced to language", the problem already encountered in "Even Now Your Eyes" (page 61 above).

The Influence of Judaism

Reference has already been made to the possibility that the theme of alienation in these early poems derives in part from Rosenberg's racial heritage. There is no evidence that Rosenberg suffered from anti-Semitic discrimination, though there must have been something about him which attracted the unwelcome attentions of a junior officer in France:

Besides this trouble I have a little impudent school-boy pup for an officer and he has me marked--he has taken a dislike to me I dont know why (CW, page 301).

Although Rosenberg's father was closer to Orthodoxy than his son, Rosenberg inherited certain habits of mind which mark him out; such a habit is that of referring to periods of

³ Bottomley's first letter to Rosenberg, dated 4th July, 1916: unpublished.

Old Testament history or to times of Jewish disasters when he needs a parallel for the contemporary state of society (this occurs most unambiguously in Trench Poems such as "Burning of the Temple", "The Destruction of Jerusalem" or "Through these Pale Cold Days").

It is therefore no surprise to discover that Rosenberg began his poetic career by writing from within the framework of Judaism. Thus the earliest surviving poem is entitled "Ode to David's Harp" and is dated by editors 1905. The printed version differs in several respects from the extant British Museum manuscript. So line seven appears as:

Whose silvery tone impassioned all. . .

and the line printed as line seven becomes line eight, while lines 8-10 appear in the manuscript thus:

Those Chords whose tender strains awoke

In hearts that throbbed for war,

The martial stir when glory calls. . .

Line 29 of the published text has replaced the manuscript epithet "brazen" by "iron", one of Rosenberg's favourite adjectives for war. After line 32 of the printed text five extra lines were included, the one in brackets being scored out:

Breasts are heaving--fate is weaving

(Judah's sword for victory)

Other bonds than slavery's chains.

For her chosen's blood are frozen

Icy fear in all their veins.

There is no trace of these lines in the 1937 edition, any more than there is of those four lines which the manuscript located immediately after line 38:

The chords are rent--for years have bent
Its living strings asunder.
But harp and name--shall life proclaim
In living voice of thunder.

These lines conclude the manuscript version which has therefore nothing corresponding to lines 39-42 of the published text. Variant readings such as these make little difference to an estimation of the poem: what they do show is that even at the age of fifteen Rosenberg took the business of poetry seriously enough to try strengthening his earlier version.

The regularity of rhythm and rhyme suggest this was an early poem, and the ease with which the tetrameters run on sometimes overrules the sense--"In the muse's fairy dwelling" illustrates this tendency. Nevertheless it is quite an accomplished poem for a fifteen-year-old, written within the tradition of Jewish lament. There are two reasons why Rosenberg's early ventures into verse should have been of this nature, the first of which was apparent to Laurence Binyon as an ambition "to become a representative poet of his own nation"⁴, but it is equally possible that Rosenberg chose such a theme because such material was nearest to hand in his impoverished and restricted youth.

The rhyme-pattern and length of stanzas varies, but the stanzas are fluent and reminiscent of the Byron of "Hebrew Melodies", such as "The Harp the Monarch Minstrel Swept":

It soften'd men of iron mould,
It gave them virtues not their own;
No ear so dull, no soul so cold,

⁴ Preface to Bottomley's 1922 edition of Rosenberg's poems, page 9.

That felt not, fired not to the tone,

Till David's lyre grew mightier than his throne!

while the basic rhythm echoes moments in Hymns Ancient and Modern like "While shepherds watched their flocks by night".

Small climaxes and anticlimaxes in lines 5-7 and 14-15:

Oh sacred lyre, once more, how long?

'Tis vain, alas! in silence rest . . .

--maintain the interest, while the final stanza is cast into rhyming couplets which differentiate it from the rest of the poem, although they are not the measure best fitted to a despondent conclusion. As well as being a Hebrew lament for lost splendours the poem also has a ring of Wordsworth's sonnet on Milton: the people need a focus or rallying-point, some new source of inspiration which will lift them out of their present despondency and sloth.

"Zion" shares much of the background of its predecessor. Dated 1906 in Complete Works it carried the ascription "written at the age of 16" in Bottomley's edition of 1922. In formal structure it is more highly organised than the above poem as it is arranged in four-line stanzas of alternating tetrameters and trimeters which rhyme regularly: there is a possible hint of Byron again as Rosenberg here exhibits Byron's fondness for feminine rhyme which emerges in the second and fourth line of each stanza:

She's gone, who shared my diadem;

She sunk, with her my joys entombing;

I swept that flower from Judah's stem,

Whose leaves for me alone were blooming . . .

("Herod's Lament for Mariamne")

This correctness of form makes it an interesting comparison

with "The Destruction of Jerusalem" of Trench Poems which is similar in both theme, structure and rhyme, but so much more dense in both language and imagery. Another element the two poems have in common is the residual judgment that such a fall from grace was deservedly punished by destruction; the poem here is mainly concerned to present Zion in its splendour, whereas "The Destruction of Jerusalem" concentrates on the aftermath of its fall, though both may well refer to the same historical event, the Babylonian invasion of 597 B.C. A reader of Macaulay may also find something of the rather tuneless public voice in "Lays of Ancient Rome" in this poem's declamatory tone, a tone which is unique among the rest of Rosenberg's poems. Compare it with:

From sunrise unto sunset
All earth shall hear thy fame:
A glorious city shalt thou build,
And name it by thy name:
And there, unquenched through ages,
Like Vesta's sacred fire,
Shall live the spirit of thy nurse,
The spirit of thy sire.

("The Prophecy of Capys", stanza XV)

"Spiritual Isolation" has already appeared in the preceding section, where it was suggested that the desolation experienced by the speaker was the result of ^{feeling} rejected by God. This is still so, yet this general feeling which the poem produces may be only a personal reflection of the insecurity felt by Jews in what remained in many ways--for those lacking the privileges of birth or wealth--an alien society, something akin to the exile of the Diaspora Jewry.

Only by implication does that surprising poem, "Of Any Old Man", have anything to do with religious differences. It is a surprising poem because of its bitterly partisan attack, which--if its subject is merely old age--seems disproportionate to its cause. In form it is a tightly-knit stanza of iambic blank-verse pentameters which opens with a warning to youth to avoid disturbing the "withered peace" of the old: such "rude jolly cries" may be goatlike (in other words, productive of animal pleasure) to maidens, but a tactless reminder to the old of the vigour that once was theirs--hence the result will be "a large recoil". It is better to leave the old in "their trial grave" (complete with "shadowy effigy"); the opposition between the two groups is brought out by "withered peace" which is set against "ripened turbulence". "Frost-mailed petulance" has a mock-heroic ring about it.

The refuge of the old lies in "Experience"--a word that "shivers" in utterance, through either fear or infirmity or both--which is used as a defence of their ignorance: "crown of naked majesties" could point towards the story of King Lear or, in a lighter vein, to that of The Emperor's New Clothes. When the old take refuge behind this word they answer none of "our" questions but simply confirm suspicions of their rigidity and defensiveness, so on what--we are left to ask--is our reverence for age based? Christ's youthfulness is proffered as condemnation--though this provides an emotional rather than a logical conclusion to the poem. Compare the anticlimactic last line of Owen's "Parable of the Old Man and the Young":

. . . And half the seed of Europe, one by one.

But Rosenberg's poem is less immediately topical in reference, thus it has a wider and more lasting appeal.

The narrow one-sidedness of the attack suggests that it originated from some personal antagonism, and its dating of 1914 means that it might have been written during his spell in South Africa. There is some evidence (in letters as well as in "The Exile", as noted on pages 97-99 above) that his stay was not altogether an enjoyable one, and since the appearance of "Your Christ" in line 15 indicates a gulf between Rosenberg and the object of his attack, it is only a short step to the speculation that Rosenberg is attacking the repression and authoritativeness of some churchmen, more likely to be members of the Christian Dutch Reform Church than to be Elders of the Synagogue. Support for such a biographical view is afforded by the poem which accompanies this one, "Invisible Ancient Enemy of Mine".

The enemy under attack in this poem is both invisible and ancient, thus it is not on this occasion simply the older generation. "My house's foe" suggests the House of David which invites the conclusion that this enemy is the spirit of anti-Semitism, or else (equally possibly) that he is the Old Testament authoritarian figure of God, the God who has chosen the Jews and then crushes and humiliates them. The last five lines of the first stanza:

. . . To rich my pride with wrongful suffering,
Your vengeful gain--
Coward and striker in the pit lined dark--
Lie to my friends,
Feed the world's jealousy and pamper love . . .

show that this enemy, like God later (as in "God"), is

cowardly and treacherous and takes malicious delight in fomenting intolerance and dissension. Stanza two gives a personal flavour to this suffering as the speaker here displays his mild (possibly Christ-like?) acceptance of sneering hostility. Although the poem is rhymeless, the stanzas of alternating tetrameter and trimeter generate a vigorous movement in the lines which gathers momentum until the bitterness bursts out in the final stanza. It presents us with an ingenious circular move to evade this enemy, or--to see it in another light--as the assumption of a Christ-like posture. Let me, says the speaker, amass all the pain of the world in myself so that the enemy, left to recall ("recount") all the cruelties he has inflicted upon the world, will be punished by the awakening of remorse; thus he will have no tortures left to inflict on others and will himself suffer "self-tortured" for the duration of eternity. Such an outwitting of the divine recalls the tactics of "The One Lost" (see pages 76-⁷⁸~~80~~) though the terms of the conflict here are much more bitter than earlier, and they look forward to a direct confrontation with the malign deity in "God".

The last complete poem which reflects the influences of Judaism is "Chagrin", which accompanied Moses in 1916. The extant manuscript of this poem, in ink, contains various workings, such as this for line seven:

. . . Of spaces in a (chagrined) sky
(the brackets indicate Rosenberg's emendation) while line eight of the printed version is an afterthought inserted before the present ninth line which had its first word deleted:

Thoughts hang like . . .

The parenthesis in line 20--"(we dream)"--was originally "we believe", so the emendation neatens up the line metrical-ly. In the manuscript version, line 23 runs

. . . And suddenly to the end of the world . . .

but by deleting all of it except the first two words

Rosenberg has repeated the structure of the second stanza which, through its form, throws emphasis on the final two lines by partially separating them from the accumulating energy of the preceding lines. A contrast emerges between the lack of physical movement in stanzas one and two (typified by thick, heavy clusters of consonants, as):

. . . my thoughts

Hang like branch-clung hair . . .

With the choked soul weighing down

Into thick emptiness . . .

and the headlong impetuosity of the concluding stanza (no heavy punctuation, and a change from trimeters to tetrameters):

. . . we must ride dim ages around

Ere the hands (we dream) can touch,

We ride, we ride, before the morning . . .

The poem originates from the image of Absalom, held a powerless captive by his hair. Thus the air is still, sinister and brooding. Hair, an emblem of pride in "Knowledge", is here the main cause of catastrophe. The sky ominously reflects the speaker's brooding state of mind, as he is held physically powerless while his soul is "choked" (by frustration). "This hanging death" (line 13) Silkin sees as summing up the social rootlessness of Jewry, and he may be correct in this: Rosenberg often reflects, though not

deliberately, the tensions of his own people. What is uncharacteristic in a Jew is the appeal to Christ for help and relief: this suggests a Blakean dichotomy between Father and Son as may be seen in Owen's "Soldier's Dream", and an echo of the implied contrast between the two in "Of Any Old Man" (see on page 107). As the accompanying "God" was to show unequivocally, Rosenberg had by this time completely abandoned the concept of the benign Father.

The final stanza explains how the impasse of the first two stanzas has been brought about. We find ourselves imperceptibly freed from restraints and our eyes are full of visions and impetuosity. Our objective takes much time and effort to reach since we seek "The secret roots of the sun to tread", and such an aim is presumptuous if we recall an echo in this line of Henry Vaughan:

The way which from this dead and dark abode
Leads up to God,
A way where you might tread the Sun, and be
More bright than he. ("The World")

But if this is hubris, then for Rosenberg such a risk is justified, for he wrote this to Marsh about June 1914, on the verge of his departure for South Africa:

People talk about independence and all that--but one always works with some sort of doubt, that is, if one believes in the inspired 'suntreaders'. I believe that all poets who are personal--see things gueniunely [sic], have their place (CW, page 294).

This line also appears in the earlier "At Night", where the sun stands for the beneficent sources of life. But whereas the "pale horses" seeking the sun's roots in "At Night" were malevolent, our searching for them is a quest for knowledge and so--incidentally, no doubt--for power. Impetuosity is

our undoing, for quite unexpectedly we are lifted from the ground like Absalom, and suspended in helpless vulnerability by a hostile force. Once again, this could be seen as the action of a jealous and repressive God.

This poem has a certain timeless quality about it, and whether it is read as a comment on Jewish frustrations or whether (as the final stanza suggests) it portrays the predicament of the artist in an inimical society, there is no mistaking its intensity, its mood of menace and oppression whose only counterpart would be found in contemporary war poems.

Fragment V, an earlier version of a moment not surviving in Moses, illustrates the quality of the divine presence as also Moses' feelings towards the Jews in Egyptian captivity. It presents, therefore, a dramatic rather than a personal point of view, but Moses' lack of sympathy may reflect something of Rosenberg's attitude. We see Moses at first becoming aware of the divine presence in the burning bush, a presence which has the same effect on him as the sight of Lilith was later to have on the Nubian and Tel: compare lines 177-180 of The Amulet:

I am flung in the abyss of days
And the void is filled with rushing sound
From pent eternities.

I am strewn as the cypher is strewn. . .

and lines 144-145 of The Unicorn:

Those fragile gleaming wrists untangle me,
Those looks tread out my soul. . .

with the first three lines of this Fragment:

I feel inert, strange, a losing of myself,
A presence as though a million years were forcing
Into me.

Moses' lighting of a fire produces the angelic figure which he sees as God's sheepdog (God at this point is still the Good Shepherd). The Jews, bemused by the "tawny panther" of predatory Egyptian oppression (the image also appears in lines 170-171 of Moses), huddle to Him for protection and in so doing arouse Moses' contempt for them and he is contemptuous of their passive acceptance of the status quo, their contentedness with the familiarity of the sheepfold. As God's chosen race they feel secure in their confidence of God's interest, yet an instinctive terror still lurks beneath.

The attitude of the Jews towards God here clearly precedes that observable in "Invisible Ancient Enemy", for God is still the kindly father, and the Jews still feel secure in their destiny. There is also a difference in texture between this Fragment and the printed Moses, firstly in its portrayal of God, and secondly in the quality of Moses' speech: his way of thinking is less decisive, more intellectual than his successor's.

God

The examination of "Chagrin" and Fragment V shows the impossibility of dividing the Earlier Poems into entirely self-contained groups for to talk about Judaism is to imply some relationship with God. The deity makes his earliest appearance in the 1912 group of poems, in a slight set of verses entitled "Peace" which on the evidence of Complete

Works was sent to Miss Wright in a letter dated 27th December, 1912 (page 339). Its theme of seeking unity with God is reminiscent of "Night and Day", but here it is taken to imply a longing for escape from the world. The aspiration of stanza two towards achieving a superhuman permanence and independence akin to a rock is vigorously redrafted in the opening section of Moses, where this solidity is independent of God who may be jealous or vindictive:

I am rough now, and new, and will have no tailor;
Startlingly,
As a mountain-side
Wakes aware of its other side,
When from a cave a leopard comes, . . .

(lines 51-55)

The final stanza closes the poem with a Wordsworthian picture of peaceful desolation, which makes an abrupt contrast with the energy of the middle stanza. The poem in fact celebrates the strength of stillness and it does so in terms recognisably Yeatsian, such as "mood", "blood" and "dreamy".

"O'er the Celestial Pathways" carries the same date as "Peace" and is similarly cast in regularly-rhyming stanzas. It embodies another idea (probably from the Zohar, as E. O. G. Davies notes in his thesis) that was to reappear in later poems--as in "Sleep"--that in dreams the mortal spirit can temporarily share in God's immortality. This leads on, in the second stanza, to a glance at the difference between appearance and reality: a shadow can remind man--in the height of his pride as lord of creation--of his ephemerality. As a defence he may assert that nothing else is permanent if he is not, but such a belief has to be put to the test.

Only after he has escaped mortality and so proved his body's "seemingness" can his spirit judge what else only "seems". This is a major phenomenological and ontological question, but the poem muffles up the debate in smooth verbal music; its immediate relevance is that this poem places man unhesitatingly in a traditionally dependent role with God, a thoroughly orthodox view.

The picture of God offered by "Night and Day" is equally traditional: this benevolence is transmitted to the earth in the form of natural beauty, which is "but the voice of God", and in return earth's praises return to God--hence the cycle of the Eternal Rhythm. Music, too, is continuing proof of God's goodwill, and the star is a window through which God looks for the eyes of those who seek Him. Thus Rosenberg's published attitude to God (in 1912) is perfectly unexceptionable, as is shown by "Spiritual Isolation" which accompanies it. As noted earlier (on page 28 above) Rosenberg's first reaction to a separation of man from God is to see it as entirely due to man's unworthiness, for there can be no error on the other side.

In the early part of the 1913 group, "Creation" presents a view of God which is substantially unchanged. When the poem was published in Poems (1922) only the first forty-three lines of it were printed, and the change of direction at this point is still visible in the extant version, so will be considered in its place. The poem demonstrates a move away from the regularity of stanza-length and uniform rhyme; rhyme is present here, though it operates sometimes on lines as pairs, sometimes as alternating sequences. The verse-paragraph which has replaced the formal stanza is more

flexible and so appropriate for this ruminative kind of verse.

The poem opens by tracing man's evolution as a natural phenomenon akin to dawn. Man's origin is apparent if we recall that light is a traditional symbol for God which Rosenberg has employed on other occasions (for example, at the opening of "April Dawn"). Yet Will (ultimately human) grew till it rivalled nature in power, thus it seems at this point that a hedonistic human will can stand independent of God:

But the will grew; nature feared,
And cast off the child she reared,
Now her rival, instinct-led,
With her own powers impregnated.

Rosenberg believed in freewill yet he found this freedom ultimately in God:

Your roots are God, the pauseless cause, . . .
The motivating force behind the whole universe is God's love,
but in the next line:

. . . But your boughs sway to self-windy laws.
we see that Rosenberg's humanism is nervous yet unshaken,
"your" in this context meaning "man's" rather than "God's".

The fourth stanza reveals that love exists (predictably) in infinity, whose very existence induces aspiration in man. So it is that we live by progressions:

. . . Moses must die to live in Christ,
The seed be buried to live to green.

Perfection is a relative term and at each new level is the starting-point for further growth--"Perfection is always a root". Joy is apprehended as a circular motion which lives

on itself--a variant on the Eternal Rhythm of "Night and Day"--thus creation continually involves the destruction of old achievements to make way for new (the reference here is to spiritual progress, but the idea looks forward to the social revolution planned in Moses). At this point the 1922 version of the poem ended. The difference made by the addition of a second "movement" is that it tempers the asserted value of freewill with a more sombre picture of loss of innocence; thus the first forty-three lines alone would appear acquiescent and complacent.

The following lines repeat that the moving force behind the universe is not mechanical but passionate--"The plan terrific". It is therefore part of that plan that man's spirit should remain unsullied by experience for only a short while. Within the ambience of freewill, the individual's soul grows luxuriantly and soon impinges on others which makes men consider it blemished. Yet the sea (equally a part of God's creation) does not consider the darkness of its waves as a sign of God's disfavour: the waves merely rejoice when God's light enables them to glitter, for not all of creation seeks so self-importantly for union with God as man does--there are other levels of existence possible and justifiable. In the space of these last ten lines or so (lines 48-59) Rosenberg displays a desire to break down or modify conventional moral tenets:

What foolish lips first framed 'I sin'?

The virgin spirit grows within

To stature its eyes know to fail.

.

When in wild growths eventual

Its light casts shadow on other light,

All cry 'That spirit is not white'.

In the notes to Complete Works the editors declare that what is now Fragment XLIV was inserted as a separate paragraph following line 69. To see what difference this would have made to the poem it is helpful to consider what this Fragment contains. Its lines deal with the question of perspective, showing how the relative heights of a tree and of a mountain differ according to an observer's standpoint. Such a metaphor, which suggests the artist's eye, leads smoothly to the inference that hope and aspiration are justifiable if viewed correctly, praiseworthy if not over-indulged. Such a passage would therefore have supported the assertions of lines 48-59 of "Creation", which are followed by a variation on lines 41-43 showing that man's joy in (God's) creation and (his own) re-creation is communicated to God and God in turn nourishes us with such joy. A rather feeble couplet:

. . . Until the golden gates do close
On endless gardens of repose.

(which itself half-echoes lines 7-8 of Marvell's "The Garden":

. . . While all Flow'rs and all Trees do close
To weave the Garlands of repose . . .

Coincidentally, the letter on page 317 of Complete Works shows Rosenberg's interest in Marvell, so the echo may be partly conscious) is followed by a striking and almost apocalyptic utterance:

A sun, long set, again shall rise,
Bloom in annihilation's skies . . .

The evidence in the universe of God's love will endure unchangingly. All striving and aspiration lead ultimately to death, but by accepting his own mortality ^{man} ~~he~~ would achieve

a wisdom to match God's:

. . . Ah, no more

A happy fool in paradise,

But finite--wise as the All-wise.

Such an acceptance contradicts the suggestion of lines 27-28:

. . . Become as wise as the All-wise,

No love would be, no mystery: . . .

which have suggested that such total knowledge would in fact be a loss for mankind--a loss of such things as the sense of awe and mystery at Creation.

This poem clearly counterbalances those which lament the individual's isolation from God (as do "Spiritual Isolation" and the later "God Made Blind" and "God") by asserting confidently that all is part of the Divine Plan. God is here benevolent and paternal and man's questionings are non-rebellious, all of which makes it curiously conventional in its treatment of the man-God relationship when compared with the later poems on this theme.

Quite abruptly, one small poem in this group offers a radically opposed view. "Walk you in Music, Light or Night" states that man bears on his brow the mark of Cain--in the form of pain and mortality--and men can recognize one another's affliction, but

God only can neither read nor hear.

Men also write about their fears for themselves and their fellows, but God is merciless and remote, incapable of offering hope or comfort. God has suddenly become aloof and antagonistic, and this view of Him is likely to end in revolt.

This is followed immediately by "The Blind God" which carries opposition to God a stage farther. In a pencilled

manuscript version of lines 8-13 the final line reads "Streaked over with your blasphemy", but then the last three lines are deleted. The 1922 edition prints line two of this poem as:

. . . Betwixt His twin eternities . . .

and line three contains an initial "The", both of which disappear in Complete Works and Collected Poems. Neither of these alterations affects the meaning. Despite appearances, there is little real connection between this second line and those lines in Yeats which Rosenberg unknowingly anticipates:

Many times man lives and dies

Between his two eternities, . . .

("Under Ben Bulben")

God in this poem sits between space and time in an incomprehensible dimension which is menacing ("shadows deep") and He is injured by man's blasphemies. In stanza two the Christian fish symbol is given a new application--we are fish in a small pool in the meadows of Eternity, and as such we are prey to angling angels who will hook us up to face an irate God. The 1922 text had a line interpolated between lines 7-8 which ran:

. . . And men like fishes lying cool . . .

Its removal does not alter the sense of these lines, but it does neaten up the rhyming of stanza two into a regular pattern. This poem shows God in the process of withdrawing from man, but He is still susceptible to injury by man and his antagonism is at the moment the result of man's shortcomings and it is only after this point that such a motive for God's unfriendliness is suppressed.

The third version of "The Poet" does not seriously

consider the idea of God. It envisages the possibility of the artist becoming God, since by this creative aspiration he penetrates behind the persona of man. "The secret God" also hints at the view found in "Night and Day", that the power of God resides in part in its remaining "ineffable", and that it is only when the "immensity" of potential is released from its normally "immured" condition in the poet that he most nearly achieves the divine. Thus God appears in this poem only in his capacity as Creator and not at all as "Disposer Supreme and Judge of the Earth".

As indicated earlier (page 49 above), "The Female God" combines an examination of man's relationship to God with a tribute to the power of woman's beauty. It comes as no great surprise to find that the nature of this God--because both feminine and attractive--is predatory, thus the divine malignity is expressed in terms of the dominating female in a love/sensuality-relationship.

"The One Lost" and "God Made Blind" which both appeared in Youth have been already examined and on page 79 it was shown how love in these poems becomes the means of escape from a hostile God. As amorous attraction had been the God's weapon in "The Female God" for ensnaring hapless man, so in these poems the divine weapon is turned against its wielder. In "The One Lost", love incidentally provides a rather amusing means of tricking God, who sounds at this point like a humourless patriarch. The next stage in such resistance to God appears in "God Made Blind" where God is--as noted earlier--equated with malignant Fate, and so opposition to Him is proposed quite openly in the first lines; the weapon is, once more, the traditionally divine attribute of love

and the means is deceit.

The only development possible in such a relationship as this is deterioration, and this is what "God" shows. Sleight-of-hand techniques are no longer possible and the only course is a declaration of man's bitter loathing and rejection of God. In the contemporary Moses one further development is that this malevolent figure becomes the God of the decadent Egyptians, thus as the presiding figure of a society which is both oppressive and effete He is a worthy target for Moses' opposition. Marius Bewley sums this up by saying "The god of "God" is a sociological, not a theological god"⁵, and in this poem too the characteristics of the society which God rules have, as it were, been grafted on to God himself. A closer examination will make this process clearer.

When it was first published in the Moses pamphlet only lines 1-15 appeared, so that version would have followed the pattern of Moses' attack on "a rotting God" even more clearly than in its present form; written, like Moses, in unrhymed pentameters, it is the culmination ^{of} ~~in~~ the civilian poems dealing with man's relationship to God. God is not merely malign, but unendingly so; there seems to be no escape from the finality of this conclusion save for a complete abandonment of God (as Moses advocated) since man is left to provide the only benign influence in society. Jon Silkin comments at length in Out of Battle (page 268) on the complexity of mingling a Judaic God with the late-Hellenistic belief in a

⁵ Marius Bewley, "The Poetry of Isaac Rosenberg", in Commentary, Vol. VII (New York, January 1949), page 36.

mortal body and an immortal soul, and points out that this God is not only hostile but possesses "a rat-soul" to add to his inferiority. (One further stage in this degradation of God occurs later, we will notice, in "Break of Day", where the rat assumes Godlike impartiality--the figure in Stephen Dedalus's mind of

the God of creation [who] remains within or behind or beyond or above his handiwork, invisible, refined out of existence, indifferent, paring his fingernails.)

The opening of this poem is both striking and harsh, an effect achieved by a mingling of sharp consonants and archaic forms:

In his malodorous brain what slugs and mire,
Lanthorned in his oblique eyes, guttering burned!

("God", lines 1-2)

--"lanthorned" is a visual reminder of "thorn", which increases the unpleasantness. The lines at once suggest the depth of repulsion which this being stirs up, while "oblique" adds to this an element of deviousness. God is a cunning being who foils the world, and from being merely hostile He has now become a bully. Like most bullies, if one heroic individual will stand out against Him, He will cringe (another reference to Moses' revolt), thus blunting the force of the attack and He will take reprisals on the weak afterwards. Much the same attitude towards God is reflected in lines 223-225 of Swinburne's "Félice":

. . . Pray, till ye feel the exceeding weight
Of God's intolerable scorn,
Not to be borne.

Rosenberg's phrasing at this point echoes lines 379-380 of

Moses: . . . But get yourself bronze claws before
You would be impudent.

Another close resemblance to the play occurs in lines 11-15, which are almost identical with these lines of the Song of the Aged Minstrel (Moses in disguise) from Moses:

Ye who best God awhile,--O, hear, your wealth
Is but His cunning to see to make death more hard.
Your iron sinews take more pain in breaking.
And he has made the market for your beauty
Too poor to buy although you die to sell.

Divine benevolence, we should heed, is more apparent than real, and our well-being or our resistance will only increase God's enjoyment as he degrades and crushes us: if we do get the better of ("best") God for a while, our luck can be only temporary. The "market" has been "fixed" so that we cannot obtain a good bargain from life. Suddenly, at this point where the poem resumes after its original ending, God transmigrates to the body of a cat, unsleepingly watchful, so we have to become cunning, like rats. Men feel safe "here", in some sort of refuge (maybe sleep, as proposed in "Sleep"), covered by night while God is out on the prowl.

Line 19 presents a puzzle:

But he has gnawed a fibre from strange roots, . . .
Silkin, following his ethnic line of interpretation, suggests that God has perhaps become contaminated by mingling in an alien community, thus He is no longer entirely Judaic. This is quite acceptable, but it is difficult to see how this relates to the general loathing for God prevalent in the rest of the poem, the God who is responsible for malign human nature as well as for social injustice and corruption. Another possibility is to remember Banquo's

have we eaten on the insane root
That takes the reason prisoner?

(Macbeth I:iii:89)

which would see God as obsessed with viciousness and so unbalanced. Dawn brings to an end the "pale wonder" of release from persecution when "he slinks in at dawn". Our continuing misery is no more acceptable than is our own hair being lifted by God's malevolent breath: this image has already been used with great effect in "Chagrin" (page 110 above) where, as Silkin says, it suggests the "same kind of depending vulnerability". (Out of Battle, page 270). God's fingers throttle the voices of those who "pass through" this life, so we have no reason for believing in an afterlife: similarly our farewells of each other are "blind" as we do not know where God will strike next.

The final line:

Ah! this miasma of a rotting God!

echoes line 144 of Moses in its complete rejection of God as a symbol of both autocratic power (as here) and of a repressive social order (in that play). What this poem lacks is the relative optimism of the ending of "God Made Blind" (pages 78-80) where there seems to be room left for an improvement in the relationship; it even lacks the implied hope of line 153 of Moses--

. . . Only putrefaction is free . . .

Thus the situation here seems inescapable within the terms stated, and Silkin's comment on it is hypothesis rather than interpretation:

The only way to avoid 'this miasma of a rotting God'
and the infecting decay of authority is to change the
character of the authority (if indeed it is to be kept

at all) and one's relationship with it (op. cit., page 270).

--though in fairness it should be added that he is looking to Moses. The poem is demonstrably a parallel to Moses, though it stops short of the play's decision to break the stalemate:

Who has made of the forest a park?

Who has changed the wolf to a dog?

And put the horse in a harness?

And man's mind in a groove?

God as a non-denominational figure occurs once more, in "Sleep", and in fact there He has become "gods" who remain sinister and antagonistic toward man. This poem resembles the earlier "Chagrin" in form, being arranged in stanzas of increasing length, with mixed metre and no rhyme. It also contains an element of the Zohar belief that in sleep the human soul can rise above and temporarily escape from earthly reality. The same idea also underlies Fragment XXXVIII, though no revolt is planned in that poem. The "Godhead" whose lip hangs in sleep is of course man made in God's image: when he sleeps, God's power can be usurped by mice and other insignificant creatures of darkness--are they, like the "star-amorous things" of "At Night" potentially evil? But also at this time man can act free from the influence of the Gods, since during daylight hours we have to submit to their whims. In sleep, the positions are reversed, and the "subtle gods" who, like the God of "God" have "oblique eyes", receive a deserved taste of their own medicine. For Rosenberg

as for Spinoza,⁶ God is here a vast body made up of human actions but unfettered by human limitations, save in this respect. Our prone bodies transmit a kind of paralysis to the gods', so they are "Futilely gods'".

When compared with "God" this is a more adolescent poem, lacking its bitter contempt: revolt is here something of a clever game and Rosenberg seems not to consider that the gods may cause us to sleep in order to influence our sub-conscious personalities, so that our apparent freedom proves to be illusory--

Who rests in God's mean flattery now?

It may be, however, that the Hebrew source for this poem obviated such a possibility.

Only two further references to God occur, one being in Fragment V and as that has been already examined on page 112 no more need be said here. In Fragment XLIII we are told that the worst of life is to remain alive while all around us decays. In the second stanza the reminiscence of the boy and girl from Tennyson's "Break, Break, Break" is distorted, for their voyage of life begins happily, only to be ravaged and finally destroyed. Why should this be?

. . . For an idle whim.

Then an extra-metrical line is added, as if an afterthought:

God's dream, God's whim.

Thus this Fragment shares the attitude of "God" without its

6 Again, the motion and rest of the body must be derived from some other body, which has also been determined to motion or rest by another, and, absolutely, whatever arises in the body must arise from God, in so far as He is considered as affected by some mode of extension, and not in so far as He is considered as affected by any mode of thought . . . (Spinoza: Ethics, Part III, Demonstration to Proposition 2).

depths of loathing as well as displaying a stoical fatalism like that of Gloucester in King Lear:

As flies to wanton boys, are we to the gods;
They kill us for their sport.

Appearance and Reality

Connected with Rosenberg's concern about the nature of God and of his relationship with man, there runs through these Earlier Poems a concomitant interest in the divergence between appearance and reality, which may be Platonic in origin. Yet the Platonic theory of forms which was detected much earlier (page 44) in "Twilight" (II) is not wholly a Greek idea, and Rosenberg's awareness of it may derive from a more readily accessible Judaic source than Plato. One of the early mystics who wrote a commentary on the Zohar in the sixteenth century was Moses Cordovero, and in the course of his book he maintains, in essence--

that the Infinite is present in every part of the finite, which, in turn, is itself but a phrase or 'mode' of the Infinite, and that, as Cordovero phrases it elsewhere, "Nothing exists outside God". Here Cordovero gave expression to a view which appears surprisingly like the pantheism taught a century later by Spinoza who, in fact, is said to have avowed his indebtedness for his theory to Cordovero (Isidore Epstein: Judaism, page 244).

This source could thus account for much of what passes in Rosenberg for the heritage of Plato, for it is a theistic version of the classical view.

The emergence of this question has already been noted in earlier remarks on "O'er the Celestial Pathways", where it

is related to man's temporality as compared to God's unendingness. In the Night and Day pamphlet, the dilemma reappears, but this time in non-theistical terms. In "Aspiration" we can detect a link with "Night and Day" which goes deeper than merely its title, for both poems are concerned with the search for identity. The arresting opening line of "Aspiration":

The roots of a dead universe are shrunken in my brain . . . expresses a mood of frustration which fits in neatly with Lilith's anticipatory fear of the violence of the storm which has brought the mysterious and fascinating figure of Tel to her house:

The roots of a torn universe are wrenched, . . .

(The Unicorn, line 134)

This mood is fixed by the following images of unreality:

. . . tinsel leafed branches of the charred trees . . .

To a man in this state of mind, nothing is what it seems, nothing has fixed identity:

And a rose within the mirror with the fragrance of it hid;
And mine ear prest to the mouth of the shadow of a name;
But no ghost or speech or fragrance breathing on my faint
eyelid.

Stanza three seeks a way out of this impasse: with a heroic effort of self-assertion the poet could tear down the veils that muffle communication, but although it is doubtful whether he will achieve anything substantial, at least an attempt will have been made. If the poem reflects the struggle of identity between flesh and spirit, as in "Night and Day", then such a resolution seems to be successful; at least the ending of this poem entertains the possibility of success

rather more than the negative conclusion of its companion-poem.

In the later "A Question" the distinction between appearance and reality is again related to a poet's activity, in this instance the human power of image-making. Perception is not a physical activity but is truly achieved by "all the spirit's eyes". The danger of this intense power is that the vision produced by the mind may deceive the senses into taking such inner reality for its outward appearance, which it is not. In other words, the mind can distort what the senses perceive. The poem is brief, and does not warn or comment--it simply poses the question "What if this were to happen?"

In the contemporary "O be these Men and Women?" a sense of alienation from the rest of mankind as well as from the "root" source of life accompanies the questioning of reality in the second stanza:

Are these things your dreams
That I too can watch?
When I dream my dreams
Do you see them too?

This poem has already appeared in the section on Isolation (page 96).

Two of the latest poems in the 1914-15 group are decidedly pre-Surrealistic in manner, and deal with the same subject in such similar ways that the later version is probably a free reworking of the earlier one. There are also evident in this pair of poems affinities with Swinburne's "Before the Mirror", especially where in lines 47 and 54 the earlier poet seems to have been Rosenberg's

model: the first line contains "Deep in the gleaming glass . . ." while the later one has "She sees by formless gleams . . .". In this connection, a line from "Hesperia" may well have given Rosenberg the idea for lines 7-8 of "The Mirror", for Swinburne writes in line 29:

Fair as a rose is on earth, as a rose under water
in prison . . .

which is echoed thus in "The Mirror":

. . . So in its splashless water falls, so dumbly lies
therein

A fervid rose whose fragrance sweet lies hidden
and shut within.

"Dusk and the Mirror" comprises three stanzas of varying lengths and equally varied rhyme-schemes, and it opens with the animation of the inanimate: dusk is an active force, holding on to the light in the distorting mirror-image of a darkening room, and the eye is deceived by what it sees:

Mutation of slipped moment

When nothing and solid is blent.

Dusk cannot overwhelm one jewel, the mirror, which--as it no longer has anything to reflect--now dreams of the images it has held and which are safe from dusk's obliterating approach. In the final stanza dusk is like a tree hovering over the lake-like surface of the mirror whose glow seems to threaten the enveloping darkness. The evocative image of lines 36-38:

Like vague undrowning boughs

Above the pool

You float your gloom in its low light . . .

reappears more economically if less poetically as the second

line of "The Mirror":

Like drowning vague branches in its depth floats
the gloom, . . .

Ultimately, dusk gazing narcissistically into the mirror
fears the mirror, for the glass is a reminder:

. . . Behind the wall of hours you hear
The tread of the arch-light.

"The Mirror" is a shorter reworking of the above, set out this time in regular rhymed stanzas which are ambiguously scannable, being either dactylic or anapaestic. The first stanza is purely descriptive, and in line five the heavy alliteration on "s" seems uncontrolled and is difficult to enunciate clearly. Here the Donnian image of the mirror is fused with the 1890s image of the rose: the mirror cannot reflect the ~~a~~ssence (scent) of a rose, but only its externals (appearance). This echoes the earlier reference to inadequate representation in "Bruised words" from "Even now your Eyes" (see page 61). The mirror thus "imprisons" sensual^s impressions (at the same time absorbing and reflecting them) while seeming to echo them faithfully. Similarly, the poet's attempts to portray the spirit are as inadequate as the mirror's inability to reproduce a rose's scent. Even though the style of this poem is more economical, its expression is still heavily decorative, relying much on Yeatsian epithets like "glimmering", "pale" and "fade". What we see in these two poems is Rosenberg turning his description of a favourite subject, twilight, to his purpose as a method of presenting to us the difficulties of poetic expression.

One final glance at the disparity between appearance and

reality is afforded by the slightly commonplace lines in an early Fragment, LVI, which tell how the spiritual quality of human life only becomes evident when it ceases being immersed in mundane and transitory matters. Lines 4-6:

Then when life only seems to pause
A life divine from heaven she draws,
From labour's earthly trammels freed. . .

--acquire a value for us when we contrast them with Rosenberg's later view that spirituality shows itself more truly in action than in contemplation--something we are to encounter unambiguously in the person of Moses. The later Fragment XIV points up the contrast between reality and dreams in terms of day's conquest of night. The final two lines:

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

have already been anticipated by the last line of the incomplete Fragment LIX:

. . . In gorgeous disarray . . .

as well as by the fifth line of the incomplete Fragment XXXIV:

Your gaudy disarray

Both find a common origin in Blake's "My silks and fine array" ("Song" from Poetical Sketches).

The Role of the Artist

The last pair of poems examined above point us toward another of Rosenberg's areas of concern, that of the problems and responsibilities encountered by an artist. The liberating power of poetry has already been hinted at in the over-elaborate "The Key of the Gates of Heaven", and the emphasis on poetry as song reminds the reader of Blake's

lyrics. Reference was made earlier (page 57 above) to the artless repetition of "golden" in lines 2-4, but in fairness it should be added that its meaning does vary when it is applied in rapid succession to a key, a door and to song. Both "chain" and "hand" also appear more than once, in each case with different referents which vary their meaning. As a poem it fails because of its elaborate speech as well as of its lack of concrete detail. Its succession of images, finally, is a collection of separate pictures rather than a developing argument; it lacks movement--and this may remind us that Ezra Pound abandoned Imagism because he found it to be too static for his purpose.

"My Songs" is a similarly flawed statement about the origins of the poetic impulse. It opens in a Wordsworthian manner, for the first two stanzas are strongly reminiscent of how

with an eye made quiet by the power
Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,
We see into the life of things.

("Tintern Abbey", lines 47-49)

Passing through echoes of Shakespeare ("vasty") and Rupert Brooke ("A pulse of all the life") the poem concludes by asserting a pantheistic source for the creative impulse. The mingling of sense-perceptions in the final stanza was to be dramatically compressed into lines 45-47 of "Daughters of War":

. . . Whose new hearing drank the sound
Where pictures lutes and mountains mixed
With the loosed spirit of a thought.

(This mingling of the senses may be detected also in Swinburne's "Thalassius" (lines 30-31):

. . . Where depth is one with height,
Light heard as music, music seen as light.)

"To Nature" is really a pendant to "My Songs", for it describes how the poet seeks inspiration from nature; despite the fact that he cannot fully appreciate her beauty, he at least is reassured that he is alive for to be unaware of this deficiency would be to be dead. "As We Look" has some similarity to "Twilight" (I) in that it also deals with the divergence in response--in this case, the response is to art:

Nay, when the old be new,
Nay, when the blind shall see,
Then, when the night is day, . . .

--only when such things occur will you and I hear the same song. Although certain basic experiences are the same for all mankind, one who observes natural phenomena will interpret them according to his mood. Eyes, which have appeared in other early poems as the windows of the soul, are here windows curtained till thought removes the blinds.

One of the later poems in the 1912 group is "Raphael", to which brief reference has already been made (page 62). Its blank verse pentameters are flexible and lively, sometimes laboured but at other times giving a fair impression of Browning's directness and vigour. The archaic style of diction is appropriate for a Renaissance figure, and the idea already noted that the poem may originate from Rosenberg's own experiences as an artist is supported by the almost pre-Raphaelite sketch of Ruth Lowy which is reproduced opposite page 256 of Complete Works.

Rosenberg's artist begins by defining the criterion for

success as knowing the moment when to stop adding to a picture. That this was a problem for Rosenberg himself too is brought out by Binyon's comment on page 7 of his Preface to Poems (1922):

He once showed me at his studio a large, ambitious composition--an oil-painting--which I fancy was never completed . . . I liked the mysteriousness of it, and the ideas which inspired the painting had suggested figures and groups and visionary glimpses of landscape which had passages of real beauty, though the whole work had grown impossibly complex with its convolutions of symbolic meaning. It reminded me of his poetry . . .

Like the artist of Keats's Grecian Urn, Rosenberg's Raphael feels he has caught beauty in suspended animation--and the line

Thus you shall look, my love, and never change . . .

calls to mind Keats's

For ever wilt thou love, and she be fair!

The poem contains isolated lines which are most effective, such as line 22:

. . . To sit, and sit, a statue, movelessly . . .

where repetition and alliteration try to convey both motionlessness and the passage of time. But at other moments Rosenberg's attempts to render the frustration of the artist whom perfect expression eludes are both cumbersome and passionless:

You--yes, 'twas thus you looked, ah, look again

That hint of smile . . .

There--there--before my eyes and in my brain

Limned perfect--but my fingers traitors were.

Raphael's thoughts about public praise recall the lines on people's reactions in "Fra Lippo Lippi":

'That woman's like the Prior's niece who comes

To care about his asthma: it's the life!' . . .

and so on.

These lines lack the life of Browning's but the judgement of lines 42-43 makes a valid critical point:

. . . 'Like noonday lakes to torrents wild,
After titanic Mighty Angelo'.

Raphael's paintings do possess a serenity missing from the vigour and majesty of, say, Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel frescos, which inspire awe. The two artists were contemporaries, although Michelangelo survived Raphael (who died at the age of thirty-seven) by almost forty-five years.

The next paragraph (lines 49-62) foreshadows the emergence of ambition in Moses. In his concern with the future Raphael temporarily forgets his model, but his aspirations are tempered by the realization that his creation will outlive him. Rosenberg momentarily captures the Browning tone of voice, with its antithesis and abruptness:

Some doubt of God--but the world lives who doubts?
which is followed by the self-questioning--so familiar to readers of Browning--as to his motives in painting, whether it be to fulfil ambition, to respond to a challenge, or to gain approval of the wise. He acknowledges that some inner force compels him to paint, then at the eighty-fourth line remembers that his girl is still with him and so turns from these lofty themes to thoughts of hiding in the "loosened fire" of her hair which like a prison will keep his soul captive (the earliest reference in Rosenberg to woman's hair as a lure and trap). Raphael muses drowsily about trying to express his feelings and the girl to him becomes a Wordsworthian "presence that embraces all things felt" (line 100), a being who leads him to aspire (another favourite image appears here in lines 102-103, that of inaccessible

stars being reflected in lowly earthly waters). Rosenberg resolves the problem of how to end the monologue naturalistically by having the artist join his model in sleep.

Although the poem is not wholly successful it is an interesting experiment. As in the later speeches of Moses and The Amulet and The Unicorn Rosenberg displays a certain adeptness: the lines have more life to them than a straightforward exposition would have produced. The style is clearly Browning's but it lacks his tension, for Rosenberg's Raphael is not a soul at a moment of crisis as Browning's most successful characters are. The poem is a creditable pastiche, but is weakened by the repetitiveness of "love" and "sweet" which in the opening section come to sound increasingly like metrical in-fillers; their use as "counters" (Hulme's word) is emphasised by their total disappearance from the middle section of the poem while the beginning and ending are fairly well interlarded with them. The only moments of real passion behind the words seem to occur between lines 39 and 62 which talk of the artist's ambition.

The third draft of "The Poet" is dated 1914. ~~The~~ earlier versions have already been discussed on pages 90-91, and this one is also, in a letter of May-June 1914 to Marsh (Complete Works, pages ²⁹⁴⁻²⁹⁵~~249-250~~):

I told you my idea--the whole thing is to be called the poet, and begins with the way external nature affects him, and goes on to human nature.

This version opens with an unfamiliar image, which has a visionary intensity uncluttered by any attempt at a "rational" explanation:

At my eyes' anchoring levels
The pigmy skies foam over

The flat earth our senses see;
A vapour my lips might stir--
The heat of my breath might wither.

Lines 2-4 of this reappear in the contemporary "Girl's Song". It seems that the poet is very high up, for the skies appear "pigmy" and the earth flat. The vapour mentioned above is superior to clouds, for it is the essence of inspiration, but this is so tenuous that it could easily be destroyed by his breath: his eyes are similarly starved of inspiration. All this, it will be recalled, is only a more involved restatement of the idea central to "The Poet" (I), that of frustration:

. . . And caught him in a cage of earth, but heaven
can hear his dewy lays.

"The beamy air" has a Blakean quality, but its sunbeams, together with "roofless silence" and the man-made roar of urban streets all become fused by the poet's vision into "an essence, a love-spirit"; this act is a deliberate effort of will by the artist, not the result of "wonder-list'ning sleep".

The informing power of stillness:

All things that, brooding, are still,
Speak to me, untwist and twine
The shifting links of consciousness,
Speak to the all-eyed soul . . .

acts on the poet's mind in terms reminiscent of "Il Penseroso":

Com, but keep thy wonted state,
With eev'n step, and musing gait,
And looks commercing with the skies,
Thy rapt soul sitting in thine eyes:

There held in holy passion still,

Forget thy self to Marble . . .

Rosenberg's attraction by the precise articulation of "intricate infinities" is made evident once more, but the soul or subconscious mind is now seen to be the agency through which a link between the poet and God ("well of the unconscious") can be forged. From this contact with the divine the poet's visionary power achieves a greater intensity than "reality", and thus his symbols possess a universal application: at this point E. O. G. Davies helpfully recalls to us Blake's "To see a world in a grain of sand". In the preceding section on God it was concluded that the final view offered of the poet by successive poems of the same title was that he approaches the divine when he is able to

Pass through the ward of our immured immensity . . .

In the sense that the poet is able (through divine inspiration) to adopt a supra-human viewpoint (hence his lofty perch in the opening lines) he does in fact become God-like. How great a distance lies between this concept and that of the frustrated angel in version (I) is very likely a measure of Rosenberg's rate of emergence from the Shelleyan influence; it may also be a mark of Rosenberg's own increase in self-confidence in his art, though the poem is totally lacking in any explicit personal reference.

Three sets of lines grouped under Fragments also touch the theme of being an artist, the first of which (XLIV) has in its opening three lines a marked resemblance to the corresponding section of "The Poet" (III): both display the painter's eye and are concerned with the perspective of a scene obtained from a particular viewpoint. This Fragment

has in fact already appeared in the earlier examination of "Creation" of which, at one stage, it was a part (see page). The role of the artist, it suggests, is to observe the relativity of values, to avoid extremist positions, to unite perspective with proportion.

An earlier Fragment, only two lines long (L), repeats the idea already discerned in lines 16-17 of "Raphael" and compared to Keats. Rosenberg's expression here is closer to that of Shelley than that of Keats:

. . . But from these create he can
Forms more real than living man,
Nurslings of immortality!

Fragment II also has something to say about artistic inspiration, though its unrhymed dramatic blank verse lines may at first give it the appearance of being a jotting for Moses. The artist speaks, declaring his inspiration from, and momentary identification with, the heavens, but such presumption will be punished. "God's blank eyes" could be an earlier version of "God Made Blind" and certainly also of the later and more menacing "oblique eyes" of "God". The sky is in fact impassive but man's trepidation makes him project divine retribution on to its motionless expanse.

. . . in its white depths

Dream unnamed gulfs of sudden traps for men . . .
looks forward to the deceptive beauty of "heights of night". The malevolence of heaven is said to unite men in fear but the real source of the fear is individual animosity.

The second stanza dwells on the moment of artistic inspiration, condensing it into the neat metaphor of sea-spray being instantaneously lit by moonlight. "Amorous" in this

early Fragment carries no sinister overtones beyond its meaning as "self-regarding", (see page 42 above). Lines 16-18:

. . . that holy amorous instant knows

Transplanted time to make twin time in space,

My new-born thought touch aeon-dusted thoughts.

present difficulties on first sight, but the sense seems to be that such a moment of intuition is "twin time in space" because it has already occurred to someone else in another age: inspiration is finally only the contemporaneous discovery of a recurring idea, which is therefore "aeon-dusted". The complex condensation of this stanza carries on into the last three lines where the process by which an idea arrives is compared to the spectrum components of "white" light: the "flash" of inspiration, however dazzling momentarily, is only "some pale light" when related to its source the sun, which is momentarily dimmed by comparison with it.

Edwin Muir in The Present Age (page 96) comments on lines 4-10 of this Fragment as follows:

That is half-realised poetry; but one can feel how wonderful it would have been, realised.

It is difficult to see why he picks out these lines for comment, since the last stanza is much more obviously half-digested. By comparison with these lines, Fragment LIV ("Wild Undertones") is facile, explaining to an audience that what they read comes from the poet's soul, not merely empty posturing or word-spinning.

The later Fragments IX, VIII and VI are all concerned with art, the first two seeking to explain the nature of the artistic impulse. Due to the inverse chronological arrangement of the Fragments, IX precedes VIII in order of

composition and the latter is in its turn a condensed version of VI. In IX art is "maenad anger", which brings out its ecstatic, bacchanal character; it is moreover, an impulse provoked by frustration at the imperfections of the actual world or by the desire for an unattainable ideal. This craving isolates the artist, hence his life is dedicated to "dereliction". A glance at Fragment VIII shows that Rosenberg re-used the substance of the first stanza with hardly a change, the only significant one being the replacement of the Dionysiac element of ^{"maenad"}~~"anger"~~ by "amber", which is appropriate as it preserves for future generations. The close resemblances between the first stanzas of both IX and VIII and lines 247-250 of Moses:

The streaming vigours of his blood erupting
From his halt tongue are like an anger thrust
Out of a madman's piteous craving for
A monstrous balked perfection. . .

suggest that they were being worked on at the same time. "Amber" also, by its gemlike quality, suggests the aloofness and even superiority of the artist. Stanza two of both these Fragments remains virtually the same, and once more they recall line 458 of Moses:

. . . Barbaric love sweeten to tenderness. . .
as well as Koelue's Song (lines 199-204) which in turn is echoed by Fragment VII. "Barbaric tenderness" has a flavour of Bergson's "élan vital", a quality personified in Moses.

The two final stanzas of IX were not re-used in succeeding drafts, but some of the expressions were to reappear in Moses. Lines 11 and 20--

The riding pomp of the years, . . .

and

. . . The riding pomp of all the years . . .
are found in the first version of Moses at line 24:

. . . The riding pomp of heavy handed years . . .
while line 16:

The streaming vigours of our blood . . .
is almost identical with line 247 in the published version
of Moses. All that these two stanzas add to the earlier two
is the rather unexciting information that poetry is a distil-
lation from the raw material of life.

Fragment VI once again resembles a moment in Moses, its
first two lines anticipate Moses' growing awareness of a
newly-awakened power in him:

. . . Pricking my nerves till the brain might crack

It boils to my finger-tips, . . .

With this the resemblance to Moses ceases as this fragment
turns to the aesthetic position of the artist rather than to
the consideration of him as a shaper of society. The poet's
soul aspires (traditionally) to the stars, as in "Night and
Day", yet his inspiration is no longer solely divine but
elemental ("Pulse of the void"). To bring to the world light
and music the poet expands his soul, and in exchange for such
sacrifice he alone apprehends the "infinite dreams" of God.
These lines are suffused by an idealistic fervour which was
to become much more practical and ruthless in Moses.

There is one remaining Fragment in the British Museum
collection, (on Folio page 35), at present published only by
Silkin in his catalogue to the Leeds Exhibition. It is
mentioned here not because it offers another of Rosenberg's
views on the artist, but because it illustrates the quality

of the artist at work in Rosenberg himself: the jottings in it have been quarried to fill many poems, such as Koelue's Song in Moses and Fragments ~~XI~~, IX, VIII and VII. More probably this one page is the source of Fragments IX, VIII and VII. The lines and words enclosed in brackets are those written and then deleted by Rosenberg.

Over the chasm they rolled together
Chasm that lay in tumult of trance
 is calm
Blue (was) the sky and (clear) the spring weather
(Careless of two who have ended their dance,)
(Over the two who were lovely once,)
What shall we write here. They were once

Flies are down hurrying insects are busy
Blue is the sky and quiet the air-

They only stepped out of despair

Across of a
 Sky chasms in sunset stress

 Burn swart for sorrowless

 Roses in storm adance.

 Abysmal as they sway

 Thro a tumult of deep trance

(Chasms and lakes in me)

They burn for sorrowless roses

On the reverse of this sheet is written:

Across sky chasms of a sunset stress.

(Burn my roses sorrowless)
My roses loiter (and seem to sing)
(and want)

their last breath to press

The dawn of the vague evening (calls them)

Calls them to dance (to dance,)

Abysmal still they swing
Over
(thro) a tumult of deep trance

What this Fragment shows most clearly is Rosenberg's serious and energetic struggle to find the right words and phrasing for his ideas.

This difficulty of expression is a subject to which Rosenberg returns in several poems, one of the earliest of which is "Even Now your Eyes are Mixed in Mine", a poem already considered under the heading of Love (see page 61). In the same way, "A Question" (noted earlier on page 130) with its concern about appearance and reality, implies a problem for the poet of how he can develop a vehicle sufficiently subtle yet well-defined enough to bring out the interplay between the reality of the physical world and that of the mind.

One poem, entitled "Expression", deals with the problem directly. As one of the poems to earn favourable comment from Bottomley in his first letter to Rosenberg, we are not surprised to find it in Poems (1922). In that edition the present line 12--"And in might" was incorporated into line 11, thus making the ^{third} ~~fourth~~ stanza of the same length as all the others while the new line 11 is equal in metrical length to the third lines of the remaining stanzas. Here the poet's function is to shatter silence, to "bruise the air" (an expression recalling "Bruised are our words" from "Even Now"), his song to be

. . . a blossoming fire

Brown bright by thought . . .

Intangibility (or in Rosenberg's own phrase "something hidden

and felt to be there") cannot be captured in words; an eagle's flight may be limited, the size of the sun can be reduced to a mathematical formula, but what is impossible is

no sense dipt

In the mystery of sense.

The last three lines possibly serve as a comment on Rosenberg's own experience as a communicator--not an easy task, his words are "troubled . . . like smothered fire" and have to force their way through

dense

And smouldering wrong.

Thus by the time of Youth, the artist has a clear-cut moral purpose.

Aspiration

Several of the Earlier Poems contain a figure of or the desire for aspiration, which should cause no surprise to readers who have taken note of the Romantic influence visible in the younger Rosenberg's work. Not all the poems where this element can be detected present a longing for the same objective, as may be seen; nor was aspiration merely the flash of a passing youthful idealism, for in Moses we see embodied Browning's

Ah, but a man's reach should exceed his grasp,

Or what's a heaven for?

and Tel also is motivated by an impulse more lasting than that of mere desire.

This seeking for a goal above the mundane is often presented by Rosenberg through the symbol of stars, as in the earliest appearance of the idea in "The World Rumbles by Me"--a slight poem which was considered on page 89 above. The

aspiration contained in the prayer:

If I stretch my hand, I may clasp a star
is toward artistic success rather than toward happiness in
love, and this is the kind of attainment which is sought
after in most of these poems. "My Days" in the same group
reflects the hope found in Shakespeare's Sonnet 66--that of
a young poet's hope to live in his poetry. The conscious-
ness of following Shakespeare is brought out by the changes
made--presumably on manuscript authority--after the poem's
inclusion in Bottomley's edition: thus "springeth up such"
(line three) was in 1922 "spring up many", while "falleth"
in the seventh line appeared originally as "fall some". One
result of these changes in verb is that their form in lines
three and seven now matches that in the fifth line. Further
echoes of the seventeenth century occur in the final couplet
which does no more than paraphrase Shirley's

. . . Only the actions of the just

Smell sweet, and blossom in their dust.

The poem is finally saved from the vapidness of generaliza-
tion by the intrusion in line five of the identifiable figure
of the sexton to counterbalance the impersonality of "Time".
Here again Rosenberg can be seen working his way through
conventional forms and themes.

This desire for artistic success emerges in other poems
in the 1912 group, to both of which reference has already
been made, "The Cage" and the first version of "The Poet"
(pages 57 and 90-91 respectively). Both share the image of
the body as a prison for the ambitious, restless spirit,
but the former envisages a relationship with a woman as a
means of escape from the "cage of earth"--an attempt at

communication which is thwarted--while the latter expresses the misery and frustration of an "alienated" and constrained artist.

Among the latest of this 1912 group is "Knowledge", which presents a rather unconvincing picture of a Narcissus-like figure gazing at himself in a mirror. Rosenberg was later to dwell (especially in The Amulet and The Unicorn) on how feminine beauty carries within itself the seeds of its own destruction, so here the artist is beset by his own canker; ambition if unfulfilled can dissipate energy, so the defeat of this serpent by his outward confidence will be short-lived. His own self-image may dazzle himself, but to others his plight is clearly visible; he is gnawed at by his feelings of shortcoming, and as his thirst for knowledge (and so for power) is insatiably self-perpetuating, so also is his capacity for "misery". This delusion may extend so far that his idea of artistic success is an illusion, for the success he attributes so knowingly to himself is seen only by others (the public) to be the sham that it is. The second stanza is imagistic in technique--in fact the images are piled on one another so thickly that that of line 10 is only half-expressed:

A lank unresting spectre whose grey gaze, . . .
--but the overall effect of the poem is uninspiring. In attempting to describe the dilemma likely to confront the searcher for truth or knowledge or any other of the great abstractions, in a logical manner, Rosenberg has produced a poem which is lacking in tension and so in animation.

The immediate companion-piece to this poem is "Raphael", still familiar to us from the preceding section. On page 135

attention was drawn to the middle section of twenty-three lines which outlined the artist's ambitions: certainly Rosenberg's Raphael was not lacking in this quality:

And this I know and feel, what I have done

Is but the seed plot of a mightier world.

Raphael's desire (and determination) to excel is tempered only by the recognition that despite whatever success he achieves

Our own creations outlive our decay.

But the assumption that this is an acceptable motive is never questioned: on a teleological view of human nature it should not be.

In "Day" the Poet sets out

. . . To seek what all have sought to find . . .

in an optimistic mood, whereas in the despondency of "Night" he had felt imprisoned like the artist of "The Cage" and "The Poet" (I):

. . . Through dull corporeal bars

We drink in the proud stars.

As with Blake, stars are a symbol for, and object of, aspiration. When the Poet of "Day" asks the tree what it most desires, the reply received--

. . . 'I am what I would be' . . .

--is like the state of Ted Hughes's "Pike" which possesses

. . . A life subdued to its instrument . . .

but the Poet has the desire for immortality, probably artistic rather than personal. His ambition, which runs through the whole poem, is the lofty one of bringing man back again into God's grace: he is a romantic idealist rather than a social reformer. The poem ends obliquely, yet we are left

in doubt as to whether the Poet will follow the advice, offered by all the songs he has heard, on how to build a bridge between earth and God. Presumably, though, we are given a hint about the outcome by the optimism of the last song. Closely linked to "Night and Day" is "Aspiration", which was later reprinted in the Youth pamphlet, but it has already been examined in a preceding section (page 129 above).

The earliest poem of the 1914-1915 group treats aspiration in a different light. In "O Heart, Home of High Purposes" Rosenberg examines a spiritual malaise rather than a social one. The heart and hand (the intuitive and the non-intellectually skilled) aspects of man's nature are criticised for lack of purpose. The poem is a rallying-cry, as stanza two makes clear: the sun has a Blakean function of Experience in besmirching the essential Innocence of the spirit. If, like the following poem, this one was written during Rosenberg's stay in South Africa, then "sunsoiled" may also be a sign of recoiling from the indolent, spiritually smothering, days in the company of wealthy, philistine companions. "Wizard duty" is a curious epithet which on its later reappearance (as "wizard-locked" in "The Mirror" and "wizard vermin" in "Louse Hunting") acquires sinister overtones which are absent here: what it means is "having witching power" (Shorter Oxford English Dictionary. A similar use is found in Binyon's "The Sibyls", which was published in The Cause, of 1917:

Through wizard leaves of whispering laurel feared).
The next two stanzas show us music as a natural part of innocence, the innocence which will

Help us . . . breathe thy breath . . .
and in so doing "thaw our lips of death". It is this radical

spiritual innocence which is so clearly an attribute of God and in return for its protection we should willingly accept its domination: the "feel" of power is presumably that which is asserted through the intuitive heart and the skilled hand. The poem has something of Wordsworth's "Milton!" sonnet about it, being a call to shake off imaginative indolence, to end the present waste of energy and potential; insofar as it touches on aspiration, the desire for betterment is conveyed in generalized rather than in personal terms. But aspiration is as worthy for a social group as it is for an individual.

"Far Away" shares the air of dreaminess noted earlier in connection with "Have We Sailed" and "Wistfully in Pallid Splendour", and it may owe something, as E. O. G. Davies suggests, to the Zohar belief that some ordinary souls are granted information about the future through dreams. The mood with which it opens could be one of aspiration, the poet seeking--God-like--for a place in a type of pre-life limbo which antecedes creation. But, on consideration, the dominant emotion seems to be that of a 'ninetyish escapism.

In one sense "Auguries" relates to this theme for its controlling image is the tree of life which grows, and it grows, despite setbacks, towards heaven: the hope in the final stanza has already received comment. It is a feeling that life can and must improve in quality as humans live through successive crises; not so much a specific ambition to achieve some particular aim as a generalized optimism toward the future. The poem is not searching for a lofty ideal but the humbler desire for happiness in a human relationship is not trivial.

It is antedated by four Fragments, one of which (LI) has already been examined in the preceding section, where the aspiration of the artist to achieve a superhuman vantage-point was shown to invite divine retribution--

. . . the air

Lives with revengeful momentary fires.

Thus artistic ambition may be praiseworthy, but it is also perilous. After the first ten lines this Fragment moves on to examine the instant of inspiration.

The preceding Fragment, LII, (entitled "The Search") offers us a curious Byronic figure (complete with Barbary steed in the desert) whose youthful idealism kindles "idling cold" into a "bridle of flame".

Fragment XXXIII ("Sensual"), which comes later, reverts to the idealism of youth, and its dating of 1914 suggests that these rhyming stanzas may have been destined originally for the first section of Youth. The first two stanzas relate to the eagerness of innocence which produces ambition,

. . . the untravelled ardours leashed in eyes.

The appearance of "pavin ecstasies" in the third line offers an intractable problem of definition. An attempt to link it to "pavane" involves taking its meaning as that of a slow (but not necessarily mournful) dance, rather than in Debussy's sense of "lament": but in any case this is an unusual epithet for "ecstasies". The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary suggests "pavid, fearful, timid". The confidence of youth (stanza two) is deluded by the "Cynic life" which offers reflections instead of reality, and this suggests that withdrawal into oneself may be safer:

. . . Hands beckon but my own wild shadow calls.

Love, truth, beauty and spontaneous joy are all constituents of harmony, which is "The mystic centre of all unity", but it seems as if, in the final incompleting stanza, youth's eagerness is blunted by superficial appearances and he escapes into self-indulgent fantasies about his own capabilities. So we are left with a warning on the danger of over-dependence on sensual impressions: to aspire successfully we need to see beneath external attractiveness to "the mystic centre". The sensual must be counterbalanced by the spiritual.

Fragment XXIX is a striking set of lines which survives in a manuscript version. In the British Museum version, line five has "pictures" deleted in favour of "carvings" while the seventh line appeared as:

. . . One greed God's jealousy to gain . . .
before being emended to its present form. The final line also seems to have been different:

. . . Death watch her hair in vain.

The deleted start of another line follows:

One mood . . .

which resembles, (though only by chance) the ninth line of Fragment X (see pages 81-82). It is difficult to explain the metaphor in this Fragment but the highly-compressed and visual first stanza contains the "grape-green" which appears in line four of the later "God" where it suggests frustration. So the suggestion here is of jealousy--maybe that of some envious female deity. The second stanza shows how these jealous "fantasies" echo experiences in the mind of man: man is a creature of aspiration and will be turned aside from his quest neither by vague thoughts of death nor by the lure of ephemeral beauty. His ambition is for

something more tangible, or less romantic.

Social Concern

In case we had forgotten that Rosenberg is an urban writer so far as his background is concerned, a glance through the early poems will demonstrate that one of the subjects occupying his mind till it was taken up with war was that of the city's effect on man, as well as man's effect on his fellows.

This concern for the quality of life is conveyed very forcibly by two poems of the pre-1912 group, both of which make a strong protest against social injustice--"Dawn behind Night" and "A Ballad of Whitechapel". The former of these is marginally earlier than the latter, and is dated (editorially) 1909. As will be seen the protest here is not totally involved with social discrimination alone, but also with religious prejudice which links it to the two poems of the group which precede it ("Ode to David's Harp" and "Zion"), while its social zeal carries over into "A Ballad of Whitechapel". The very title of the first of these symbolises the advent of a revolution to overthrow the old oppressive order, which Rosenberg was to crystallise seven years later with the publication of Moses. It is possible to see the poem as a more particularised and personal objection than the last sentence suggests, for it may be a critique of the pressure exerted on minority groups in contemporary urban England: Rosenberg very likely was aware of this even if he had no personal experience of it, yet there is no specific reference to anti-Semitic persecution.

The rhetorical quality of the verse emerges if we try reading a few lines aloud. The hexameter lines are not

smooth iambs, but basically anapaestic with some variation.

Thus line five is a conventional anapaest:

Should it die/in the death/that they make,/in the
sil/ence that fol/lows the sób . . .

but two lines, in particular, display the intrusion of an
acretic stress in the third or fourth foot:

In the life/or the death/they dóle ús/from the
rags/and the bónes/of their stóre . . . (line 13)
. . . That will find/ús and free/ús and take/ús where
its/portals are/opened wide (line 16).

This metre demands and expresses effort, and the declamatory
tone is reinforced by alliteration which hammers home the
point:

. . . the thoughts that are prompted by hate
Of the red streaming burden of wrong we have
borne and still bear . . .

Such verse lacks the lyricism of "Ode to David's Harp" or
"Zion", but in the opening stanza especially it catches the
snarl of the oppressed but still scheming rebel. Curiously
enough, the final stanza tails off into a type of optimistic
stoicism:

. . . for the ship hath left the shore,
That will find us and free us and take us where its
portals are opened wide . . .

for the bitter indignation at privilege and wealth has
cooled and moved nearer to acceptance. As a poem, these
lines make up in force for what they lack in subtlety, for
the voice in them is public and political as that of
Swinburne's "Ode on the Proclamation of the French Republic",
but metrically it is much more sophisticated than anything

else Rosenberg wrote at this time.

Its companion-piece, "Ballad of Whitechapel", is set forth in regular metrical form and--as mentioned earlier (page 56)--it deals with social problems in particular rather than general terms. Despite its length and occasional lapses into melodramatic cliché or inanity, it is motivated by the desire to publicise social problems, and its tone is virile notwithstanding numerous archaisms and inversions. Rosenberg's painting of the predicament of the poor may owe something to John Davidson's "Thirty Bob a Week":

But I don't allow it's luck and all a toss;

There's no such thing as being starved and crossed;

It's just the power of some to be a boss,

And the bally power of others to be bossed . . .

and it pays lip-service to the traditional ballad-form by its four-line stanzas and its regular rhyme-scheme, but in every other respect it departs from the norm. The first stanza presents us with the text which the poem will illustrate: it also shows Rosenberg's willingness to turn a commonplace image to his own use--

. . . For grief that burst from out its dark confines

Into strange sunlit bliss.

Stanzas two, three and four were to be echoed by the lines in the later "Fleet Street":

The stony buildings blindly stare

Unconscious of the crime within,

While man returns his fellow's glare

The secrets of his soul to win . . .

and also by lines 46-57 of "Night": the city is a hell on earth, for its materialism has already laid it under the

divine curse. The "doom the Lord had scrawled" differs from that at Belshazzar's feast insofar as it merely confirms a sentence already passed:

' . . . here is naught

Save love His anger slew.'

The narrative proper begins with the sixth stanza, wherein the speaker meets "A girl in garments rent" who is "forgot of God"; this stanza contains the self-conscious archaism of lines 22-23:

. . . Lost in promiscuous bewilderment,

Which to my mazed soul was wonder-food . . .

Despite her pitiable state the girl's eyes reveal a thirst for spiritual nourishment:

. . . the unsmirched corner of a jewel

Where else foul blemish lies . . .

was to reappear long after as Moses' unflattering reference to Abinoah:

. . . a toad

Shifting his belly, showed a diamond

Where he had lain.

The speaker is attracted by her essential innocence in this wilderness, and in stanzas 10 and 11 she recounts her Dickensian-pathetic sufferings that have put her on to the streets:

She told me how

The shadow of black death had newly come

And touched her father, mother, even now

Grim-hovering in her home,

Where fevered lay
Her wasting brother in a cold bleak room,
Which theirs would be no longer than a day--
And then--the streets and doom.

According to Bottomley and Harding, these two stanzas were deleted by Rosenberg, presumably because he felt them to be uncomfortably close to the sentimentalism of "Christmas Day in the Workhouse" (and yet these lines are retained in 1922 edition and subsequent editions). The reason for these cancelled stanzas being retained in the published text is provided by the hitherto unpublished letter referred to in the final section of this chapter (see page 190 below).

Rosenberg's instinct here was accurate, for they add only crude pathos and the story suffers nothing by their excision. Her story has its effect on the speaker, who is spiritually stirred:

Then grief gave place

To a strange pulsing rapture as she spoke . . .

and in these two stanzas (13 and 14) he realises the necessity to accept life's evil, even to turn it into a kind of joy (recalling the opening stanza), which will enable the sufferer to endure what else life may bring. The next three stanzas are an enervated rhapsody to spiritual love as the origin of strength under stress which rises to the feeble climax of

Love--love--O! tremulous name.

The closing stanza merely recapitulates the poem's opening, but now the speaker has lived through his belief.

For all its deficiencies the poem is a sincere plea for men to show compassion and an outburst of idealistic anger

at social injustice and inflexibility; yet notwithstanding this, it is also the first of Rosenberg's poems to express a personal emotion rather than a generalized one. Although we may consider it as a reflection of Rosenberg's own experience of urban life, the poem's social content once more relates it to a future line of development in Moses, The Amulet and The Unicorn. Rosenberg deals, as always, in concrete terms, and the spiritual intensity of his concern is both deeply felt and clearly expressed.

In the following group of poems, "Fleet Street" bears a close resemblance to the one just considered. In its social comment on the inhumanity of the city it relates closely to it. The poem opens with a straightforward pictorial description and the "shrieking vortex" is a vivid metaphor which at the time of composition did not have the significance it was to acquire by 1914 (Blast first appeared in June of that year). The volume of city noise reacts on the speaker in the same way that the daffodils did on Wordsworth for it

. . . Wakes all the melody of life.

In the final stanza Rosenberg's economy of description is noteworthy: man's inhumanity to man is reflected by the impersonal "stare" of "stony buildings". The lack of communication between men leads to a cheapening of the individual life, whose ending goes unnoticed. Despite the regularity of organization--and rhyme was to become a restriction to Rosenberg--the poem acquires considerable impact from the successful combination of ideas with expression. At a later stage in his development this poem would probably have been more condensed and imagistic: as it is, the second stanza is rambling when compared to the sharp etchings

of stanzas one and three.

"Night and Day", as has already been indicated, contains passages critical of the city:

Sudden the night blazed open at my feet.

Like splintered crystal tangled with gold dust

Blared on my ear and eye the populous street.

As a result of this human depravity "God gives no June": the picture is that of "The Ballad of Whitechapel". The same point of view emerges in the "Day" section, but it is confined to a few lines, such as lines 47-49:

And the dun monstrous buildings be a book

To read the malediction of lucre

That spreads a shade and shelter for a plague . . .

and the description of a tavern--lines which were reprinted in the Youth pamphlet and again in Poems of 1922 where they were inappropriately entitled "In the Workshop":

Dim-watery-lights, gleaming on gibbering faces,

Faces speechful, barren of soul and sordid.

Huddled and chewing a jest, lewd and gabbled

insidious.

Laughter born of its dung, flashes and floods

like sunlight (~~line 80~~)

Filling the room with a sense of a soul lethargic

and kindly, .

Touches my soul with a pathos, a hint of a wide

desolation (lines 77-82).

Such brazen tumult has nothing natural about it, and the grotesque and onomatopaeic vigour of line 80 displays the Poet's distaste for such scenes and such half-men, although he can feel some sorrow for them. The solution which the

Poet finds is, predictably, to communicate with God through beauty and nature.

The latest of the poems on this theme, "In Piccadilly" (published in Youth) turns to a closer examination of the human nature which is spawned by the materialistic and crowded metropolis. The tone of it is bitter, as befits its place in "The Cynic's Lamp"⁷ section of the pamphlet; it is particularly scornful of the materialistic as well as the sensual element of urban street-life. The "lamp-lit faces", echoing lines 77-79 of "Day", are those of depravity, whose idea of beauty is electric street-lighting rather than stars. Such mean spirits are born from "wet pavement's slime" and blossom into lust, consequently they lack feelings more elevated than those of sensual appetites. In Poems, the eighth line began

Which dew-time . . .

instead of the present:

Dew, Time . . .

The earlier version is clearer in sense, but the appositional phrasing of subsequent editions is both more economical and metrically smoother. We are left with the implication that only by dismissing sensual values such as these can the spirit be released to reach a worthier level of existence. The pity which we could have expected from a more sentimental artist than Rosenberg is transformed into anger and cynicism that such conditions are allowed to continue.

⁷ The planned arrangement of Youth was to be in three sections: "Faith and Fear", "The Cynic's Lamp" and "Sunfire" (see Letter in CW, page 292).

Fragment XLVII fleetingly strikes the same note by presenting two contrasted tableaux--one of a woman weeping with no shelter to go to, while harlots revel in a well-built stone house. Since this poem is set at night, these two evils may be attributed to its influence, but its dating of 1914 may indicate that Rosenberg was musing here about the detrimental effects of war on a civilian population.

Versions of Poems

It will have emerged from the preceding pages that certain poems exist in more than one version. This is due to the accident of Rosenberg's death, as Bottomley and Harding make clear in their Introduction (CW, page xiv; CP, page 2):

In including all the existing material the editors recognise that they are publishing much which Rosenberg would have destroyed or recast had he lived.

Apart from the personal tragedy, this accident is in one narrow way a help to the reader for it enables us to see easily the developments and shifts in Rosenberg's thought and techniques: had he lived, Rosenberg might have adopted Graves's practice of ruthlessly excising his earlier work thus effectively covering his tracks.

Nearly all of these alternative versions have been examined--"Beauty" (I) and (II) (pages 53-54); "Heart's First Word" (I) and (II) (pages 64-65); "My¹ Soul is Robbed" (I) and (II) (pages 67-70); "The Poet" (I) and (II) (pages 90-91); "Wedded" (I) and (II) (pages 73-74). Reworkings of the same or related themes under different titles have also been noted, as with numerous Fragments, with "O, Be These Men and Women" and "O! In a World of Men and Women", or with "Wistfully in Pallid Splendour" and "Have We Sailed and Have We Wandered". This listing is not exhaustive.

The one notable example yet to be considered is the three versions of "Twilight". The earliest of them appears in the 1912 group and shows a kinship with lines 251-269 of "Day":

Twilight's wide eyes are mystical
With some far off knowledge,
Secret is the mouth of her,
And secret her eyes.

Lo! she braideth her hair
Of dim soft purple and thread of satin.
Lo! she flasheth her hand--
Her hand of pearl and silver in shadow.
Slowly she braideth her hair
Over her glimmering eyes,
Floating her ambient robes
Over the trees and the skies,
Over the wind-footing grass.
Softly she braideth her hair
With shadow deeper than thought.

To make her comely for night?
To make her meet for the night?
Slowly she heaveth her breast,

For the night to lie there and rest?

Like the lines just quoted the poem is lyrical and harmonious, making effective use of alliteration in its first line to evoke murmuring waters. Despite--or maybe because of it--its word-music, the poem lacks direction; we are not altogether clear about what is being examined here. The first stanza suggests that in the half-light of dusk our physical senses are sharpened, but the dying of light is also ominous.

This duality of hope and fear is echoed in "Night and Day" and patently symbolized in the contrast of light with dark: the ambiguity of which is dominant or more preferable is a quality of twilight itself, and its effect on the individual depends on that of the individual.

The two succeeding versions have been considered earlier, under the heading of "Beauty", since that is their predominant theme (see page⁴³ above). Version (II) dwells on the ephemerality of beauty which fades like day or like darkness; this leads Rosenberg on to assert the existence of some Platonic Form of beauty which the earth reflects only imperfectly and transiently. Version (III) opens with the alliterative initial image of draft (I), and transfers the allure of beauty to the darkness which twilight presages, but of whose beauty it has only a small share. These three versions do illustrate how Rosenberg refines on and enriches an initial sense-perception into a rather romantic personification.

"Nocturne", in the 1912 group, is a smooth and melodious study in colour and sound. Dusk is here a peaceful time, and the concreteness of the opening line reflects the painter's eye:

Day, like a flower of gold fades on its crimson bed
The poem's diction is late-Romantic, as also is its preoccupation with colours like gold and crimson. Rosenberg makes skilful use of soothing alliteration in the last four lines coupling it with long, smooth syllables:

. . . Shimmering winds of heaven fall gently and
mysterious hands caress

Our wan brows with cooling rapture of the
delicate starlight . . .

Undramatic but momentarily satisfying, the poem successfully mingles sight and sound with its informing idea: yet it is cast in a dead convention. For a poet who was to develop such a marked individuality in both subject and technique, it may surprise the reader that Rosenberg spent so long working through the styles of earlier decades. But in a period which was dominated by no style or writer (its foremost poet, Hardy, being inimitable to a young poet like Rosenberg), this was the only way to learn, for Rosenberg lacked--till 1914 at the earliest--any consistent practical guide. This was to be Edward Marsh, to whom he had been introduced by the painter Mark Gertler at the Café Royal on 10th November, 1913 and whom he subsequently visited at Gray's Inn in the following May (Hassall: Edward Marsh--a Biography, pages 252 and 279).

As a poetic subject, the ambivalence of twilight and the allure of darkness occupied Rosenberg on several occasions, as a glance at the Fragments will demonstrate. Fragment XXX, for example, which consists merely of three unrhymed pentameters, has a Shelleyan kind of intensity. As in "Night" and in "Twilight" (III), darkness is personified as a fertile woman who inspires the artist--a figure we can now see as a variant on Graves's White Goddess. This figure nourishes the stars (for they are visible only in the dark): the stars, which are consistently symbols in Rosenberg for aspiration, having received their share of "giant love" burn steadily while the poet, hungering for such nourishment, blazes fitfully with frustration.

Fragment VII, entitled "Evening" and dated 1915, suggests the hypnotic power of dusk over roses which do not at once

close up; this is, moreover, a time of vivid colours-- emerald, sunset and heliotrope. The second stanza is identical with Koelue's song from Moses (lines 199-204), and it resembles the second stanzas of both Fragments IX and VII (which were considered under the heading of "The Role of the Artist", see above, page 142) which are, like it, written in rhyming trimeters. It seems as if the transfer from light to dark has a profound psychological influence for Rosenberg, and the appearance of "abysmal" in all these Fragments suggests a sinister force emerging from the underworld at this time. Another element common to all three versions of the second stanza is the musical alliteration sustained on so many letters--v, l, c, m, s, and t--the first two of which are reminiscent of Poe's "The viol, violet and the vine."

Two versions of this Fragment are in the British Museum: the first stanzas of one shows Rosenberg's "rough working" of images to be incorporated (British Museum Folio page 30). The words in brackets in the fifth and seventh lines indicate their deletion by Rosenberg: the brackets in the second line are the poet's own.

My roses loiter, lips to press
(Fallen from sky chasms of sunset stress,)
Of emerald winds, and heliotrope--
Displacing hands that grope.
 vague
The / viols of (vague) evening
Call all the flower clans
 To
(From) some abysmal swinging
And tumult of deep trance

The second has minor punctuation variants and also two lines following the printed final line, which are then deleted:

. . . And the skies relentless
Of an iron petal scentless,
That brooding like a shadow
Weighs down the sunless meadow.

In this use of "iron" Rosenberg has been once again preceded by Swinburne in "A Year's Burden":

From shores laid waste across an iron sea . . .

Number XL presents, in its first four lines, an overwhelming sense of decay and destruction. The burning of a letter represents in a sense the destruction of the mind that produced it: neglected and left exposed, the writing will fade equally well. Life is like a letter, doomed to destruction by Love.

Fragment XXXVII is the most purely Imagistic of Rosenberg's verses and it deserves to be quoted in full:

Green thoughts are
Ice block on a barrow
Gleaming in July.
A little boy with bare feet
And jewels at his nose stands by.

It is a vividly-evoked but static memory of a scene which Rosenberg may have recalled from his time in South Africa. Since July is not summer there, this memory may have been triggered off by seeing an ice-cart in London's streets during the summer (as was that of W. W. Gibson). The "Green thoughts" capture the sheen of the ice at the same time as they echo Marvell's "Green thought in a green shade". Another reason for suspecting these lines' South African origin is offered by the final line, for the small boy is most likely an Indian wearing a caste-mark.

There is a similarity of theme between Fragments XXIV and XXI. The former is noteworthy for the strength of its kinetic verbs--"prowls", "dives", "strains"--for the wind is a predatory "monster". Once again we find Swinburne has already made use of this unfamiliar form "writhen" in line 166 of his "The Two Dreams":

. . . Soft fruit and writhen spray and blossom
bleached . . .

The second stanza of tetrameters is incomplete, but its smooth soft epithets:

Soft, forward, inarticulate, . . .
well convey the caressing of lighter winds. This contrast is effective, even if a little contrived, and Fragment XXI is a more successful whole. It is a close rendering of immediate perception, with the neat image of leaves as chain-mail: the smooth assurance and alliteration of the third line:

The shadows slide from leaf to leaf, . . .
contrasts well with the unexpectedly harsh, brittle rustlings of lines 4-6:

And, sudden and brief,
Resounds like an avalanche
The throats of these things frail.

Once more the affinity with Imagism is obvious.

Fragment XX is a failure--despite an honest attempt--to portray the vivid conflict of sensations in a man under extreme emotional stress. While his brain is burning his heart is assailed by a predatory cold spirit. The closing symbol of love/ red/ blood is also to be found in Oscar Wilde's Ballad of Reading Gaol, although the three elements

run through the poem without being all included within a single stanza.

The epigrammatical snippet (III) about the music of eternal life which will be heard only by Death--"the eternal taciturn"--is concise and rare in its generalization for lines written after 1915, while the latest Fragment of all (I) will be related in due course to The Unicorn, whence it derives.

The five remaining poems in the pre-1912 group include "A Ballad of Time, Life and Memory", an elaborate but competent allegorical picture which is rescued from the totally commonplace by the occasional riddling phrase, such as:

And all she has and all she knows is his;

But not all his for her.

In form it is deliberately unrhymed, and though its stanza-form appears to be regular Rosenberg handles it with such freedom that the occasional rhyme is accompanied by occasional assonance and the lengths of line in each stanza are carefully unmatched. In stanzas three, four and five the Keatsian language is handled with restraint and discretion.

A youthful preoccupation with death, already noted (see page 89) in "The World Rumbles by Me", links two poems which accompany it in this group. "Death", cast in fourteen iambic pentameters, is derivative in both theme and treatment, and it shares its rhyme-scheme with the 1911 tribute to Ruth Lowy's parents. The tone of youthful 'ninetyish pessimism which pervades the poem is set by the first line--the mingling of love with Death recalling the end of Romeo and Juliet--and by the end of the first stanza this has crystallised in a Blakean worm / bloom image. Echoes of Keats

("pale mouth", "Lethe") and an affinity with Owen lead in the sestet to the conclusion that only through the annihilation of Self ("Outside of strife") can spiritual reality be achieved. In "The Dead Past" death is metaphorical, being that of the past. Time has the effect of transforming the Self:

. . . You, the I that was then and a moment hath changed
into you. . .

so that the simple pleasures of youth are yearned for. But Rosenberg's keenness for paradox can lead the reader into difficulties:

. . . Saying 'The past is the future and you and the
future are we'?

When restated, the Heraclitean concept of flux emerges clearly--the future results from combining past with present while the present and future combine to create the past. The smoothness of the hexameters, coupled with a preponderance of short words, recalls one of Swinburne's predilections.

"In the Heart of the Forest" is a tone-poem metrically similar to Hiawatha, an atmospheric album-piece which piles up epithets--"shuddering", "moaning", "sobbing"--to create emotional atmosphere at the expense of syntax in the opening stanza. Polite celebration is the note of "To Mr. and Mrs. Lowy, on their Silver Wedding", where we find the cliché of love defeating time--but then this is not the occasion for poetic fireworks.

The earliest poems under the 1912 heading are negligible. "Birthday Song" is exactly what its title suggests, while "The Present" starts promisingly with the image of time present as a sea, before Rosenberg loses control of his ideas

in the second stanza. The image for eternity:

. . . The streams-to-be flow from the shadowland

Of rootless flowers no earthly breeze has fanned, . . .
is a successful one, but near the end of the poem the Present
is somehow separated from Time (not specifically Time Past,
which is capable of being isolated because it is static).
Had Rosenberg thought through these lines more carefully
such an ambiguity of pronouns could have been avoided.

Three unrhymed but strongly rhythmical stanzas express
an intense longing for life and love in "Bacchanal", where
the traditional lyric form is strongly flavoured by a
Swinburnian eroticism. The tone of the opening lines, how-
ever, more nearly resembles Browning's

How good is man's life, the mere living. ("Saul")
In stanza two the slightly hollow rhetoric of the Epicurean
boast:

. . . We would burn Time in that fire,
We would drown care in that wine,
And with music and with laughter
We would scare black death away . . .

nevertheless dwells on one of Rosenberg's recurrent concerns
--that we should treasure moments of radical, spiritual
experience which afford moments of escape from our physical
clay. One reappearance of the idea occurs as late as the
first draft of The Unicorn,⁸ Fragment (IB), lines 3-4:

Man yearns and woman yearns and yearning is
Beauty and music, faith, and hope and dreams . . .

⁸ The references to various Fragments of The Unicorn are
explained at the opening of the following chapter (page 193).

In Night and Day there is included a verse tribute to his friend and mentor, J. H. Amschewitz, which is sincere in tone though ornate in expression. This quality is generally ascribable to the poems remaining undiscussed in the 1913 group, though the earliest of them, "As a Besieged City", is the least decorated. In its two stanzas the lines rhyme regularly, but are of uneven length, and they recapture the tension of expectancy such as surrounds the imminent birth of a child, a moment of joy; this is contrasted with the moment of fear, that of awaiting reinforcements in a besieged city. The poem is a simple illustration of moods.

"Glory of Hueless Skies" functions on the balance of light and dark as symbols for good and evil. This symbolism is not the Blakean reversal of normal values, for night and the stars are life-denying--"sick and white". The opening image invokes another technique familiar in Rosenberg, that of expressing some spiritual reality by mingling physical sense-reactions, hence "the lute of our eyes". A good later example of this occurs at line 45 of "Daughters of War":

. . . Whose new hearing drank the sound . . .

The onset of light is as violent as the uprooting of shadowing trees from the earth's surface: thus inertia is replaced by activity, but not all action is necessarily creative and there is a struggle in stanza four between the impulses of good and evil. Both forces draw nourishment from the serving-up of "the broad day's feast", hence light is (by implication) not the wholly unmitigated good it is assumed to be--an idea reinforced by referring back to lines seven and eight which describe how stars die in the dawn:

. . . Like genius in a rabble

The obscure mars their might.

The poem thus broadly follows the traditional equation of day and night while acknowledging that to nourish the good is also to allow evil freedom to flourish, a characteristic touch of Rosenberg's interest in ambivalence.

After such serious material, "Spring" and "On a Lady Singing" are frivolous by comparison. They both (as do "Song" and "As a Sword in the Sun--") cluster round the central image of a woman singing. In the former poem the lady is complimented by the neat and graceful comparison with Persephone, while in the latter her singing in praise of the lark's song is more beautiful than the bird's voice: by commanding a lesser musician, she earns herself more praise. This elaborate and formal compliment virtually sinks beneath its own decorativeness in lines 5-6:

. . . Shrined in her gracious glory-giving ways

From sceptred hands of starred humility-- . . .

The relevance of such verses to a study of Rosenberg is that they show us how difficult he found it to write, with the correct degree of facility and urbanity, on subjects which did not engage his mind at a deeper level.

One such serious concern was with the quality of evil, which recurs in the earliest of the 1914-15 group, "At Night". It is a much-quarried poem, for lines one and 19-20 reappear verbatim as lines 149-151 of The Amulet:

There is a crazed shadow from no golden body

That poisons at the core

What smiles may stray . . .

while lines 7-8 are compressed into line 103 of The Unicorn:

. . . My house my blood all lean to its weird flight.

In "Chagrin", lines 21-22 resemble lines 13-14 of this poem:

. . . We ride, we ride, before the morning
The secret roots of the sun to tread, . . .
("Chagrin")

Pale horses ride before the morning
The secret roots of the sun to tread, . . .
("At Night")

The reason why this poem is the working-ground for these later lines (it precedes all other works mentioned for comparison, since it is dated 1914) is because at this period of his life Rosenberg was much concerned with just this ambivalent quality of evil.

At first sight the poem appears to be a development from Macbeth's "Night's black agents to their preys do rouse", although the evil in the first stanza is a shadow not caused by the sun. Its origins, therefore, are spiritual rather than physical, even though this evil manifests itself for Rosenberg in specifically concrete images:

Crazed shadow, from no golden body
That I can see, embraces me warm;
All is purple and closed
Round by night's arm.

The oxymoron of "dark-lit" (line five) is continued in the following line by "shadows white", and this juxtaposition of light and dark can be read in two ways. A 'naturalistic' explanation might posit that the shadows are normally invisible for they occur at night, but they are silvered by moonlight and so seem to be "star-amorous". The less immediate possibility is more likely, however, which is that the shadows at night, not being caused by the sun, reverse the normal connotations of "shadow", thus black has to become

white to differentiate it from physical darkness. Evidence of the British Museum manuscript indicates that Rosenberg fully intended to link "shadows" with "white", though the typescript version by adding a final s suggests an identity of reference between "shadows white" and what appears as "crazed shadows". In this event, both phrases probably stand for dreams, since the whole poem has a nightmare visionary quality reminiscent of Blake. This Blakean atmosphere is intensified by the "Poison-Tree" image in lines 10-11, where the sun is hostile to "star-amorous things" (which in turn could be either sinister or merely beautiful). The temptation to view the sun in stanza three as a male sexual symbol (and therefore "the secret roots of the sun" in stanza four as referring to the phallus) needs to be substantiated by other allusions to nightly sexual frustration before it deserves much consideration: but it is certainly true that many of Rosenberg's images do carry Freudian connotations, whether or not Rosenberg was conscious of them. In this poem, the interpretation of the third and fourth stanzas as a rendering of sexual guilt may seem momentarily apposite, but the context of the remainder does not justify such a reading--unless we are to regard the poem as a list of the different evil influences which are cloaked by night.

"Thrill" (line 12)--corrected in the manuscript from "trill"--has to be a finite verb rather than a noun. In the two closing stanzas there is a vivid evocation of the powers of evil on the move just before the approach of dawn, all the more suggestive because this evil remains undefined. There is a coincidental echo of Yeats in Rosenberg's "pale horses", for Yeats's violent, mysterious horsemen who appear in the

There is also a draft for "Girl's Song" which is here entitled "The Moon" and which varies little from the printed version.

The "burning emerald" of the grass at daybreak has an affinity with Eliot's "depraved May". The later appearance (in The Amulet, lines 150-151) of the last two lines suggests marital jealousy, but here the reference is limited to the suspicion which misinterprets innocent, insignificant gestures.

"Dawn", which bears the same date as "At Night" (1914), makes the greatest possible contrast with it. Extremely 'poetical' in style (in the Victorian sense) its rhyme, rhythm and stanza-length are all regular, while its unexceptionable subject is that of the twofold function of dawn--an awakening, but also the death of "the old pale glory". Notes to the Complete Works show that an earlier version of this poem had a different second stanza:

And then as sleep lies down to sleep
And all her dreams lie somewhere dead,
The iron shepherd leads his sheep
To the pasture^{perched} whose green is shed,
Still, O frail dawn, still in your hair,
And your cold eyes, and sad sweet lips,
The ghosts of all the dreams are there,
To fade like passing ships.

Dawn kills sleep as also the dreamlike state which exists immediately after waking. In the opening stanza the diction is delicate, enervated in the 'ninetyish manner, where the speaker is either addressing the girl who wakes in his bed in the morning, or musing on the personification of dawn. Dawn

brings with it a loss of innocence ("rose") and so regret, and this mood is similarly treated by Tennyson in lines 52-60 of his "Tithonus":

I used to watch--if I be he that watch'd--
The lucid outline forming round thee; saw
The dim curls kindle into sunny rings;
Changed with thy mystic change, and felt my blood
Glow with the glow that slowly crimson'd all
Thy presence and thy portals, while I lay,
Mouth, forehead, eyelids, growing dewy-warm
With kisses balmier than half-opening buds
Of April, and could hear the lips that kiss'd . . .

Both versions of stanza two open with the same pair of lines in which the girl appears as goddess of Sleep who falls so deeply asleep at the onset of dawn that her dreams die. Rosenberg's expression may owe something to lines 11-12 of Swinburne's "Neap-Tide":

The world draws back, and the world's light wanes,
As a dream lies down and is dead . . .

The version not printed as the text of the Complete Works then moves on to metaphors of frustration and barrenness, underlining the point that dawn brings the death of the sweet pleasures of night; that she regretfully but decisively banishes such dreams--for her "cold eyes" and "sad [if] sweet lips" suggest a graceful remorselessness. The later published draft is less lineal in its development towards the same conclusion. Such obliquity as this text possesses is conferred by the remarkable compression of lines 10-11 whose richness of suggestion can only be approached by some sort of paraphrase: day is "naked", unashamed and opposed to mystery,

and its light so exposes everything that it fills all the crannies on the earth's surface, almost as if dawn had been digging to unearth hidden light in the same way that men dig for gold (a mercenary substitute). The spirit of dawn is in turn superseded by broad day in a manner similar to that in which it had put night to flight; with the departure of both sleep and dreams (in their "ships") the speaker is left comfortless. This second stanza is musically and pictorially very successful, although the apparent unrelatedness of "Your" (in line 13) and "mid glimmering lips" (line 14) mars its coherence. Despite this, the poem evokes an identifiable mood.

"Past Days are Hieroglyphs" derives from two lines of the earlier poem, "Auguries":

Days that are scrawled hieroglyphs

On thunder-stricken barks,

First our souls have plucked the fruit.

In its regularly-rhymed stanzas, each with a short final line, the days of the past are seen as emblems, scored into the scarred tree of memory by experience: so scarred, in fact, is the tree that the earlier ideals--"That I read as of old and whole"--ideals which he nourished with his soul, will be scarcely discernible beneath the hieroglyphic ravages of Time. The poem's interest lies more in the development of the opening metaphor than in the originality of the basic idea.

That nostalgic 1890s figure of the blind searcher after some inaccessible perfection reappears in "Who Loses the Hour of the Wind?", possibly transferred from the preceding year's "Beauty" (I). The soul ever seeks some contact with

a supra-human power, yet it is often deluded by dreams. The final stanza may represent the artist's predicament: his words will survive the decay of their source, the brain; the fruit of such "blown" blossom grows not for our benefit but for that of others (later, presumably). The songs he leaves will tell of his struggle to achieve effective communication; there is only a tenuous link between each of the three stanzas, for each of them dwells on blindness or muteness.

The last poem in the group, "Significance", seems as if it might bear some relation to "Past Days" but the resemblance is superficial. In appearance, this poem is deceptively regular in form, but it is very congested and possesses no organic unity nor logical development. The opening stanza:

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

is a striking example of Rosenberg's coining of memorable images, yet their level of reference remains unclear: the image of the animal hooked on the cat's claws does not lead into the following stanzas. Instead, Rosenberg offers us the image of the individual on a Graeco-Roman boat (with its "two tapering points" of prow and stern) caught between the elemental Scylla and Charybdis. The third stanza suggests that our interpretation of phenomena cannot be decisive and unambivalent, for our senses do not present the same picture of the world as one another. Lines 11 and 12 defy easy interpretation:

. . . All twisted things continue to our clay

Like added limbs and hair dispreaded over-much.

--maybe Rosenberg is saying that nothing in life is simple, but "twisted", and these complexities are to life what additional limbs or improbably disordered hair would be to a picture.

One uncollected fragment in the British Museum contains the germinating ideas for this stanza, the words in brackets being deleted by Rosenberg:

Surprise that stops sharp breath
And things to touch
(That hold) a shape quite other to the eye
Giving
Form that refutes all sway chaos that coincides
Freedom manacled to passion overmuch
Chaos that coincides form that refutes all sway
Shapes to the eye quite other to the touch
All twisted things continue to our clay
Like other limbs and hair ^{dispreaded} loosened overmuch

(Folio page 34)

(The text of these lines was first published in Scrutiny of March 1935). We can plainly see how lines three and seven of the manuscript emerge as line ten of the poem, in the same way that lines six and 8-9 of the pencil draft are respectively lines nine and 11-12 of the poem, while draft lines 4-6 ^{and} are rearrangements of one another. Nonetheless, Rosenberg's attempts to find the right words for his idea do not elucidate that idea very much.

The closing stanza recalls the perils of the first two, and reminds us how easy it is to relax our perceptiveness

till the next stimulus is likely to occur. These "desert hours", however, do present us with opportunities which we are usually not alert enough to notice. The ending of the poem looks forward to "First Fruit" (to be published with Moses in 1916) which concludes with frustration at missed chances, but there is at least hope that this mistake can be avoided.

This attempt at a general paraphrase brings out the difficulty of establishing any expectation as to where the poem is likely to lead us: individual images and ideas do not fit into any cohering pattern of poetic thought.

At this point the reader has met all of Rosenberg's unpublished work and this should make clear the progress of his development. In the unpublished poems we can see more clearly than from the printed ones evidence of how Rosenberg moved through earlier conventions, working out his own style and ideas by experimenting with then abandoning different forms. By the time that we have reached the last of the 1914-1915 group we are beginning to detect a distinctive poetic voice, to note signs of achievement which only underline the loss to poetry of that voice in 1918. With only a handful of poems from Youth (and two uncollected pieces) left to consider we can appreciate the complex but satisfying pattern of expression and symbolism, the emergence of an integrity and intensity in his sometimes esoteric imagery which has purged the obscuring rhetoric of his earlier poems.

Those poems still unexamined from Youth do not live up to this high level of originality and experiment for they were pieces which Rosenberg presented to a largely unresponsive public. Thus they lack the intense individuality, the

complexities of thought and language which have just been considered in "Significance". The same is true of the two as yet uncollected poems which were reproduced in an Appendix to Davies's unpublished thesis on Rosenberg. They were written in Rosenberg's hand at the end of Michael Sherbrooke's copy of Night and Day which is now in the Library of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem; copies were obtained from there by Professor J. Isaacs and the versions which follow are transcripts. A clue about their dating is offered by one reference to Michael Sherbrooke in a letter Rosenberg wrote, towards the close of 1912, to Mrs. Cohen, which recalls uncharacteristically a moment of depression:

Quarreling is an unnecessary waste of energy, and the reason I broke with Mr Sherbrooke was to prevent quarrelling.

It was only when Mr Sherbrookes goodness became unendurable that I broke with him. When I was at Hampstead I worked all day and walked about in the rain all the evening until I was wet through and tired out--that was the only amusement I got (CW, page 337).

To Michael Sherbrooke on hearing
his recitation of "The Raven"

O! Keen magnificent pangs, luxurious opulent doom,
The exquisite tortures of death, felt, seen from
the fulness of life,
A harrowing soul despair wrought out of a jewelled
gloom,
My overcharged heart ^{can} endure not this pinnacled
orient strife.

O master--take thought of our weakness, be not like
God in His might;
He may forget--He is God, but why should you play
with our hearts?
Lift them to ecstasy's sunblaze, steep them in tear-
dripping night.

One small emendation which the text needs is the hyphenating of "soul despair" in the third line. The exotic decadent language of these lines is strongly reminiscent of Poe himself, and in fact Rosenberg's mixture of trochaic and dactylic feet is close to the trochaic octameters of "The Raven". The other poem shows Rosenberg reacting under another strong influence, that of Blake whose presence is detectable in "the cloud and the clod" of the final line:

Dust calleth to Dust

A little dust whispered--a little grey dust,
As it whirled round my knees in the arms of the wind,
"O wind lift me higher, sweet wind, lift me higher,
To see thro' his eyes to the vast of his mind.

Then I soon heard it murmur--'O brother, dear brother
How long must you guard that fierce temple of God?
So fixt to the earth and a foe to the wind--
O haste and with me kiss the cloud and the clod".

The voice of death, persuading the body to surrender its guardianship of the soul, speaks in the voice of a tired Blake: neither the choice of words, nor the slightly mechanical rhythm, nor the mood of resignation are typical of Rosenberg, even in his earlier period.

Of the remaining poems from Youth "None have Seen the Lord of the House", like the following "A Girl's Thoughts" was intended by Rosenberg to form part of the "Faith and Fear" section of his projected Youth. Accordingly, both aspire towards some level of attainment. In the former poem the figure of Night hiding from her lord the Sultan is an emblem of the human soul hiding from its God: day in the second stanza is also symbolic of eternity which will vanquish death

as day does night. The underlying metaphor of the poem is a simple one, but the language is decorated with archaic forms, such as "nesteth", "resteth", "Thee" and this gives the traditional paradox a different look. The second poem offers a delicate intuition about a girl's fears for the future. Frederick Grubb (in A Vision of Reality) helpfully analyzes the poem's hingeing on tension between "this quiet hour" of contemplation and the development of her instinctual "need, whose hauntings terrorize". Fear and pride are mingled as she contemplates life's "primeval elements" which she cannot long escape by taking refuge in her "maiden ways".

"April Dawn" was intended by Rosenberg to fit into the final "Change and Sunfire" section of his plan, whose poems were to show how "life itself becomes transfigured through Imagination, that is, real intimacy.--love" (CW, page 293). Bottomley found this poem to be "first rate" in his letter of 4th July, 1916 to Rosenberg, and it is very successful in suggesting a mood of anticipation and mystery. Springtime dawn has the significance of divine creative power, hence the paradox of the opening line:

Pale light hid in light . . .

which was noted on page 68 above. Dreams, as in "Who Loses the Hour of the Wind?" are misleading, for they can transform winter into summer (whether physically or spiritually)--just as natural Spring itself does. The importance of such a Spring-like moment lies beneath its appearance--it is a time for heeding "the spirit's song" (see page 41 above).

Unlike the other three poems from this pamphlet "The Cloister" is unrhymed, though it resembles them in metrical regularity. The rejection of the world which the poem seems

to advocate is not presented very convincingly. The sea-metaphors in the first two lines:

Our eyes no longer sail the tidal streets,

Nor harbour where the hours like petals float . . .
recall the references to crowds in the earlier "Ballad of Whitechapel":

. . . Above the monstrous mass that seethed and flowed . . .
and a woman's attractiveness is freshly caught in

. . . thin walls

Of woman's eyes . . .

Worldly experience, or so the second stanza claims, fertilizes the growth of our souls so that they produce blossoms for God. In its context of the pamphlet this poem, featuring God and his dutiful angels, makes a marked contrast to the controlled irreverence of "God Made Blind". Rosenberg is not, however, defending a withdrawal from the world so much as finding some ulterior significance in the trivialities of urban life. "The Cloister" is a place for contemplation, not for refuge from life, as Rosenberg had made clear in "The Nun", from Earlier Poems 1912. In his life, too, Rosenberg maintained this same consistency towards the harshness of experience.

Papers in the possession of the late Lady Gollancz have recently come to light and their interest lies in the typescripts of one hitherto unpublished poem and of two prose paragraphs, as well as four holograph letters to Ruth Lowy, three dating from about 1912 and written in ink, while the fourth is in pencil from France and can be dated by its reference to Bottomley's letter of July 1916 as being written some time after that date.

The unpublished poem is called "The Garden of Joy", and,

as the last six lines will show, the verse is mannered, showing traces of Swinburne, but despite this it has a few graceful touches:

They seem forever wondering--listening
Unto some tale of marvel, music told,
That the flowers weep in jewelled glistening
With envy of the joy that they must hold,
While in the dewy mirrors lady Spring
Trims herself by their smiles, their happy mould.

A fragment of a letter accompanies this poem in which Rosenberg refers to using Ruth Lowy as a model for the large Slade painting he was working on at that time and which also figures in a letter to Miss Wright (CW, page 329).

Among these papers is a typescript of "The Destruction of Jerusalem" which is identical with the version in Complete Works (page 90) save for variants in punctuation. It is puzzling how this poem, composed so much later than the other material, came into Lady Gollancz's hands, but clearly it does not originate at the same time as the rest.

The two prose-paragraphs, entitled "Joy" and "Uncle's Impressions in the Woods at Night" both display a luxuriousness in language which, in the second passage, comes near to parodying itself. The former piece has links with both the later poem, "Returning We Hear the Larks":

But hark! joy--joy--strange joy . . .

as also with a painting called "Joy" which he produced in 1912: its flavour is caught by its last sentence:

Joy--joy--the birds sing, joy--the rivers, joy--the happy leaves, for the fear of Time haunts not, and the hands of fate are afar.

The second piece displays a lack of taste and a self-conscious 'literariness' in its use of decorative description, but the

quality improves to this level as one reads on:

The trees, my companions for years, invested with new life this beautiful still night, intermingled a soothing, incessant rustling of their leaves with the slight noises which arose now and then from an awakened insect.

The four letters throw some helpful sidelights on his feelings towards his early poems. One passage refers to "A Ballad of Whitechapel" and has been mentioned earlier (page 159):

You did not say whether the poem I sent you, would do for the publication. Since I sent it I found in my copy the typist had been trying to improve on parts, which, when I noticed, sent me into ecstasies--and also, the two or three verses about the parents and brother should be left out.

It is curious that the typist had made potentially creative errors in copying the manuscript, and this is not the only time this happened (there is another incident relating to the printing of Moses which will be found on page 16 ^{above} ~~below~~).

The remainder of the letter contains appreciative references to Michael Sherbrooke and his powers of recitation:

. . . and then the unutterable broken pathos of the last verse--has so tremendous a grip on you--and so supreme is the acting--one almost faints.

Michael Sherbrooke the actor also occurs in a letter printed on page 337 of Complete Works and is the subject of a poem referred to on page 185. This is followed by a moment of self-revelation:

. . . I have a dread of meeting people who know I write, as they expect me to talk and I am a horrible bad talker. I am in absolute agonies in company and it needs a sympathetic listener like yourself to put me at ease. . . . The Pre-Raphaelite show at the Tates closes very shortly--when you get back I wish you could come with me--and exchange impressions. We would both learn. I think the Rossetti drawings would be a revelation to you.

His final comment about the pre-Raphaelite exhibition at the Tate underlines the fact that the influence of this group

had its effect on his art as well as on his poetry: the style of his drawing of Ruth Lowy (facing page 256 of Complete Works) clearly owes something to the pre-Raphaelites.

Another letter provides evidence of his work on his big painting entitled "Joy":

It is a gorgeous scheme of rose pearl and gold--a dream picture.

Clearly this letter is contemporary with those to Miss Wright in Complete Works which talk of:

My colour conception is a wonderful scheme of rose silver and gold--just how it is all pink yellow and blue--but I have great hopes in it . . . (page 229)

and of not having

seen the pearl by day but it looks gorgeous by night--it is just that irridence--that shimmering quality I want to make the whole scheme of my picture . . . (page 330).

Like the following one, this letter is addressed to Ruth Lowy from Rosenberg's studio in Hampstead, and also reminds her that she had offered to sit for him. Sit she did, as the superb red-chalk drawing reproduced in Complete Works shows--though in fact Lady Gollancz recollected that she lay on the floor for this picture.¹⁰

The second letter from Hampstead relates specifically to Rosenberg's difference of opinion with his patrons, in particular with Mrs. Cohen, but to Ruth Lowy he could treat it lightly:

She was very disappointed at my picture and said she was sure I could have done better. I thanked her for the compliment and assured her it was quite undeserved--I did my best. She said that unless I could get into a more healthy style of work she won't help me--and many other things that showed great invention. I told her she could do what she liked--God knows what she means by a more healthy style of work--Do you

¹⁰ Interview with Lady Gollancz, December 1970.

feel ill when you see my work. I know some people
feel faint looking at a Michel Angelo . . .

When Rosenberg was in France he wrote to Ruth Lowy about Bottomley's enthusiasm for Moses, thus this must have been written after he had received Bottomley's letter which is dated 4th July, 1916. Three sentences are of particular relevance to this study of his plays and poems: the second one shows his consciousness that he was not writing in an orthodox Judaic vein:

G.B. has urged me to write Jewish Plays. I am quite sure if I do I will be boycotted and excommunicated, that is, assuming my work is understood. My 'Moses' is a hard pill to swallow and should I get the chance of working on it and amplifying it as I wish--it will be harder still.

--while the last is an acknowledgement that reworking was, to him, not merely a matter of simplification. The three versions of Moses leave us with the evidence for judging his success.

CHAPTER III

EXPERIMENTS IN DRAMA

Style and Influences

In considering Rosenberg's style it is more fruitful to examine this in the light of his plays, as in them he achieves a greater degree of poetic organization and a more consistent originality of expression than he managed to do in his Earlier Poems. Thus, this introductory section deals with the characteristic qualities of his dramatic verse before moving on to consider the plays themselves in detail.

In this chapter reference will be made to the different drafts of Moses and to the several published Fragments of The Unicorn; for ease of identification, the first and shortest unpublished draft will be referred to as Draft I, the longer and more fully developed but still unpublished version will be called Draft II, while Draft III denotes the final version which was published in 1916 and is printed in Complete Works and Collected Poems. The two unpublished versions are reproduced in an Appendix (page 485). The Fragments of The Unicorn are all printed in Complete Works and Collected Poems, and the three individual fragments will be labelled (IA), (IB) and (IC) (in order of their appearance in those volumes) while The Unicorn II refers to the last completed draft which is printed in both editions of Rosenberg.

One of the first things to strike the reader of Rosenberg's verse plays is the intense vigour of the language. This is in keeping with the concepts of violence which both embody; the violence of Moses is that caused by one large-souled and godlike man initiating a revolt against the "imaginative indolence" (a phrase used by Charles Sorley) of the Egyptian court. In The Amulet and The Unicorn fragments the conflict is one produced by a nation (personified in their leader Tel) whose only means of physical survival is to turn parasite, to suck the life-blood of an already decaying civilization (if Saul and Lilith are typical members), so its effect will not be felt by the ruling hierarchy alone but also by the ordinary individual members. The difference in conflict is one of degree rather than one of kind, therefore much that follows applies to both the verse-plays. Moses spends much of his time musing on the advent of power or inspiration to a human being which raises him above the lesser mortals: violence does figure in the play, as in Abinoah's treatment of the Hebrews and in Moses' coolly-calculated suffocation of Abinoah. The idea of this power in an individual is handled slightly differently in The Amulet, where the Nubian is a human embodiment of Moses' search for the "Unreasoned reason of the savage instinct". By the time Rosenberg has worked through to the second draft of The Unicorn his prime concern is with violence on a racial level, the violence of war and invasion, and he shows us how the impersonal and inexorable march of circumstance impinges on innocent lives.

This change of direction is not at all surprising when we recall that Moses was written in peace-time and published

just before Rosenberg's departure for the battlefield in 1916. Though destruction is abhorrent to him he had already in 1914 (though he was in Cape Town at the time and thus isolated from the European conflict) foreseen that war's results might be cathartic:

O! ancient crimson curse!

Corrode, consume.

Give back this universe

Its pristine bloom.

("On receiving News of the War")

After nearly twenty months in the trenches this idealism had been replaced by stoic acceptance (which some have mistaken for indifference or callousness); as he wrote in a letter to Miss Seaton within a month of his death:

If I am lucky, and come off undamaged, I mean to put all my innermost experiences into the 'Unicorn'. I want it to symbolize the war and all the devastating forces let loose by an ambitious and unscrupulous will (CW, page 379).

Clearly the draft which we possess is not completed or finally revised, for in the same letter he adds that he "had the whole of it planned out, but since then ["last summer"] I've had no chance of working on it." There is enough of substance, however, to show the direction of his purpose. War is a process of wholesale destruction, but even at the end of The Unicorn we are left with the impression that the end of Saul is the moment of rebirth for Tel and his Nubians.

This concern with violence is reflected not only in the themes of the plays, but also in the movement of the verse as well as in the symbols and images which Rosenberg uses. Both display a vigour and originality which is often striking yet equally often imperfectly achieved.

Moses' first soliloquy is often quoted as an example of Rosenberg's rapid evolving of one image from another, but the movement and rhythmical pattern of the lines also serves to emphasize the tremendous upsurge of creative energy which floods in on Moses. D. W. Harding is only one of several who have commented on this passage as illustrative of Rosenberg's ability to compress his thoughts:

Fine! Fine!

See in my brain

What madmen have rushed through,

And like a tornado

Torn up the tight roots

Of some dead universe.

The old clay is broken

For a power to soak in and knit

It all into tougher tissues

To hold life,

Pricking my nerves till the brain might crack

It boils to my finger-tips,

Till my hands ache to grip

The hammer--the lone hammer

That breaks lives into a road

Through which my genius drives.

These lines have an effect which is cumulative, partly because there is not time to differentiate deliberately between one metaphor and its successor in this rapid, breath-taking catalogue. The effect must be close to that which Hulme sought in his "Notes on Language and Style":

Style short, being forced by the coming together of many different thoughts, and generated by their contact. Fire struck between stones (Further Speculations, page 80).

Besides this, our feeling of being in the presence of a supra-human consciousness which is just becoming aware of its potential is increased by the intensely active movement of both rhythms and verbs. (This picture of the creation of new souls by the breaking of old ones is paralleled by Khayyam's potter's wheel or the Button-Maker in Peer Gynt, as well as by the second line of Rosenberg's own Fragment VI--"Pulse of the void working to my vain grappling fingers"--a Fragment which has been more fully discussed in the section on the artist's role in Chapter II above). Dennis Silk quotes a remark from Thorlief Boman¹ which offers an explanation of Rosenberg's syntax--"The verbs, especially, whose basic meaning always expresses a movement or an activity, reveal the dynamic ^{variety} ~~activity~~ of the Hebrews' thinking." Consider the verbs in these lines quoted above: their kinetic energy is inescapable--rushed, torn, broken, soak in, knit, hold, pricking, crack, boils, ache, grip, breaks, drives. An interesting parallel to Rosenberg's verbal energy is offered by Ezra Pound's definition of the Image in The New Age of 28th January, 1915:

It is a vortex or cluster of fused ideas and is endowed with energy. If it does not fulfil these specifications, it is not what I mean by an Image.

The centrality of movement, or at least of activity, to Rosenberg's poetic thought is illustrated by the passage quoted above, but this quality is displaced equally clearly in any extract from the 155 lines which follow it during this scene. Similarly, lines 21-37 of The Amulet or lines 170-204 of The Unicorn are not the only passages which can be cited to support this claim for Rosenberg's fundamental view of

¹ Hebrew Thought compared with Greek (1960), page 28

life as a harnessing of different kinds of energy.

The prominence of this idea may originate in part with Rosenberg's aim to write drama in verse. Dramatic poetry always contains a kinetic impulse which may be less strong or wholly absent in other verse forms, such as the short lyric. When we turn to Rosenberg's non-dramatic poems, particularly to those written before 1915 it emerges that the writing here is more diffuse, more langorous, fonder of the 'ninetyish vocabulary associated with Swinburne and the early Yeats; recurrent images here are those of wine, roses, pearls, silver, and the point has been made in detail by the preceding chapter. "Dawn" (1914) is illustrative of this:

O tender first cold flush of rose,
O budded dawn, wake dreamily . . .

Not all of Rosenberg's dramatic verse is as crisp and clear-cut as some of the examples indicate. Very often he finds that words themselves are insufficient to verbalize the idea or intuition he wants to communicate. The result is an extreme of terseness which is elliptical when tied down to written symbols, the kind of writing which produces the hostile charge of obscurity. Such a charge can be levelled against lines 52-65 of Moses:

Startlingly,
As a mountain-side
Wakes aware of its other side,
When from a cave a leopard comes,
On its heels the same red sand,
Springing with acquainted air,
Sprang an intelligence
Coloured as a whim of mine,
Showed to my dull outer eyes

The living eyes underneath.

Did I not shrivel up and take the place of air,

Secret as those eyes call up a giant frame?

And I am that now.

The difficulty of grasping Rosenberg's meaning in the first sentence is increased by the lack of connectives, so we are uncertain at first which of the clauses are main and which are appositional or parenthetical. The verbs here, though kinetic, are made to communicate their energy through several lines whose sense is interrupted by commas. Is "Sprang" in line 58 the verb which controls the next four lines, while "coloured" (line 59) and "showed" (line 60) are merely supporting participles, or are all three verbs in parallel co-ordinate clauses? Whichever of these solutions is more acceptable grammatically is insignificant, finally, in our arriving at the general meaning of the sentence (lines 6-8 of which can be taken to mean something like '. . . springing with a familiar pattern, so sprang an intelligence coloured with my whim just as the leopard's paws are coloured by the red sand floor of the cave . . .'), but the structure is of a kind to baffle both eye and mind and to send them back over the lines in a search for some ordered structure: "showed" must, in fact, be a transitive verb. The second sentence is syntactically straightforward, the obstacle here being Rosenberg's use of eyes as an image to suggest not only spiritual awakening and profound perception, but also a creative force which can metamorphose him into a "giant frame".

Another example of Rosenberg's condensing of the thought-process occurs in The Unicorn at lines 197-204:

The daughters of any clime are not imagined
Even of their occult ears, senses profound,
For their corporeal ears and baby senses
Were borne for gentle voices and gentle forms
By men misused flying from misuse
Who gave them suck even from their narrow breasts
Only for this, that they should wither
That they should be as an uttered sound in the wind.

The dying race of men are incapable of imagining women ("The incarnate female soul of generation"), "Even of their occult ears". This must refer to a kind of spiritual awareness of the sound of women's voices, although one does not immediately connect the ears with the faculty of the imagination. We are told that their physical organs of perception are stunted by sterility and hopelessness, although their fathers have brought them on their nomadic wanderings ("borne" not "born") in the hope that they in their turn will ultimately find the women with whom they can unite. The whole notion of a race of men doomed to extinction is emphasised, but also complicated, by the suggestion that the men have themselves suckled their male children (no daughter seems to have been born to the wanderers) who were produced by intercourse with animals (see lines 193-194 and also 216-217). The young thus produced have been brought up only so that they in turn can continue the desperate search for women.

One quality of Rosenberg's imagery still remains to be noted--that of the visionary, apocalyptic outlook, so reminiscent of the Blake whom Rosenberg admired; though we should remember that Rosenberg noted his reverence for Blake as an artist rather than as a poet. In an undated letter to

Miss Seaton (a friend from the days of his apprenticeship) he is talking of the Blake exhibition at the Tate: "The drawings are finer than his poems, much clearer, though I can't help thinking it was unfortunate that he did not live when a better tradition of drawing ruled." (CW, page 340). His lecture on Art delivered in Cape Town in 1914 contains the following verdict on Blake:

No other artist that ever lived possessed in so high a degree, that inspired quality; that unimpaired divinity that shines from all things mortal when looked at through the eye of imagination. Each touch is interpenetrated with sense, with life that breathes from the reachless and obscure heights and depths, deep profound, and all embracing (CW, page 251).

"Reachless" and "deep profound" themselves show us how naturally the poetical emphatic expression came to Rosenberg in his writing, whether it was in prose or verse.

This visionary quality of Rosenberg's verse is most patently visible in that section of Moses in which Moses outlines to Abinoah his scheme for a "a new Jerusalem", see lines 448-469. This is a passage over which Rosenberg took considerable trouble, as can be seen by comparing it with the versions in the two earlier drafts of the play. Though the final printed version is clearer in intention it lacks the compression, the 'clotted' quality which is characteristic of Rosenberg at his best and most poetically interesting. What Moses has in mind here is nothing less than a complete revolution in human nature; by charging each individual with spiritual significance he will turn what are at present defects into their corresponding social virtues-- animal cunning will become wisdom, violent passion become compassion and tenderness, meanness become providential thrift. The images which are used to describe this process

are in part sculptural--"Here is the quarry quiet for me to
hew . . ." (line 448); "I'd shape one impulse . . ." (line
452); and in part musical--

All that's low I'll charm;
Barbaric love sweeten to tenderness
(lines 457-458).

His aim is to create a social organization
as near
Solidity as human life can be
(lines 463-464).

This phrase reminds us of Moses' earlier references to him-
self in terms of a mountain (lines 51-54) and tacitly implies
his scorn for the man-made pyramids he is commissioned to
complete, monuments to the dead who even when alive were still
spiritually lifeless and socially negative.

Yet we are left with the inescapable feeling that the
Hebrews, in following Moses, will simply be exchanging one
despotic ruler for another. Moses' picture of creating har-
mony is placed, as Charles Tomlinson has noticed², in an
external setting which demands the violent death of Abinoah
as a prerequisite to this golden age. The violence, indeed,
does not end with the suffocation of Abinoah, but is contin-
ued in the stage-direction which tells of the arrival of
Prince Imra's soldiers, who have come to arrest Moses.

Another passage illustrative of "that inspired quality"
of Blake's can be found in the speech of Tel to Lilith in
The Unicorn (lines 170-204) where he tells of the history of

² In an unpublished essay, "Fate and the Image of Music:
an Examination of Rosenberg's Plays", which the present
writer has been able to see through the kindness of
Jon Silkin.

his tribe of wanderers, of their suffering, of their impelling desperation. The verse in this passage is not so well organized, so carefully revised and tidied up as the previous passage from Moses, and the picture it presents is far from Moses' dream of a "newer nature" for man: what we are given is a haunting evocation (though hindered by surface complexity) of the nightmare world of the Nubians.

One obvious difference which sets this speech apart from the Moses speech is in the character of the speaker. The Moses we have seen is a figure of authority, a civilized, refined Egyptian prince, skilled in persuasion: Tel, by contrast, verges on the inarticulate to start with; his speech is not marked by logical construction but it contains much more human pathos than the former. Tel, by virtue of his role in the plot, is being drawn into an emotional relationship with a woman, whereas we have already seen Moses sacrificing the love of Koelue for "the huge kiss of power". The former is growing from a sterile hermit into a full-blooded man, while the latter is a man in the process of becoming a god.

The curious quality of this passage is the vividness with which the plight of the Nubians is presented to us--there are no rhetorical flourishes, no self-conscious poetical cadences, but we acknowledge the force of such a line as "Whose air was never warmed by a woman's lips", or phrases such as "bleak blood" or "Heights of night ringing with unseen larks".

This visionary power of Rosenberg's is, in other words, the bringing to life of a situation (real or fictitious) by the concentration upon it of poetic imagination; which is only a clumsy paraphrase of his own words on Blake. The

"unimpaired divinity" which he ascribes to Blake would not be a fitting label for Rosenberg himself, but the generosity of human spirit is certainly a quality shared by both writers.

The unevenness of Rosenberg's poetic achievement is a weakness which is often remarked upon. In these two plays, however, and especially in Moses, both the poetry and the organization of language and ideas are of an almost wholly uniform high standard. Since Moses went through two drafts before appearing in print, it is not surprising to find that the earlier weaknesses have been made good, the rough edges evened. The Unicorn was still, being worked on, apparently, at the time of Rosenberg's death and what we have is presumably his second working draft, so here and in The Amulet, which he abandoned, we can find substance for this criticism.

Lilith's first speech in The Amulet displays a weakness in Rosenberg's dramatic verse-writing:

Amak, you'll break your father's sleep,
Come here and tell me what those spices are
This strange man bakes our cakes with.
It makes the brain wild. Be still, Amak.
I'll give you the strange man your father brought
And he will run with you upon his back to-day.
Come from your father or you'll get no cake;
He's been a long journey.
Bring me the pictured book he brought for you.
What! Already cut to pieces?
Put away that horn from your father's ear
And stay that horrid noise: come, Amak (lines 1-12).

An opening speech, of necessity, has to do a certain amount of scene-setting, thus it is frequently prosaic. Lilith

speaks in just such a prosaic manner; she manages to convey some vital information concerning the story which is to unfold, but her manner of speech is hardly convincing as that of a mother cajoling her young son into obedience. Certainly her speech is more mundane, more concerned with external trivialities, than later in her discussions with the Nubian. But it is unconvincing in both its tone and movement; the rhythm and metre is regular and pedestrian, while the language has a curiously archaic quality which is generally lacking throughout the remainder of the play--consider the last two lines cited above. The lines carry no urgency, no impress of personality, in contrast with Lilith's other speeches which all contain a high degree of emotional intensity. It is an easy step to compare the 'flatness' of this speech with the animation and dramatic expressiveness of the one which follows it (lines 14-43).

Saul's first speech in The Unicorn is not so inadequate for the purpose as is the first one in The Amulet, but it is marred by the obvious weakness of repetition during the first twelve lines. Saul's self-consoling soliloquy manages to express a necessary degree of his fear of the supernatural, but the appearance of "wail" three times in six lines in no way helps to create atmosphere; its obtrusive reappearance tends more to irritate than to chill with apprehension. Rosenberg would probably have found a less vague word to vary his usage, on further reworking.

Lines 169-180, which express Tel's difficulty in putting into words the emotions he feels on beholding Lilith for the first time, posed an artistic problem for Rosenberg, as he acknowledged in two letters from the front in 1917. In one

to Edward Marsh he wrote "The most difficult part I shrink from; I think even Shakespeare might:--the first time Tel, the chief of the decaying race, sees a woman . . . and he is called upon to talk" (CW, page 375). To Gordon Bottomley in a letter postmarked 3rd August he repeated: "The emotions of the black (the Chief) are the really difficult part of my story" (CW, page 377). We only possess the one example of this passage, and the bemusement of Tel is clear enough, but what is not clear enough is the sequence of his admittedly disjointed thoughts; the speech lacks cohesion and there are some striking images in lines 175-177:

An instant flashes a large face of dusk
Like heights of night ringing with unseen larks
Or blindness dim with dreams . . .

but their significance is hard to discover in this context. Once Tel embarks on his account of the suffering of his people his speech becomes much more dramatically acceptable.

At two points the plot lacks credibility. First, when Saul arrives home in company with Tel he has been worrying about Lilith's safety and he has already been overawed by Tel's mysterious appearance and his virile potency. Lilith greets him with glad relief, but despite her fearful plea for him not to leave her again, he dismisses her fear of seeing the unicorn's eyes ("balls of fire"--an expression Saul himself had used of the unicorn at line 30) as "some fantasy" and goes into another room to dry himself, leaving Lilith alone with Tel. It is dramatically necessary for Lilith and Tel to be left alone in order for them to discuss the storm in nature, and in their souls, but Saul's reason for departing lacks conviction, especially since he is absent for so

long. Secondly, he reappears seventy-one lines later with "smouldering eyes", which indicate that he suspects something is afoot, but, unaccountably, he goes out again at once to find some chains for capturing the unicorn. Not till Lilith shrieks at line 232 does he re-enter with the chain, and by then he is powerless to prevent the catastrophe. He says nothing, and on seeing the Nubians, each with a woman captive, he resignedly follows Enoch in leaping through the window, following him, presumably, into the same conveniently-sited well.

D. W. Harding was the first critic to comment upon another characteristic of Rosenberg's verse, which is not confined solely to the plays; that is, his fondness for re-using certain images. This tendency is not unique to Rosenberg, but what is unique is the number of reappearances which an image makes. Another practitioner of this method is Eliot, in whose early poems preceding "The Hollow Men" (1925) there is a noticeable recurrence of images related to colours, streets, fog, cats and flowers. Had Rosenberg survived the war he would doubtless have suppressed some of his earlier and sometimes fragmentary versions, but as it is we can now more easily trace the stages in the development of an idea or image.

Harding uses "heights of night ringing with unseen larks" as an example of this process. The image derives from Rosenberg's frequent references to women's beauty, and especially to their hair, as a trap for men. This idea also provides the theme of Skipwith Cannéll's "Nocturne" IV published in the Des Imagistes anthology of 1914:

With the net of thy hair
Thou hast fished in the sea,

And a strange fish
Hast thou caught in thy net;
For thy hair,
Belovéd,
Holdeth my heart
Within its web of gold.

An even earlier expression of it occurs in lines 112-116 of Swinburne's "Laus Veneris":

Ah, not as they, but as the souls that were
Slain in the old time, having found her fair,
Who, sleeping with her lips upon their eyes,
Heard sudden serpents hiss across her hair . . .

as well as in lines 406-407 of his "The Masque of Queen Bersabe"

. . . And her long hair withouten let
Spread sideways like a drawing net . . .

The first appearance in Rosenberg of this image is probably the one in "Returning, We hear the Larks", although in this case the reference to "heights of night ringing with unseen larks" is used literally--it describes his amazement at hearing larks singing in the front line as if to greet him on his return (presumably at dawn) from a night patrol; what strikes him is the way natural beauty obtrudes into the desolation of the battlefield. Yet by the end of the poem Rosenberg realizes that the beauty which drops on to their "upturned list'ning faces" could just as well have been death; thus this phrase comes to represent beauty which may or may not bring death or disaster in its wake--hence:

. . . Like a blind man's dreams on the sand
By dangerous tides,
Like a girl's dark hair for she dreams no ruin lies
Or her kisses where a serpent hides. there,

This paradox of the danger of beauty, at this moment of the poet's experience, spreads into his attitude towards the physical and spiritual beauty of women.

These connotations of menace are carried over into lines 115-116 of The Amulet:

. . . 'The dishevelled lustres of her hair
Moon-storm like', they say . . .

--where the detractors of Lilith (whose words these are) are obviously saying that her beauty is fickle and may be treacherous; they reckon that she is at the least unfaithful to her husband. This image recurs at lines 182-184 as:

Our girls have hair
Like heights of night ringing with
never-seen larks,
Or blindness dim with dreams.

There is no suggestion of anything sinister here, only the mystery and allurement of beauty. When this image occurs in The Unicorn (lines 175-176) it once again suggests danger lurking in the dark although it is almost identical in appearance with the last two lines of The Amulet image. An earlier appearance of this idea is in the fourth line of Fragment XXXVI--"Gold hair whose rich metal enlocks us in terror"--where the image is very direct and concrete, its threat evident. In "Chagrin" (lines 8-12) we see an earlier attempt at the compact image which is finally achieved in "Returning We hear the Larks": in this poem the image has no intimation of the dangers of night, but the hair brings disaster upon its owner as did that of the luckless Absalom. From these uses of this image, Rosenberg's varying emphases are apparent at different stages, but it emerges that the most wholly

satisfying version is that in The Amulet; it contains the same rich suggestiveness of the image in "Returning, We hear the Larks", but it is expressed more compactly without loss of the verbal music.

Other recurrent images which Professor Harding refers to and comments on are "soul sack" (Moses, lines 7 and 103; "Dead Man's Dump", line 24) and "crazed shadow from no golden body" (The Amulet, lines 149-151; "At Night", lines 1-2 and 19-20; "Adam" (Fragment I), line 1; The Unicorn, lines 157-159); these are only the most striking and lengthy phrases which occur, but there are very many images and expressions which reappear, sometimes with slight variations, (one at least seventeen times). Such images may be only a word or two in length, and not every use of them adds another layer of meaning, but the general tendency is for an image to collect overtones as it is re-employed. The following examples are not discussed by Professor Harding.

This process can be seen at work in Rosenberg's use of the epithet "blond". Its first appearance is in Draft II of Moses:

. . . Writ by illusions gay and blonde (line 11).
"Gay" and "blonde" here are synonymous, both expressing pleasure. In the final draft of Moses this line becomes "Writ by illusions blond", a compression which, in its context, connects the word with cowardice, a hanging back from a positive commitment to creative action. The word appears in "The Jew" (line five) in its original form ("blonde") and here it is clearly being used to denote the colour of a man's skin (not hair, as in our colloquial sense), for it is contrasted with "bronze" and "ruddy". Since Rosenberg is here talking about how the Jew is an outcast among other ethnic

groups, his use of it suggests a Nordic or Germanic racial type, with, possibly, a hint at anti-Semitism. This overtone of hostility is not retained in the two other appearances which the word makes--in The Amulet (line 100) and in "Through these Pale Cold Days" ("They leave these blond still days . . .", line nine): on both these occasions the word reverts to its earlier connotation of pleasure, associated with light and innocence. The idea of "blond" meaning idle and fruitless as in the published draft of Moses is taken over by "pallid", which appears in two of the Trench Poems--"Soldier; 20th Century" (" . . . That has outgrown the pallid days", line 14) and "Girl to Soldier on Leave" ("Pallid days arid and wan . . .", line nine). In these poems the word refers to a stage of the soldier-hero's life which is spiritually paralysed, days which are deprived of the life-giving light of the sun, brought to man by an earlier type of suffering hero, Prometheus.

Occasionally Rosenberg re-uses an image or word merely because he likes the sound of it. Such a word is "miasma" which is found twice in Moses (lines 144 and 254) and also in line 29 of the closely-related "God". The same is true of his description of the Unicorn in Fragment A of Draft I (lines 20-21) which is incorporated as it stands into Draft II; without doubt it is a successful image--it is striking and it also suggests something grotesque or supernatural about the animal which is in keeping with his idea for it to symbolize an other-worldly power operating in the mundane world of Saul and Lilith:

The haughty contours of a swift white horse
And on its brows a tree, a branching tree.

Certain single words are of key importance to Rosenberg in his system of poetic ideas--words such as "gleam", "root", "iron", "blind". To discuss the varied uses of each of these epithets individually would take up some considerable space, but an idea of the range of associations of each can be outlined here. "Gleam" is occasionally used merely to mean light-reflecting, as in 'these layers of gleaming horror' ("The Tower of Skulls", line two) which refers to the sheen of bare bone in the skulls, the clean sterility of death. More common is the sense behind "fragile gleaming wrists" of The Unicorn (line 144) or "pale hands gleam up" ("Daughters of War", line 52) which are vivid visual realizations of the pallor of refined (or dead) hands; the first phrase is Tel's remark about Lilith and shows that he sees her attractiveness at first as a spiritual one in the sharpest contrast to his own physical yearnings (which are as yet only partly aroused by her). For most of the time, however, the word suggests the luminous quality of something spiritual which is alluring to man but as yet unattainable; this is the meaning behind "prophetic gleams" ("Daughters of War", line six); "gleaming and fading unknowable and known" (The Unicorn, Draft I, Fragment B, line three), "all these things are shadowed gleams of things beyond the firmament" ("Twilight" (II), line eight).

The root is for Rosenberg the source of what is valuable in the world; it is obviously a means of growth, but while the flowering plant above may be buffeted by the stresses of the world the root remains secret, inaccessible and unharmed. Recurrent tree-images account in part for the frequency of this metaphor, but the root as a source of primal fertility

is central to Rosenberg's conception of the rôles in society of both Moses and Tel. In the plays, "the roots' hid secrecy" (Moses, line 450) are the vital, untapped resources of imaginative creativity, of spiritual growth in human life--these are the "primeval elements, . . . old source of race" which Moses will work upon to create a new and fruitful society. In "Daughters of War" (line three) there occurs "By the root side of the tree of life" which refers to the underworld inhabited by the Amazonian spirits; by definition, it is inaccessible to mortals while they are alive, and as the poem progresses it becomes clear that this "root side" is still the source of life--but in this case of a life after death, a version of a non-Christian Valhalla. This almost mythical use of the word contrasts sharply with the less frequent literal meanings of the word as it appears in "Midsummer Frost" (line ten) or in the fifth line of "At Sea Point", where it is used to suggest both primal foundations and a sense of growth from a period of geological time. Yet another variant is found in both line 14 of "At Night" and in "Chagrin" (line 22) where the symbol appears as "the secret roots of the sun": since the sun is the source of light and life, its "roots" are vital to the continued well-being of the universe as they are both the origins of life-giving light and also (in "Chagrin") the ultimate source of discoverable knowledge. The image here is a curious and striking one, as the sun may be conceived as a flower which 'grows' out of the earth at sunrise, thus its roots are always below (and beyond) the horizon.

"Iron", by contrast, is susceptible of less variation in its suggestiveness. In Rosenberg's hands the word's meaning

is constant; it appears--not surprisingly--in several war poems, where it suggests either the impersonal hardness and immensity of war or the lethal properties of weapons. Thus we find phrases in Trench Poems like "iron are our lives" ("August 1914", line nine); "The old bark burnt with iron wars" ("Daughters of War", line 15); "Blind fingers loose an iron cloud" ("Marching", line 14). In Moses and in The Amulet and The Unicorn the word appears at least five times and at first sight is used merely as a variant for hard, unbending. But its use in the plays underlines Rosenberg's view that the struggle in both (more mental in The Amulet, more physical in The Unicorn) is on a level with war, with all the waste, destruction and corruption that this involves. Rosenberg's announced intention for the function of The Unicorn has already been referred to above (page 195). The use of this epithet helps us to relate Moses and Trench Poems and The Unicorn more closely together; they are composite parts of a picture which Rosenberg was assembling to show the state of the world as he saw it from 1915-1918.

"Blind" also figures in the Trench Poems, but not simply as suggesting loss of sight to be one of the consequences of war (though it does carry this suggestion in line 14 of "Marching"). For Rosenberg blindness is both a physical and a mental disability. The most beautiful and poignant image incorporating it occurs in lines 13-14 of "Returning, We Hear the Larks":

. . . Like a blind man's dreams on the sand

By dangerous tides, . . .

an image which successfully conveys the almost innocent

trust of the blind man, happily lost in his dreams, all the while unconscious (blind) of the threat from the sea which menaces him. This idea is compressed on its reappearance in The Amulet (line 184)--"Or blindness dim with dreams"--but the same sense of being deluded into a state of security by forces of danger remains. Physical blindness is a disability whose effects can be far-reaching, but in line 28 of "God" the farewells are not those taken by physically blind people so much as by those who are unknowing, who lack foresight. This is the sense in which man's fingers which dig iron and saltpetre from the earth are also blind ("Dead Man's Dump", line 54); finally the "blind fingers" in "Marching" already referred to above are not merely ignorant of the consequences, but also uncaring, in addition to the possibility that the "iron cloud" which they unleash is an act of retaliation from an enemy who has already been physically blinded.

Not all of Rosenberg's favourite words and expressions are finally worked into a successful formulation and it may be of interest to record one example of an image which is incompletely achieved. It is found, firstly, in three of the Fragments (VIII, IX and X) all of which are variations on the same theme, and then finally in Moses at lines 199-202:

The vague viols of evening
Call all the flower clans
To some abysmal swinging
And tumult of deep trance;

The main words of the image appear in varying orders--"rose", "storm", "adance", "abysmal", "swing", "tumult", "trance", and the versions in Fragments IX and X are difficult even to paraphrase. "Abysmal swing" and "tumult of trance" presumably

appealed to Rosenberg's ear, and he is here trying to arrange them in some meaningful way, though with little success. The final rearrangement appears to be that in Fragment VIII (since these Fragments are printed in inverse chronological order) which is identical with the comparable lines in Moses; here at least the words succeed in conveying the hypnotic effect of ~~saying~~ masses of flowers--but "abysmal" still causes the reader to pause and wonder if Rosenberg is echoing the Shakespearian "abysm of time" to create a feeling of timelessness. The idea of "abysmal" as suggesting a sinister force from the underworld is possible, but difficult to reconcile to this context. Even the success of this version is still qualified.

This examination of Rosenberg's technique provides evidence for concluding that he had not at this stage escaped from the "lawless and grotesque manner" which, as we shall see later (page 228) was to worry Edward Marsh about his style of writing. Yet at the same time it is equally clear that, despite lapses in style or literary taste, he is continuously striving to refine and clarify his expression and in this process certain words or clusters of ideas come to possess for Rosenberg a significance which will ensure their reappearance in subsequent poems.

In his letters to various correspondents Rosenberg frequently comments upon contemporary writers, and the two for whom he expresses an unchanging admiration are Lascelles Abercrombie and Gordon Bottomley. While in South Africa in 1915 he had written to Miss Seaton "Who is your best living English poet? I've found somebody miles and miles above everybody--a young man, Lascelles Abercrombie--a mighty poet

and brother to Browning" (CW, page 368). His attention was drawn to Bottomley by reading his "The End of the World" which appeared in Georgian Poetry I (published 1912)--"very fine imagination and original", he commented to Marsh (CW, page 289). With both these writers he established an acquaintance by correspondence, and they frequently offered him advice on his own verses.

On reading the poems by Abercrombie and Bottomley which Rosenberg may have read a large number of parallels become apparent, but there is insufficient evidence to ascribe the similarities to any direct influence on Rosenberg: Rosenberg was, however, susceptible and sensitive to suggestions about his own writings, as his responses to Marsh's criticisms and advice show clearly enough.

Both these writers were exponents of the verse drama, which was then undergoing a revival--the most widely-acclaimed theatrical success of the time being Drinkwater's Abraham Lincoln (which was not, in fact, published till 1918).

Rosenberg's first acquaintance with their work came through their non-dramatic verse, as can be seen from his opinions of Abercrombie's "Hymn to Love"--"It is more weighty in thought, alive in passion and of a more intense imagination than any I know" (Letter to Edward Marsh from France, postmarked 10th October, 1916: CW, page 313). He had, in an earlier letter to Marsh, admitted the influence of this poem on his own work--"Song of Immortality (which by the way, is absolutely Abercrombie's idea in the Hymn to Love, and its one of my first poems) . . ." (CW, page 292). This poem of Abercrombie's now scarcely seems to deserve Rosenberg's praises: its main characteristic is a staleness of diction

which nonetheless falls short of cliché, a 'Parnassian' brand of elegant deadness. A brief illustration will suffice:

Yea, made of chance and all a labouring strife,
We go charged with a strong flame;
For as a language Love hath seized on life
His burning heart to story.

It may well be, however, that the similarities which are noted below are not the result of Rosenberg being influenced by these mentors so much as evidence that they were all using in their poetry ideas which were popular and acceptable in English poetry at that time.

In a letter to Rosenberg (which so far as can be ascertained has not hitherto been published), dated 4th July, 1916, Bottomley wrote: "There is a great field still almost untouched in the Old Testament stories; the right way of handling them has scarcely been found yet in English poetry, but I believe you have it within your means if you care to go on with it." This was after he had read Moses which he praised for its

large, fine movement, the ample sweep which is the first requisite of great poetry, and which has lately dropped out of sight in the hands of exquisite lyricists who try to make us believe there is a great virtue in being short of breath.

Bottomley's observation is reinforced by a comment of Wallace Martin on what he considers to be one of the Imagists' main weaknesses:

Their concentration on the short lyric had the effect of making technique, rather than subject or conceptual originality, the criterion of their success ("The New Age" under Orage, page 164).

Bottomley himself had given evidence of his ability to create the "ample sweep" in his recently-published King Lear's Wife (1915) as can be seen in this passage which

occurs when Lear is dallying with his dying queen's waiting-woman, Gormflaith:

Gormflaith: Master and friend, grant then this hour to me:
Never again, maybe, can we two sit
At love together, unwatched, unknown of all,
In the Queen's chamber, near the Queen's crown
And with no conscious Queen to hold it from us:
Now let me wear the Queen's true crown on me
And snatch a breathless knowledge of the feeling
Of what it would have been to sit by you
Always and closely, equal and exalted,
To be my light when life is dark again.

Lear: Girl, by the black stone god, I did not think
You had the nature of a chambermaid,
Who pries and fumbles in her lady's clothes
With her red hands, or on her soily neck
Stealthily hangs her lady's jewels or pearls.
You shall be tiring-maid to the next queen
And try her crown on every day o' your life
In secrecy, if that is your desire:
If you would be a queen, cleanse yourself quickly
Of menial fingering and servile thought.

Gormflaith: You need not crown me. Let me put it on
As briefly as a gleam of Winter sun.
I will not even warm it with my hair.

Compare the ease and flow of this blank verse with the
vitality of the dialogue in Moses when Moses rebukes Abinoah
for beating the Old Hebrew:

Moses: You drunken rascal!

Abinoah: A drunken rascal! Isis! hear the Prince.
Drunken with duty, and he calls me rascal.

Moses: You may think it your duty to get drunk;
But get yourself bronze claws before
You would be impudent.

Abinoah: When a man's drunk he'll kiss a horse of king,
He's so affectionate. Under your words
There is strong wine to make me drunk; you think,
The lines of all your face say, 'Her father,
Koelue's father.'

Moses: This is too droll and extraordinary.
I dreamt I was a prince, a queer droll dream,
Where a certain slave of mine, a thing, a toad,
Shifting his belly, showed a diamond
Where he had lain. And a blind dumb messenger
Bore syllabled messages soaked right through
with glee.
I paid the toad--the blind man; afterwards
They spread a stench and snarling. O, droll dream!

I think you merely mean to flatter me,
You subtle knave, that, more than prince, I'm man,
And worth to listen to your bawdy breath.

Abinoah: Yet my breath was worth your mixing with.

Moses: A boy at college flattered so by a girl
Will give her what she asks for.

Abinoah: Osiris! burning Osiris!
Of thee desirable, for thee, her hair
Prince Imra vowed his honey-hives and vineyards.
Isis! to let a Jew have her for nothing (lines
375-400).

This must have been the kind of example Bottomley had in mind when he wrote his letter. One obvious difference between the two passages is how craggy and compacted Rosenberg's language is when placed beside Bottomley's, yet both are good examples of dramatic poetry. This relative surface-simplicity in Bottomley was something which Rosenberg himself noted in a letter of July 1916 to Sydney Schiff:

I pounced on King Lear's Wife, and though it was not more than I expected, it was not less. The only fault I can find is in the diction. It has the aspect of talking to children, in some places (LC, page 16).

This criticism is astute, but points to a weakness in his Rosenberg's own poetry, in particular to his dramatic poetry. He seems at this stage in his poetic development to prefer the rhetorical flourish (found in Abercrombie) and suggests that he was, in fact, facing the wrong way in his admiration of Abercrombie's diffuse style. Rosenberg's plays were not intended for stage-performance, but since they were written in this form the poetry must be subjected to the demands of stage dialogue. For an audience to grasp the meaning at the first hearing while they are to some extent distracted from it by the spectacle on stage, the dialogue must be very straightforward. Thus it is arguable that the appearance of a word like "knead" in "Come knead the hills and ocean into

food" (Moses, line 245), although a vivid and vigorous metaphor, it will cause the audience to pause over it because of its unfamiliarity, and once the mind pauses, the thread of the speech will be lost. This is by no means an isolated example of Rosenberg's preference for a 'poetic' word which would irritate a theatre audience, a preference which is less evident in the later The Unicorn.

Bottomley's comment about the use of Old Testament stories leads us to think of Abercrombie's drama Judith. This play was first published in 1912 and so Rosenberg may well have read it. There is no need to suppose that it suggested a Biblical theme to him, as Rosenberg had been brought up in a consciously Jewish fashion and there is evidence in his earlier poetry that the Old Testament stories were familiar to him (see "Chagrin"). Abercrombie's adaptation of the Apocryphal story for his own poetic purpose is not so radical as is Rosenberg's treatment of the Moses legend. Abercrombie has reduced Judith from an almost Amazonian heroine into a puritanical virgin who is more ashamed at the loss of her virginity to Holofernes than she is gratified at the great blow she has struck for Israel: in the depths of her self-pity she unsuccessfully attempts suicide. Rosenberg's Moses, on the contrary, is a considerable development from the inspiring leader of Exodus. He is intensely energetic and cunning, an exemplification of Zarathustra's precept to "live dangerously". His cunning and political skill are demonstrated in the use he makes of Pharoah's tooth-drawing edict (Rosenberg called this a "curious plot", which was worked in later). Moses' personal involvement with Abinoah (via his daughter Koelue) is Rosenberg's own embellishment

and it gives a much more powerful dramatic motivation to the action of the play than does, say, Abercrombie's provision of a devoted Jewish lover for Judith in the person of Prince Ozias; she feels her power to arouse his love causes her as much shame as if she suffered from leprosy.

In his poems published before 1916 Abercrombie shows an interest in areas of human experience which were to concern Rosenberg also in his verse-plays. The most obvious element common to the two writers in this respect is their interest in how an individual reacts at a moment of stress. Many of the protagonists come into this category--Peregrinus (in the play of the same name), Judith, St. Thomas (in The Sale of St. Thomas) and Deborah. Peregrinus, for example, in his desire to purge his earlier wickedness and to inspire others, decides to burn himself publicly: he does not, at first, flinch from the suffering this will involve because, like Moses, he sees a regenerating power in violence:

. . . abandoned all the sorts of delight
For this amazement of the nerves,
This sharp delicious ransack of the brain,
This ravishing wild piracy of the soul,
Cruelty.

There is an element of masochistic pleasure here, which is nowhere evident in Moses. Unlike Moses, however, Peregrinus' brave talk is more posturing than anything else. Once on the funeral pyre, he changes his mind about the burning but is too late to prevent the flatterer Marcon igniting the fuel.

St. Thomas is another character who shares, to some extent, Moses' mental turmoils. But, like Peregrinus, and again in contrast to Moses, he is a weak vessel, and his

words--though vigorous and violent--have more sound than determination about them. A curious verbal resemblance to Rosenberg occurs in St. Thomas's recoil from the hardships that will face him on his mission in India: he shudders at "The horror of the huge power of life", which is precisely what Moses embraces eagerly, welcoming "the huge kiss of power".

Judith's motives (in the play which bears her name) for attempting to seduce Holofernes are those of the nation outweighing those of the individual:

But this is chief: what balance can there be

In my own hurt against a nation's pining?

If this is the attitude which we expect Moses to adopt, we are in for a surprise: his motives for defying Pharoah are much less lofty, but also more human because of this. He will seek the Hebrews' release from Egyptian bondage because it coincides with his bid for leadership:

. . . I shall have a great following for this,

The rude touched heart of the mauled sweaty horde,

Their rough tongues fawn at my hands, their

red streaked eyes

Glitter with sacrifice.

Something which is common to the poetry of Abercrombie, Bottomley and Rosenberg is the element of violence which runs through them: this propensity in Rosenberg has already been discussed. Vigorous images are less frequent in Abercrombie than in Rosenberg, but they bear a similarity to those in Moses. There is, for example, a qualified parallel between Moses and Saul of Deborah: both men are isolationists with a strong sense of their own responsibilities and actions, and both are impressive in either physique or in powers of

impressing others. Compare:

That Saul's a rare strong fellow! No one else
Standing above waist-deep could pick a man
From out a boat like a little parcel, trudge
Through mud and water holding a grown doctor
Above his head with arms stiff straightened out.

with this:

His monstrous posture, why his neck's turn
Were our thews' adventures; some Amazon's son
doubtless
From the dark countries. Can it be
The storm spirit, storm's pilot
With all the heaving debris of Noah's sunken days
Dragged on his loins. (The Unicorn, lines 70-75)

or with lines 232-236 of Moses.

In a like manner, Holofernes in Judith finds himself in
the grip of a merciless supra-human power; as a fierce
warrior, love to him is not something soft and alluring, but
an excruciating, almost physical, pain which is to be endured:

. . . now I feel
Love like a dreadful god coming to do
His pleasure on me, to tear me with his joy
And shred my flesh-wove strength with merciless
Utterance through me of inhuman bliss . . .

This violence of language and imagery may be justified on
grounds of its contribution to atmosphere, to build-up of
character, but on occasions in both Abercrombie and Bottomley
this violence is harder to explain.

D. H. Lawrence was critical of Abercrombie on one occasion for what he considered to be gratuitous unpleasantness

of imagery and diction, such as:

Another stranger

Who swore he knew of better gods than ours,
Seemed to the king troubled with fleas, and slaves
Were told to groom him smartly, which they did
Thoroughly with steel combs, until at last
They curried the living flesh from off his bones
And stript his face of gristle, till he was
Skull and half skeleton and yet alive.

(The Sale of St. Thomas)

or again:

When I was young

My mother would catch us frogs and set them down,
Lapt in a screw of paper, in the ruts,
And carts going by would quash'em; and I'd laugh,
And yet be thinking, 'Suppose it was myself
Twisted stiff in a huge paper, and wheels
Big as the wall of a barn treading me flat!'

(The End of the World)

To a much smaller extent this element of 'nastiness' is detectable in King Lear's Wife: the Corpse-washer's song which concludes the play was objected to in performance by the Censor:

A louse crept out of my lady's shift--
Ahumm, Ahumm, Ahee--
Crying 'Oi! Oi! We are turned adrift;
The lady's bosom is cold and stiffed,
And her arm-pit's cold for me.'

Moses in particular might be susceptible to the same charge-- one could refer to Abinoah's treatment of the Old Hebrew, or

to the barbarity of Pharoah's tooth-drawing edict, or to Moses' cold and calculating rejection of Koelue--but this unpleasantness is not there for its own sake. It is integral to Rosenberg's conception of Moses as symbolising "the fierce desire for virility, and original action", in a way in which it is not vital to the dramatic conceptions of Bottomley and Abercrombie. This element may owe something also to the attitude which J. G. Fletcher recalls in Life is my Song:

In revolt against the elaborations of end-of-the century aestheticism; against the romantic movement faltering in sentimental prettiness, against the genteel tradition in decay, artists everywhere were turning back to the primitively ugly, knowing that in primitiveness alone lay strength (page 68).

As in Rosenberg, the beauty of Abercrombie's women is able to exert a profound influence on men: not solely the arousing of male passion, but a hint that there is some mysterious power they possess. This may be either the fertility which will produce children:

. . . But now that women are to me not only
The sacred friends of hidden Awe, not only
Mistresses of the world's unseen foison . . .

(Prelude)

--the phrasing here is strongly reminiscent of Tel's in The Unicorn (lines 195-196) where he and his race seek for "the incarnate female soul of generation": or else it can be the complete enervation of a strong man that a beautiful woman can produce, as:

I think she would dismay you and unhitch
The sinews from their purchase on your bones . . .

("Vashti")

which recalls Tel's loss of his giant strength on seeing Lilith in The Unicorn:

. . . I am a crazed shadow
From a golden body
That melts my iron flesh, I flow from it
(lines 157-159).

The effect of feminine beauty upon man is a time-honoured cliché so it is not surprising that both the poets express its power in similar concepts: what is more striking is the resemblance in the language.

But to see and hear and touch Woman
Breaks our shell of this accursed world,
And turns our measured days to measureless
gleam . . .

for instance, has a ring about it of Tel's "thin golden tremors" of lines 187-190 of The Amulet or the phrase recurring in The Unicorn in lines 156-157; Rosenberg does not, however, take up Abercrombie's echo of Blake's "mundane shell". Tel's loss of identity in these lines is in turn echoed by a remark of Holofernes, the strong man for whom Judith's beauty was to provide a fatal snare; this vicious bully, under Judith's influence, becomes capable of speech like:

Now am I but the place thy beauty brightens,
And of myself I have no light of sense
Nor certainty of being.

What these parallels between Rosenberg, Abercrombie and Bottomley indicate is not any conscious imitation on Rosenberg's part of these older and more experienced poets, although this was possible in a young poet who was developing a characteristic style of his own during the last three or four years of his life; they were often his mentors--especially Bottomley--but never his models. The overlap

between them is more properly ascribed to the degree of common poetical consciousness and the contemporary poetic diction which they all inherited. In brief, Abercrombie's verse is diffuse (and in Deborah the diction is deliberately archaic). Bottomley, by contrast, writes with simplicity and vividness: his verse is vocal in a way in which Abercrombie's never is. But Rosenberg's dramatic verse is more compressed and elliptical than that of the other two. This does not mean that Rosenberg is a poet whose line of development descends directly from Abercrombie and Bottomley, so much as it shows how Rosenberg admired the two older men for their poetic and dramatic skills and they in turn praised his achievements without really understanding his intentions. In their criticism of his work, however, there is a greater understanding of his difficulties with language than that which appears in Edward Marsh's comparatively academic strictures: for example, Marsh wrote thus to Bottomley about Rosenberg--"I do want him to renounce the lawless and grotesque manner in which he usually writes and to pay a little attention to form and tradition . . . he seems to me entirely without architectonics--both the shaping instinct and the reserve of power that carries a thing through" (Christopher Hassall, op. cit., page 402).

A word may be added here about Rosenberg's use of the Imagist technique, as expounded and practised by T. E. Hulme and Ezra Pound. Pound's definition of Imagism is celebrated:

- "1. Direct treatment of the 'thing' whether subjective or objective.
2. To use absolutely no word that does not contribute to the presentation.
3. As regarding rhythm: to compose in the sequence of the musical phrase, not in sequence of a metronome." (reprinted in Literary Essays of Ezra Pound, ed. T. S. Eliot (1960), page 3).

This clearness and crispness of image is not the sole prerogative of those who stepped into line behind the "Des Imagistes" banner, and we can find this brief, self-contained image in Moses, The Amulet and The Unicorn just as we can find it in Rosenberg's non-dramatic verse. (There is evidence (see CW, page 346) that Pound and Rosenberg corresponded with each other and it is quite possible that the latter was aware of Pound's new poetic theories). The most obvious example of Rosenberg's use of this verse technique can be found in Fragment XXXVII, which is the more easily identifiable as a fragment of the Imagist type by reason of its terseness and isolation. It has already been quoted on page 169 above, but is reproduced here for convenience:

Green thoughts are
Ice block on a barrow
Gleaming in July.
A little boy with bare feet
And jewels at his nose stands by.

Images of this kind, presenting a fully-realized picture and mood at a certain point in time, occur also in the plays, but are less easily detachable from their context simply because they are embedded in it.

On looking at Moses, for example, we may look at Moses' first soliloquy again to find examples of such images. And find them we do--although, as noted earlier (page 196) they pass by very rapidly and evolve into something else before our eyes.

And like a tornado
Torn up the tight roots
Of some dead universe . . . (lines 31-33)

may at first recall the remark in his lecture on Art:

Art is now, as it were, a volcano. Eruptions are continual, and immense cities of culture at its foot are shaken and shivered. The roots of a dead universe are torn up by hands, feverish and consuming with an exuberant vitality--and amid dynamic threatenings we watch the hastening of the corroding doom (CW, page 250).

--but in its completeness and concreteness it is comparable to Fragment XXXVII. Unlike the appearance of T. E. Hulme's poems, however, Rosenberg is not writing here to create jewel-like miniatures, but to create tension and a feeling of uncontrollable energy bursting forth, so we do not, in the normal process of reading, detach it from the following picture of the dead universe in terms of a broken clay (frail) vessel which is now available for powerful plastic shaping. Similarly the images of the hammer (lines 40-42) or of princely pampered Pharoah (lines 44-47) can be viewed as successful applications of the Imagist technique to build up a breath-taking verse-paragraph.

The contrast with T. E. Hulme hinted at above is very clear if we compare the movement of this speech of Moses' with one of Hulme's own poems. Hulme advocated a poetry that was "dry and hard", and Rosenberg's images here certainly contain none of the romantic vagueness which Hulme deprecated. The classically precise and disciplined use of a visual image is well illustrated in Hulme's "Above the Dock":

Above the quiet dock in mid night,
Tangled in the tall mast's corded height,
Hangs the moon. What seemed so far away
Is but a child's balloon, forgotten after play.

Hulme's visual definition here is unimpeachable, but the poem is an isolated unit; the image, in Ezra Pound's words

"presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time". The weakness in this aesthetic theory is precisely this, that the images are not interrelated, there is no totality of experience beyond the immediate impact. This view is supported by Wallace Martin's assessment of Bergson's influence on Hulme's aim in poetry; for Hulme the image was "a philosophical concept". Bergson led Hulme

to conceive poetry as an objectification of response rather than a vehicle for the communication of a subjective state, accompanied by the appropriate evocative description (Wallace Martin, op. cit., page 174).

As David Daiches remarks in his Poetry and the Modern World (page 81): "Clarity and precision of an individual image provide only one criterion; richness and wholeness of texture provided by an adequate integration of separate images is a criterion equally important, but one neglected by both Hulme and the Imagists." An Imagist poem is by definition static, incapable of development and as such is incapable of satisfying the reader, either emotionally or logically. (In this respect Imagism was soon to dissatisfy Pound himself as well). It is a mark of Rosenberg's ability that he could assimilate and develop in his own way an ephemeral poetic objective. In much the same way he was able to strike a balance between the ideas which in Abercrombie's drama preponderate over his characters, and the choric harmonious diction and rhythmic movement of Bottomley's verse plays and to produce verse which shows the influence of both these poetic innovators while it possesses a distinctive quality of its own.

What, then, are the conclusions to be drawn from this examination of Rosenberg's use of images and symbols? From his early youth Rosenberg's poetic imagination had been influenced by his inheritance of the 1890s style of writing. It is worth recalling here that he had begun writing poetry as early as 1905, when he was fifteen, and "Ode to David's Harp" is the only survivor from this date; yet he developed from this into a poet of originality and force. By the time that he was swept into the war in 1916 he was already well on the way to the mature work which he produced in the trenches: unlike Wilfred Owen, with whom he invites comparison, his talents were not brought to premature blooming by the experience of war. War merely gave Rosenberg's well-developed poetical skills a change of direction.

In many ways, Moses is Rosenberg's most successful work, apart from some Trench Poems and a handful of those written in peacetime. It is obviously more satisfying than The Amulet and The Unicorn because of its comparative completeness, and as a result of successive revisions Rosenberg has created an even and consistent poetic texture, within his own range of aims. This consistency has been achieved, as suggested earlier, at the cost of some immediacy and of the watering-down of striking but highly-compressed verbal arrangements.

That a poem should go through more than one working draft is not surprising, but poets generally allow only the final draft to get into print. One grain of consolation available to us from Rosenberg's untimely death in his twenty-seventh year is that we are left with more than one version of Moses, and several fragments of The Unicorn: as well as this we have other poems--"Beauty", "Heart's First Word",

"My Soul is Robbed", "The Poet", "Twilight" and "Wedded"-- which survive in more than one version, and these are supplemented by sixty-one Fragments of varying degrees of competence and completeness. The significance of this is that we can clearly trace the lines along which he revised his poems; we know what he considered important in the earlier versions and what was expendable in remodelling.

From his letters we learn that one of Rosenberg's prime concerns in reworking his poems was to remove the obscurity which his correspondents (principally Edward Marsh) found there. As early as 1914 Rosenberg was criticizing Edward Marsh for what seemed to him to be wilful wrong-headedness:

if you do find time to read my poems, and I sent them because I think them worth reading, for God's Sake! don't say they're obscure (CW, page 298).

With the passage of time, however, he became less self-righteously sensitive to criticism for he realized that the difficulties encountered by Marsh and Trevelyan would be equally daunting to less critical readers. This was proved to him as he shows in a letter written to Sydney Schiff from his training camp at Farnborough early in 1916:

I have written two small poems ["Spring 1916" and "Marching"] since I joined and I think they are my strongest work. I sent them to one or two papers as they are war poems and topical but as I expected, they were sent back. I am afraid my public is still in the womb. Naturally this only has the effect of making me very conceited and to think these poems better than anybody else's (LC, page 14).

By 1917 his attitude to criticism was more tolerant, as he wrote to Edward Marsh:

Mr. Binyon has often sermonised lengthily over my working on two different principles in the same thing and I know how it spoils the unity of a poem. But if I couldn't before, I can now, I am sure plead the absolute necessity of fixing an idea before it is lost, because of the situation its conceived in (CW, pages 316-317).

Within two months of this he was expounding to Edward Marsh his conviction of what should be the datum of poetry, at the same time acknowledging that his technique was lacking:

I think with you that poetry should be definite thought and and clear expression, however subtle; I don't think there should be any vagueness at all; but a sense of something hidden and felt to be there; Now when my things fail to be clear I am sure it is because of the luckless choice of a word or the failure to introduce a word that would flash my idea plain as it is to my own mind (CW, page 319).

However, what was said was, for Rosenberg, ultimately of greater importance than the way in which it was said; his concepts, ideas, theories are what are "hidden and felt to be there", but at times words with their conventional meanings are insufficient for his purpose:

And I absolutely disagree that it is blindness or carelessness; it is the brain succumbing to the herculean attempt to enrich the world of ideas (CW, page 373).

Examples of passages where interpretation and paraphrase are difficult have already been mentioned above (pages 198-199) and these should be sufficient illustration from the plays-- though, of course, Rosenberg's technique of "modelling in language" (to use Sassoon's phrase)³ is equally evident throughout his work. It is appropriate to recall at this moment Frank Kermode's reference to Carlyle, who defined the symbol as "concealment yet revelation" (The Romantic Image, page 109).

The idea of treating words as an artist would do his clay or block of stone is a helpful one, for Rosenberg's words occasionally have the same smooth surface as the feel of a piece of polished marble or glazed clay--like the clean lines of a carved figure, the words have a concise, sharp-edged

³ Foreword to CW.

meaning. On other occasions, to continue this inexact metaphor, the verbal surface is roughened and grained, the central idea (as in so many of Rodin's smaller pieces or in Michaelangelo's unfinished figures for the Medici tomb in Florence) is seen in the process of emerging from a variegated but amorphous background whose surface is rough-cast, glinting at unexpected angles. This is as near as we can get to explaining the positively dramatic but at the same time 'unfinished' effect achieved by some of his passages. Take as an example of this emergence of the polished from the unpolished before the stage of the 'rounding-out' of the image, lines 7-15 of "Tel's Song":

I have no life at all,
Only thin golden tremors
That shudder over the abyss of days
Which hedged my spirit, my spirit your prison walls
That shrunk like phantasms with your vivid beauty
Towering and widening till
The sad moonless place
Throngs with a million torches
And spears and flaming wings.

After a few readings some grasp of the mood is obtained, a feeling of exultation on Tel's part which is the effect that a girl's beauty has on him. Difficulty arises, however, when we try to pin down this suggestiveness more precisely: it requires some cogitation to discern either the strand of development which connects these images or to mark off the effective area of one image from those preceding or following. This, surely, is what Harding means when he says that Rosenberg "seems to leave every idea partly embedded in the

undifferentiated mass of related ideas from which it has emerged".⁴ The pressure operating behind this passage is not that of logic or of mere intelligibility, still less that of syntactical exposition--it is something only dimly apprehended, yet the total effect of these lines is both pictorial in a mystical way and also remarkably haunting. Any attempt at paraphrase is weak and clumsy; no prose explanation can fully explore the suggestiveness of the original, as this version will show--Tel is reduced to a wavering shadow of his former self, a shadow which is threatened by the abyss of extinction; yet Tel's spirit imprisons the girl's because he has captured within himself the image of her beauty. Her beauty, however, melts these prison walls, and this beauty grows and extends till it fills his formerly sad and moonless existence ("the abyss of days") with splendours. The retention of the dash after "beauty", which appeared in Bottomley's edition of Poems, would help to make the meaning clearer.

The richness of this passage still conveys a sense of mysterious wonder at the power which can achieve such a profound alteration, and, as shown above, the demands of logic and of syntax are left unsatisfied by Rosenberg's attempt to project what he obviously conceived very clearly; these lines make a deep impact on the reader, even if it is lacking in definition. The faint echo of rebel angels in Milton's Hell is all the more effective for not being made explicit.

As a worker in words, however, a poet's prime concern must be to communicate with his readers, either verbally or visually, and Rosenberg treated his position as a poet

⁴ "Aspects of the Poetry of Isaac Rosenberg": Scrutiny, Vol. III, March 1935, page 366.

responsibly:

Simple poetry,--that is where an interesting complexity of thought is kept in tone and right value to the dominating idea so that it is understandable and still ungraspable. I know it is beyond my reach just now, except, perhaps, in bits. I am always afraid of being empty. When I get more leisure in more settled times I will work on a larger scale and give myself room; then I may be less frustrated in my efforts to be clear, and satisfy myself too.' (CW, page 371).

As remarked upon earlier, he thought about poetry deeply and took critical comment seriously:

I am not going to refute your criticisms; in literature I have no judgment--at least for style. If in reading a thought has expressed itself to me, in beautiful words; my ignorance of grammar etc, makes me accept that. I should think you are right mostly; and I may yet work away your chief objections (CW, page 294).

This concern with his ability to communicate must be one of the reasons behind his decision to redraft Moses. He himself was obviously not satisfied with the first version as it stood and he wanted to improve not only the poetry, but also the narrative and the characterisation. If we examine the three drafts of Moses we can see the problems which Rosenberg found facing him and also form our own opinions about how successful he was in finding solutions.

Various drafts of Moses

The first draft (henceforth referred to as Draft I) consists of one scene in typescript of one hundred and sixty-eight lines and it involves four characters--Moses, Abinoah an Overseer and two Hebrews. Moses is introduced to us by fifty-two lines of dialogue between the two Hebrews; although the speakers are labelled merely "First Hebrew" and "Second Hebrew", they are differentiated in respect of their attitude towards Moses. The First Hebrew is suspicious of Moses' motives in undertaking a "venture" against their

Egyptian masters, while the Second Hebrew is more sympathetic towards Moses and has found in him a source of inspiration, regarding his common heritage with Hebrews to be more significant than his alien upbringing; not just a leader, Moses is an artist, an idealist craving perfection. Obviously, Moses finds the Hebrews do not come up to his expectations, for he is searching their eyes for some response to his "muffled meanings".

The speech which follows this (lines 42-55) is also attributed to the Second Hebrew which is presumably an error in the typescript, as it argues against trusting Moses because his loyalty to the establishment is suspected by Abinoah. There is no love lost between Moses and Abinoah as the former has as his mistress Koelue, Abinoah's daughter. When Abinoah appears, Rosenberg has pencilled in the margin the information that he "has been taking haschish and feels lively"; this presumably is meant to explain the bitterness of his words about the Hebrews. His invective and beating of one of the Hebrews is interrupted by a song which Moses is heard singing from a distance, but the song has been altered from one beginning--"A naked African/Walked in the sun . . ." (which was reincorporated in Draft II) to a song full of the feelings of tension and foreboding in which the air is still and the leaves on the tree lie motionless. Yet within a few lines the mood of the song has altered to that of the simple pleasure of merely being alive. This is in the sharpest contrast to the conditions Moses is in when he confronts Abinoah who prolongs his beating in order to provoke some response from Moses.

When Moses' attempts at intercession are brushed aside,

and Abinoah reminds Moses that he is Moses' prospective father-in-law, Moses takes the opportunity to put Abinoah in his place in the social hierarchy; as Koelue's father Abinoah feels he can criticize Moses with impunity. So secure does he feel that he unwisely tells Moses he knows the secret of Moses' origin, whereupon Moses decides that Abinoah must be disposed of. His rejoinder to Abinoah at this point is one of the very few lines in this draft to show signs of reworking. Line 125 originally ran--"I'll smudge your life out like a bug's". This displayed, so Rosenberg probably felt, the right degree of contemptuous loathing toward Abinoah on Moses' part but he has searched around for a formula which would transmit the same quality of emotion but in a haughtier and more elevated manner (although Moses' previous exchanges with Abinoah have been on Abinoah's level of scurrilous abuse). The typescript bears several alternative versions, but there is no evidence to suggest in what order these emendations were made. If, however, one accepts that Rosenberg was attempting to dignify Moses' response, then some sequence of alterations can be suggested. The first emendation is a short line: "You stench of man", which gives way to the splendid abuse of "You mud bank of the Nile you stink/Your life is not very necessary". This latter version restores the threat to Abinoah's life which was so patent in the original draft; although the second line is metrically inadequate. The final version is also a pair of lines to replace the single line of the first draft:

O you ambiguous and unnecessary stench

Your existence is not so necessary.

The obvious weakness here lies in the hissing repetition of

"necessary" within two short lines. As is evident from Drafts II and III of Moses, the comparison of Abinoah to an unpleasant and pervasive odour and the threat to his life are the elements of this retort which Rosenberg wished to preserve and his problem was simply to find the most expressive way of combining them. In Draft II he resolved it into an economical threat--

O you ambiguous and unnessesary stench
You'll be more interesting as a mummy
I have no doubt.

This exposition emphasises how Rosenberg has at this moment turned away from the Exodus story. Exodus 12:2 gives the traditional version of the story that Moses killed the overseer because he was beating a Hebrew. Rosenberg's Moses, as has been observed, is equipped with a more immediate personal reason for acting in this way than the humanitarian ground for action attributed to the Biblical Moses. The accepted picture of Moses is that of an impulsive man of action to whom the murder of the overseer is a deed of revenge performed in the heat of the moment: the Moses Rosenberg presents us with is a dangerous, scheming politician whose revenge on Abinoah is premeditated and executed only when the latter is enjoying a false feeling of security as he is being taken into Moses' confidence.

After another exchange in which Abinoah foolhardily endangers his life still further by telling Moses that his "strained aspect and dissimulation" have aroused the suspicions of the Egyptian authorities, Moses' final speech poses a curious question--"Why do I vindicate myself to you?" This is curious because this is the one thing he has certainly

not been doing; what he has been doing, in fact, has been to stand very firmly on his authority as an Egyptian prince. Presumably the sense here is that Moses is saying he will not explain his suspicious conduct to the mean-spirited Abinoah. Moses continues by asserting that Abinoah's narrow view of the world leads him to make his private vengeance the cause of his trying to discredit Moses in public. Finally Moses gives a clear statement of his own desire for power, and what he wishes to do when he has it:

I would be skilled in arts of government,
And shape one impulse thro' the contraries
Of vain ambitious men, selfish and callous,
And frail, life-drifting natures reticent.
Likeness thro' bulk-nation's grand harmony.
Here are the springs ----- primeval elements;
The roots hid secrecy, old source of race.
Unreasoned reason of the savage instinct.

I have a lust in me, a hunger to mast- [?ery]

The general sense that Moses wishes to control men, to recreate their natures in the likeness of his own, is clear, but the phrasing here is difficult and interpretation is further hindered by eccentric punctuation. Moses' basic manifesto, however, remains unchanged throughout the next two drafts of Moses; Rosenberg's attempts to make his meaning clearer in Draft III do clarify as well as lengthen the exposition but they weaken the poetic impact of these lines. In their original form the lines reflect, in their weighted, ungainly movement, the nature of the immense effort and difficulty which such a revolution will involve. Moses intends to reassert the pre-eminence of the "unreasoned reason of the
savage

instinct", but this reawakening of consciousness will be an uncomfortable process and the establishment of his "gorgeous tyranny" will involve the crushing of any opposition.

One other reworking of a line is worth noting--at line 157. The first version of this line was "And can all Thebes deepest teach me more?", which presumably refers to Thebes in upper Egypt, a city which shares its name with the source of federal government in Greece: if the theory that the Ptolemaic dynasty is Macedonian in origin is true, then this may explain the similarity of the names. This suggestion of Moses' cultural background disappears under Rosenberg's pencil when this reference is replaced by a remark more typical of Rosenberg's Moses--"I have a lust in me, a hunger to maul" or ". . . to mastery". The reading is uncertain here as the last word in this line runs off the edge of the page and in Rosenberg's hand there is little distinction between "maul" and "mast". "Maul" may be preferable because it does not involve any conjecture, it fits in rhythmically and metrically to the irregular pentameters in which most of Moses is cast, and moreover it may be the action appropriate to a man who has already been referred to as "a naked African" who is able to slay a tiger, the epitome of "the savage instinct". (Not until Draft III is Moses compared directly to a leopard). On the other hand, it could be that "maul" is inaccurate here, that in this context "mastery" is much more relevant to Moses' argument than mere animal mauling. "Mastery", it is clear, would be an extra-metrical insertion and would provide the line with a feminine ending which is infrequent in Rosenberg; but the pentameters here are neither orthodox or of uniform length so it cannot be ruled out on the basis of

rhythmical regularity alone. If this line is compared with the third variant reading, which is retained in the corresponding part of Draft II:

I have a trouble in my mind for largeness.

A purity in the roughhearted manner . . .

the sense conveyed by "mastery" is very much closer to these lines than is that of "maul", and this is surely the decisive factor. Added to this is the fact that line 246 of Draft II corresponds almost exactly to "I have a lust in me, a hunger to mastery"; although this line is now spoken by Abinoah, the "lust" in Moses referred to by Abinoah is one "to domineer", not one 'to destroy'.

Once again it is clear that in these emergent variations Rosenberg is concerned to emphasise the craving for power in Moses' character in preference to his initial conception of Moses as a politically sophisticated leader. It is noticeable that there is no mention of God's plan for his people; the long dialogue in Exodus 3:7-20 in which God gives Moses the task of leading the Israelites out of bondage has no place in Rosenberg's concept of Moses as a leader. Indeed, Moses' view of his own nature and of his purpose takes no account of God. God in Moses is not required in the establishment of "a purity in the roughhearted manner", and the only appearance of the deity in the drama is in association with the decaying and corrupt society of the Egyptians. Moses' reshaping of human lives and nature does not for one moment involve the Egyptians; their society is presumably worthless and beyond redemption so it is to be used merely as a springboard for launching the Hebrews on a new venture. Yet despite Moses' tacit ignoring of God, he is not aiming

solely at secular power--his plan is not for a bloodless coup which will give him political leadership, but for a rebellion which will leave him as both spiritual and temporal head of a people; nor does he anywhere indicate that the quality of the Hebrews' life will be tangibly improved under despotism. These brief comments may serve to indicate the gulf which exists between Rosenberg's Moses and the Biblical leader of Exodus.

Draft II which is in holograph (ink) on the pages of a diary for 1914 shows a considerable advance on Draft I. In mere externals the differences are slight--the length has increased by one hundred and twenty-one lines and a fifth character, Abinoah's daughter Koelue, makes a brief but lyrical appearance. The length of the action is now too great for the compass of a single scene, so the original single scene is prefaced by another of sixty-six lines in which Moses introduces himself, very effectively, in soliloquy. Revealing of character as this soliloquy is, it does not rivet the attention in any dramatic sense, so Rosenberg further recast this opening scene in Draft III.

The first fifty lines of Scene I are completely new, although they have affinities with some of Rosenberg's shorter poems and fragments (see, for example, Fragment VI, lines 1-7, "Girl's Song", lines 5-7, "Day", lines 116-122). (There are also coincidental similarities between lines 80-82:

All day some slow dark quadruped beats

To pulp our springiness

All day some hooped animal treads our veins . . .

and lines 172-175 of Swinburne's "Anactoria" which refer to God:

. . . his hidden face and iron feet
Hath not man known, and felt them on their way
Threaten and trample all things and every day?
Hath he not sent us hunger?

--as well as with Yeats's "The Countess Cathleen" (1892):

The years like great black oxen tread the world,
And God the herdsman goads them on behind . . .)

In these lines Moses is revealed as a man who is just becoming conscious of his own power, becoming aware that he has some sort of destiny to fulfil. Initially, he is hemmed in by the "cowled lost impossible things" in his own mind, which seem to be manifestations of a fear of failure. A new vital age is dawning and this prospect inspires him to put his ideas into practice now, to hang back no longer, to expose himself to the power he feels rising within him, to break the silence of sloth and acquiescence. Silence is the besetting sin, and Moses can see 'the writing on the wall':

Lo! on the air is scrawled in abysmal light
Old myths never known and yet already forgone,
And songs more lost, more secret than desert light.

This apocalyptic glimpse of what the future can hold demands freedom from social conventions, "unwalled/To human byways", but such a realization of human potentiality cannot be envisaged in detail, just "Understood only in its gleaming".

Lines 35-47 are an indictment of Egyptian society for its dullness and sterility, and Moses acknowledges that violence is necessary to break out of this confinement, to escape his own degeneration although the hedonistic life of the court has a seductive charm about it. At this point occurs the song removed from Draft I and its relevance is immediately

apparent--Moses is clearly the naked African (who reappears in both The Amulet and The Unicorn) who has the strength to slay the tiger, supported by a woman's love (presumably Koelue's). The reference in line 55 of this draft to the panther as a source of energy and life is also to be found in lines from Swinburne's "Summer in Auvergne":

Dawn, as a panther springs,
With fierce and fire-fledged wings
Leaps on the land that rings

From her bright feet . . . (lines 9-12).

This song, however, marks a point of departure; he is growing in spirit and energy, driven by his desire to seek for power and by comparison she is diminishing, remaining earth-bound and confined to loving a single individual. Like God, Moses wishes to create a fairer mankind; his embrace has extended to encompass the world, and Koelue is insufficient to occupy this grasp.

By a neat ironic touch, Scene II is opened by Koelue singing her song of sensual desire and longing: this is ^a dramatically valid method of obtaining our sympathy for the deceived girl, which is increased when we hear of the dislike the Hebrews have for her merely on account of her father. One change from Draft I which Rosenberg has made at this point is to turn First Hebrew into Old Hebrew and Second Hebrew into Young Hebrew, and the speeches which follow are easily ascribed to the correct speaker as the Old Hebrew is full of fear and suspicions, hardened by long suffering while the Young Hebrew is idealistic and filled with Moses' revolutionary fervour. Old Hebrew expresses at lines 80-86 what must have been a frequent lament throughout history; being

God's chosen seems in retrospect to have brought on them more humiliations and disasters than honours and joys. The weighty syllables and slow movement of the lines here well expresses the crushing domination of the Egyptians. Young Hebrew, by contrast, is impatient of subservience to predictions of gloom derived from past experience and can only testify to Moses' ability to generate fanatical support and zeal for escape among the oppressed; in a race whose records are crammed with heroic figures Moses towers over all (lines 96-113). (This predominance of Moses reflects the strictness of the historical Moses' authority which was indicated by the long period in the wilderness into which he led the Hebrews on their release from Egypt: it would have been possible to reach Canaan from Egypt in forty days, but Moses took years over the journey in order to break the Hebrews' ties with Egypt and to discipline them before they joined the idolatrous Canaanites). At this point the movement of the verse is much freer, its energy and variety reflecting a young man's passionately-felt enthusiasm.

A further word of warning from Old Hebrew (still in error referred to as First Hebrew) about Moses' distance from the slaves prompts Second Hebrew to pour out a more fully-developed version of lines 20-41 of Draft I in which Moses' kinship with ^{the} Hebrews is emphasised. The speech which follows this at line 144 is attributed to Old Hebrew, but the speaker was originally Second Hebrew as at lines 42-55 in Draft I, yet its tone of disillusionment and cynical memories of false prophets (lines 146-149):

But I who am gray
Have seen so often concious imposters

Or such who have imposed upon themselves

Have seen many heroic rebels--lost . . .

clearly contradicts the words of Second Hebrew above it.

Beside the first six lines of this speech Moses has noted a reminder, "Leave 10 lines space"; but in Draft III there is no interpolation at this point of an extra ten lines. What happens there is that the speech is expanded slightly but lines 300-308 (of Draft III) introduce a new reason for suspecting Moses: Old Hebrew perceptively argues that Moses' refusal to implement the tooth-drawing edict is merely a devious method to ensure the Hebrews' support. Lines 150-163 of this draft are transferred practically verbatim to Young Hebrew in Draft III. After line 149 are two cancelled lines which clearly resemble line three of Draft I:

Moses is inexperienced and will fail

Because his flesh is wild and will suffer for it . .

Maybe, on consideration, Rosenberg felt that these lines did not add anything to Old Hebrew's view of Moses--in which case he was right.

Abinoah's entry is prefaced by the hint from Draft I about his hashish taking, but to this is added that he "has one obsession hatred of Jews". Lines 165-174 are identical with lines 56-65 in Draft I and contain Abinoah's contemptuous attack on the Hebrews. The last line of Moses' song (line 181) is altered from "Now is life wonderful" to "How wonderful to have lived", although both lines exist in the pencil emendations to Draft I: the only effect of this alteration is to put the trees' enjoyment of life into the past, so reflecting the Hebrews' view that the present can only be endured with the aid of pleasant memories. As in

Draft I, Moses and Abinoah have a heated exchange over Abinoah's right to beat Old Hebrew, who has now collapsed in a faint. At the point in Draft I where Moses accuses Abinoah of being drunk, the present draft expands the moment to allow Moses time to warn him against impudence, using the image of "bronze claws" which can be found again in "God", lines 8-9. Between lines 203 and 204 Rosenberg has deleted a rather weak and pompous line--"But you must behave more properly my man". Abinoah's retort is that his pretended affection for Moses gives him the right to be impudent, or, possibly, that he relies on the affection which he expects Moses to have for his father-in-law to excuse him.

Moses warns Abinoah that he (Abinoah) is merely a servant of Moses, and at lines 211-212 this speech gives a good example of Rosenberg's reworking an image (in this case unsuccessfully) because the words of the original carry inappropriate overtones. The version which appears in Draft I at lines 98-99:

Because you're dung

Out of which grew a lovely rose for me . . .

has point, pungency and economy. In Draft II Rosenberg first of all emended these lines to read:

Because dull fool

You gave a pink delicious apple for me . . .

which is obviously less successful, the suggestions of "pink" and "delicious" being somewhat inapplicable to the daughter of an Egyptian overseer. It may be that Rosenberg was seeking to escape the traditional cliché of love being like a rose, but the mention of "dung" as the fertilizer which produces this beauty grounds the image in reality: moreover, the causal relationship between "dung" and "rose" is much

closer than that between "dull fool" and the apple he gave.

This image has in turn been replaced by a further variation which is left unaltered:

Because crabbed tree

You grew a ruddy juiced apple for me.

But this is even weaker than the preceding image: the contrast between the "crabbed tree" and the attractive apple it produces is an illuminating one, as is the accuracy of "crabbed" to describe Abinoah's mean vindictiveness as well as to evoke the customary bitterness of crab-apples. Where this image fails is in the inappropriateness of "ruddy" and the strange-sounding "juiced". By "ruddy", as by "pink", Rosenberg doubtless meant to convey that Koelue was ready for marriage, fully ripened into maturity (while "delicious" and "juiced" refer to her desirability): however, the inescapable reaction of the reader is to accept "pink" and "ruddy" as attributes of Koelue's complexion, which clearly makes nonsense of the description. It should be obvious that as these lines in Draft II stand they are still inferior to their originals in Draft I. Yet once Rosenberg drops his preference for the tree and apple he finds a very powerful substitute in Draft III which exactly captures Moses' feelings towards Abinoah at this moment:

. . . Where a certain slave of mine, a thing, a toad,
Shifting his belly, showed a diamond
Where he had lain.

Another textual alteration has been made at line 220 which was originally followed by:

Am I not father of a prince's concubine
Why should I not get drunk?

--which expanded and explained line 220 (on the model of line 112 of Draft I). Rosenberg's judgment was serving him well here, as these lines only repeat information already known to the reader and do not carry the action forward. The quicker exchange of lines which results from this omission only makes Moses' claim that Koelue got what she asked for seem more brutal.

Abinoah's unwise revelations about the circumstances of Moses' birth are retained in Draft II, but a stage-direction accounts for his recklessness by blaming it on the hashish he has consumed; this is accompanied by an explicit suggestion that Moses is a bastard, the son of "a quick wit Jewish girl" who was originally (and less interestingly) described as "trembling".

Lines 249-250:

. . . Doubtless the old instinct to bully my girl

Making a gaping in my hachich dreams . . .

call for a comment. It seems unlikely that they refer to Moses' bullying of Koelue (of which there is no other evidence) and the conclusion that they mean Abinoah's old bullying of his daughter is confirmed by Moses' remark at line 257. Granted that this is so, the remark is a puzzling instant of self-revelation which seems wholly uncharacteristic of Abinoah. Draft III removes this inconsistency by transferring these lines to Moses at lines 425-426. Two lines later in the present draft Abinoah introduces a new charge against Moses--that of pride--which is followed by an alteration of line 135 of Draft I. This read:

. . . The smirch you made, the good you drew in me . . .

--but Draft II alters the final "me" to "you". In either case, a satisfactory explanation of the line is difficult to

provide, and in the following draft the line disappears altogether.

Moses' odd question about vindicating himself, already commented on in relation to Draft I (page 240 above) is retained, but his long final speech reappears virtually unchanged. Line 264 gives us Moses assessing his behaviour as:

All sunlike actions and original . . .

which was also in Draft I at line 146, but this expression did not survive into Draft III. It does, however, afford one illustration (more will be found at the end of this chapter) of the affinity between Moses and Nietzsche's Apollonian artist whose ". . . eye must be 'sunlike', according to his origin" (The Birth of Tragedy, Section 1, page 25). One alteration is that of "Likeness thro' bulk" (line 153 of Draft I) to "Litheness thro bulk" which is obviously more intelligible and suggests that "Likeness" was very probably a typist's misreading of "Litheness". A second change is also a minor one: "A purity in thorough hearted manner" becomes "A purity in the roughhearted manner", which is more characteristic of Moses and echoes Young Hebrew's view of him at line 100 as a being of "such unhuman shaggy turbulence".

Draft III is a considerable expansion of its predecessor, its length having spread to four hundred and sixty-nine lines and the number of its characters to six. It exists only in the versions printed in Poems (1922), Complete Works (1937) and Collected Poems (1949). As noted earlier, Rosenberg has once more varied (and improved upon) the opening of the play. The addition of twenty-seven lines of dialogue between Moses and Pharoah's messenger paints very clearly the relationship between Moses and Pharoah which sparks off this whole episode.

The language of Pharoah's command is high-handed and peremptory:

The sixteenth pyramid remains to be built. We give you the last draft of slaves. Move! Forget not the edict.

--and is violently contrasted with the earthy actuality of the Messenger's explanation which immediately follows it:

The royal paunch of Pharoah dangled worriedly,
Not knowing where the wrong. Viands once giant-like
Came to him thin and thinner. What rats gnawed?
Horror! The swarm of slaves. The satraps swore
Their wives' bones hurt them when they lay abed
That before were soft and plump. The people howled
They'd boil the slaves three days to get their fat,
Ending the famine.

When Moses is left alone he soliloquises as in Draft II, but his soliloquy is longer by one hundred and four lines which present a dimension of Moses not shown before; this is the remarkable energy and power of the man himself, the intensity of the ambition which is driving him and the ruthlessness he will practise in order to achieve his end. The quality of the first thirty-seven of these extra lines has already been discussed (see above, pages 196-197). From line 66 to line 88 Moses is devising a way of turning the tooth-drawing edict to his own advantage, and his reference to the people he needs to follow him shows clearly that his purpose has nothing philanthropic about it (see lines 83-86 already quoted on page 223). Lines 89-98 record how his new devotion to the deity of power has removed the mountain of his thoughts which had stood like an obstacle between his will and his ability to act.

At line 99 Moses contemplates his reflection in a glass and comments how it only shows the "Ruddy flesh soon hueless" not "The lasting bare body" which is his soul. His soul is called upon to sing to him (thus dividing the very long soliloquy) and this song repeats, almost identically, lines 1-19 of Draft II, which is followed by lines 20-36 of Draft II now spoken by Moses himself. Lines 37-39 of Draft II have been replaced by an expanded section (lines 142-149) which puts forward, very unambiguously, Moses' feelings about the authoritarian institutions of God and society--"Who has made of the forest a park?" The Blakean echoes here are inescapable (There is, in addition, an echo here of Zarathustra's contempt for passive conformity, found on pages 249-250 of Thus Spake Zarathustra:

Virtue is what maketh modest and tame. Thereby they
have made the wolf a dog and man himself man's best
domestic animal.

and lines 150-155 express how Moses feels he has been called to do a great work of destruction--"Only putrefaction is free". Lines 156-176 of Draft III correspond to lines 40-60 of the previous version, but they are followed now by a soliloquy which was printed by Marsh in Georgian Poetry III (1917). It is a much more concretely-realized development of the last six lines of Draft II's first scene, and it contains an imaginative vigour which is missing in the latter. Such a line as "Two amorous sculptures passioned endlessly" conjures up at once memories of the Grecian Urn, yet "passioned" is suggestive of both the figures in a frieze and of the spirit impelling the hand that carved them. The progress of Moses' thought is away from human love and towards the impersonality of the inspired leader of a people, and this is reflected in the succession of images at this point: the tree

is the initial symbol of towering strength and aspiring will, beside which the merely conventional romanticism of Koelue is grass at its roots. The symbol of Koelue's restricted emotional reaction is represented by the kiss which Moses metamorphoses in his imagination into a completely non-human "huge kiss of power". In a similar way Koelue's hair is transformed into the shaggy mane of a wild beast; his desire, no longer aroused by her slender form, will respond now only to the animate but inarticulate "dizzy beast of the world". The human objective has become animal, sexual love has been superseded by ambition and "the will to power".

The second scene opens in the same way as in the previous version, but Old Hebrew's response to Koelue's song has become much more vindictive:

Hateful harlot. Boils cover your small cruel face . . .
The exchange between the two Hebrews which follows closely resembles the corresponding passage in Draft II. Old Hebrew's fine evocation of the sufferings of the Hebrews is preserved intact from Draft II, as is Young Hebrew's answer which dwells on the Messianic qualities he sees in Moses. Young Hebrew's vindication of Moses as a Hebrew beneath his Egyptian exterior is also reproduced in substantially the same form as in the preceding draft, save that Rosenberg has improved the tightness of its construction and its immediacy. So at line 259:

. . . Our pain has pierced hid tunneled ways . . .
becomes more explicitly:

. . . Our pain has pierced dead generations . . .
which increases the emphasis on a common heritage so dear to Young Hebrew. A more extensive recasting occurs later in this speech at lines 273-283. Here the generalizations of

Draft II about Moses' deception of the Egyptian pyramid-builders gain added power by being made concrete. The lines which Moses scratches on the sand to illustrate problems of mechanics and construction take on a new significance; to the perceptive Young Hebrew these lines on the sand are

Limned turrets and darkness, chinks of light,
Half beasts snorting into the light,
A phantasmagoria, wild escapade
To our hearts' clue . . .

Moses' designs are a manifesto for rebellion, an appeal to the "primeval elements" till now latent within the oppressed Hebrews, and they express clearly Moses' own animal energies. The ambiguity of the writing in the sand is vividly realised in--

What swathed meanings peer
From his workaday council, washed to and from
Your understanding till you doubt
That a word was said . . .

but Moses hints enough to arouse the Hebrews' "starved hopes".

As has been noted before, not all of Rosenberg's reworkings are completely successful. Old Hebrew's suspicions of false prophets are here expanded from four to fourteen lines (279-302); in the process there is a gain in concreteness, but this is more than matched by the resultant diffuseness: compare these lines with lines 146-149 of Draft II which appear on pages 247-8 above. The fourteen lines which follow this speech correspond to lines 151-163 of Draft II, but here they are spoken by Young Hebrew (as they were by Second Hebrew in Draft I): the vigour of the invective against Abinoah it contains is more characteristic of Young Hebrew's hot-headed enthusiasm than it is of the tired cynicism of

Old Hebrew, whose words they were in Draft II:

. . . Like a bad smell from the soul of Moses dipt
In the mire of lust . . .

Moses' song in this draft is lengthened by the addition of five lines about the calculated vindictiveness of God (which appear again in "God" at lines 11-15), and although Old Hebrew is beaten blind--"I see/Like a rain about a devouring fire"--he detects a Messianic quality in Moses' voice. Another point of interest here is that Moses has appeared disguised as an aged minstrel, so that he can trap Abinoah into expressing his contemptuous detestation of the Hebrews before he throws off this costume in a grand dramatic gesture and gives Abinoah a timely warning about the perils of insubordination. His reference to "bronze claws" in line 379 has a ring about it of Shakespeare's opening line to Sonnet 19:

Devouring Time, blunt thou the lion's paws . . .

Lines 385-395 are closely related in meaning and tone to their predecessors (lines 210-219) in Draft II. This passage does, however, contain Rosenberg's final version of the image which had caused him so much difficulty earlier (see pages 249-250 above). The crabbed tree and its delicious fruit give way to a loathsome toad which has a jewel concealed under its belly, and to a blind and dumb messenger whose message is joyful although beyond its bearer's comprehension. Rosenberg's resolution of his problem in this instance is a success--the image of the toad sums up accurately Moses' feelings toward Abinoah, although the additional image of the messenger weakens a little the impact of the former.

Another minor improvement occurs in lines 401-402, where Abinoah comments that the dowry Prince Imra would pay for Koelue is "his honey-hives and vineyards", which makes him

seem slightly less mercenary than his counterpart in Draft II who talked of ^a thousand shekels: this is a slight softening of the otherwise harsh and unsympathetic portrait, and it is hard to see why Rosenberg preferred this version save merely on the grounds that hives and vineyards produce a smoother run of the verse than shekels.

Abinoah's knowledge of the secret of Moses' birth is presented here in a slightly different form. Instead of the reference to the ark in the bulrushes (as in Draft II, lines 227-233) Abinoah changes his threat to the announcement that Moses has a sister Miriam, whom he meets secretly every night. The force of this is that it paints Moses as a deceiver of Pharoah, for "A king calls for his son in vain"; not only is Moses not an Egyptian but Abinoah knows that his behaviour has been compromising and Moses would have some explaining to do if this were made public.

The framework for Moses' final speech of intention is more carefully constructed than in the two earlier versions. Abinoah, aware of Moses' doubtful loyalties, has warned Prince Imra to come to arrest Moses, having spent a considerable time in carefully accumulating his evidence: in order to keep Moses under his eye till Imra can arrive Abinoah pretends to take an affectionate interest in Moses--though his spiteful remark that Imra has replaced Moses in both Pharoah's and Koelue's affections reveals a flash of the fiery Moses we have only seen in the descriptions of Young Hebrew. This interest encourages Moses, who is also simulating friendship in order to lure Abinoah into feeling secure alone with him, to launch out on a final speech which is longer by only six lines than the earlier version.

The opening lines of this speech are full of guile and they also contain undeniable echoes of Jacobean dramatic blank verse:

I am a rebel, well?

Soft! You are not, and we are knit so close

It would be shame for a son to be so honoured

And the father still unknown . . .

these echoes are detectable not only in vocabulary, such as "I am a rebel, well?", "Soft!" and "Knit so close", but also in the smoothness and regularity of the pentameters here. With deceptive friendliness Moses takes Abinoah into his confidence, inviting him to "Look round on the night". The next five lines are an addition to the speech in Draft II and they contain the clearest expression of the antithesis which Moses sees between his own ideals and the values of Egyptian society--the gulf is as fixed as that between night and day. Yet what Moses plans is equivalent to a mixing of night with light which would obviate the need for a dawn (which suggests the growth of awareness or of liberty, gradually). Egypt is the Hebrews' night and it is to be struck out: the result is a fusion of the two cultures--"No night or light would be, but a new thing"--which runs counter to earlier suggestions that the only use Moses has for Egyptian society is in its ruin. The first twelve lines of the Draft II speech have been replaced by Moses' treacherous 'winning' of Abinoah and by these lines on the abolition of night; other lines from Draft II are rearranged. By transposing lines 273-275 of Draft II so that they now precede lines 268-272 the development of Moses' thought in Draft III (lines 449-455) gains from a strengthening of the logic but also from an intensification of Moses' revolutionary enthusiasm. This is the only

alteration made in this final version of these seven lines, apart from the replacing of "thro" by "thread" in line 455, which attracts the attention of the reader to this half-line in order to emphasise the importance of this paradox: this metaphor recurs almost immediately in line 460. As in this line, so in line 455, "thread" cannot be anything else but a verb.

In the last section of his speech Moses again declares to Abinoah his prescription for curing the Hebrews' ills. They are not beyond salvation, but merely lacking a leader, a goal; once given such a man they will develop into a progressive, active society, whose chief aspiration will be to achieve the "solidity" of a mountain (we recall "Here is the quarry quiet for me to hew" from line 448) rather than the 'builded', architected surface of a pyramid. Moses will not be building with the smoothed and squared blocks of the pyramid-builders, but with "these rude elements"; his achievement will not be a clean-cut symmetrical memorial to the dead, but "a thing,/Ineffable and useable," which because of its complexity and the disparate elements which compose it cannot finally be expressed any more distinctly than this.

The final irony is that Moses is honest in telling his plans to Abinoah, as we can judge. He can well afford to be, as the overseer's death is necessary on two counts; firstly, his knowledge is dangerous to Moses, and secondly he would obviously resist the establishment of such a reign of freedom. As noted on page 202, however, this violence breeds violence, for Moses is left with a dead body on his hands to confront the forces of his rival Prince Imra, who have come to arrest Moses on Abinoah's instructions. The immediate

prospect, as Charles Tomlinson has remarked in his essay, is stalemate.

It was claimed earlier that this final version of Moses is the most polished of the three, but at the same time it has become more diffuse as a result of Rosenberg's desire to explain himself as he goes along. This loss of concentration is very clear in this final speech and an illustration from Draft II should clinch the point:

My brainful fingers will charm these wild herbs
Unto a rich deliverence brave juices.
Barbaric love to bring forth tenderness
Cunning, to nurture wisdom, wise desires
Meanness enlarged to prudence
And hugeness be a driving wedge to truth.
Thus these rude elements would I grandly fashion
Into some newer nature, a consciousness
Like naked light siezing the all eyed soul
Oppressing with its gorgeous tyranny
Until they take it thus--or die

The corresponding passage in Draft III differs from this, but not merely in respect of the two additional lines:

All that's low I'll charm;
Barbaric love sweeten to tenderness.
Cunning run into wisdom, craft turn to skill.
Their meanness threaded right and sensibly
Change to a prudence, envied and not sneered.
Their hugeness be a driving wedge to a thing,
Ineffable and useable, as near
Solidity as human life can be.
So grandly fashion these rude elements

Into some newer nature, a consciousness
Like naked light seizing the all-eyed soul,
Oppressing with its gorgeous tyranny
Until they take it thus--or die.

The earlier version surpasses the latter with expressions like "brainful fingers", while "hugeness be a driving wedge to truth" is much stronger, both metrically and in sense than "hugeness be a driving wedge to a thing". Yet in Draft III, "All that's low I'll charm;/Barbaric love sweeten to tenderness" has a Shakespearean flavour lacking in its counterpart. In general terms, however, the later draft achieves an improvement in smoothness at the cost of concentration and sharpness of definition.

From this lengthy comparison we can see the amount of time and effort which Rosenberg devoted to his drama. In a letter to Sydney Schiff (LC, page 7) dated 4th June, 1915 Rosenberg made the earliest reference we have to Moses:

I am also enclosing a sketch for a play, which may interest you; but I want this back as I have no spare copies.

That this was only a "sketch" is borne out in his letter to Marsh from Bury St. Edmunds, dated by inference "late 1915":

The play I mean to work at when I get a chance
(CW, page 304).

Between these letters and the postcard postmarked 19th May, 1916 (not published in Complete Works) which refers to his bringing proofs of Moses to Raymond Buildings for Marsh to see, we have much evidence in his letters of his continuing activity in evolving and developing both diction and characterisation. There was obviously some sort of draft completed in 1915, and in a letter to R. C. Trevelyan from France (postmarked 15th June, 1916 and printed on page 350

of CW) he explains:

I know my faults are legion; a good many must be put down to the rotten conditions I wrote it in--the whole thing was written in barracks, and I suppose you know what an ordinary soldiers life is like.

The letter to Miss Seaton which mentions the "curious plot" (CW, page 369) was conjecturally dated "before Easter 1916", so the third version was clearly being drafted then. Thus Rosenberg was working on the text for approximately the year which elapsed between his first mention of the early draft--through the period at Farnborough when he wrote:

I have been working on 'Moses'--in my mind, I mean (CW, page 369)

--and the date of its publication which seems to have been immediately before his departure for France at the end of May or during the first ten days of June 1916.

It is remarkable enough that he was able to compose anything longer than lyrics under these circumstances:

As I can't work here, I jot little scraps down and will piece it together the first chance I get (ibid).

What he did achieve is a remarkably sustained and closely-knit drama of a highly individual character.

The Amulet and The Unicorn: Textual and Critical Problems

Within a few weeks of his arrival in France Rosenberg was writing to Mrs. Cohen about an idea for a successor to Moses:

I am thinking of a Jewish play with Judas Macabeas for hero. I can put a lot in I've learnt out here. I hope I get the chance to go on with it (CW, page 348).

During this period he also wrote to Laurence Binyon on the same topic:

I have thoughts of a play round our Jewish hero, Judas Maccabeus. I have much real material here, and also there is some parallel in the savagery of the invaders then to this war. I am not decided whether truth of

period is a good quality or a negative one. Flaubert's 'Salambo' proves, perhaps, that it is good. It decides the tone of the work, though it makes it hard to give the human side and make it more living. However, it is impossible now to work and difficult even to think of poetry, one is so cramped intellectually (CW, page 373).

Despite the difficulty of working at poetry in the trenches, Rosenberg kept the project in mind for several months, so that as late as February 1917 he is writing to Bottomley possibly in reference to the latter's question:

I do believe I could make a fine thing of Judas. Judas as a character is more magnanimous than Moses, and I believe I could make it very intense and write a lot from material out here (CW, page 374).

By this time another idea had suggested itself to him, as he announced to Edward Marsh in a letter dated 4th August, 1916:

I have a fine idea for a most gorgeous play, Adam and Lilith. If I could get a few months after the war to work and absorb myself completely into the thing, I'd write a great thing (CW, page 311).

Compare also the letter to Bottomley postmarked 12th June, 1916:

I had ideas for a play called 'Adam and Lilith' before I came to France, but I must wait now (CW, page 370).

Before pursuing the development of this Adam and Lilith idea, we should maybe pause to consider why Judas Maccabeus appealed to him as a dramatic subject and search for a clue as to why the idea was dropped. Moses emerges from Rosenberg's handling of him as a very unsympathetic, if admirable, character, and in Judas Rosenberg possibly felt that he had found a historical figure whose nature was more congenial to him. It is surely a naïve mistake to suppose that Moses is Rosenberg's ideal man, or that he was modelled on Rosenberg's own personality.

Moses was a violent figure in the sense that violence was a justifiable means--revolution implies some degree of

upheaval--and as his treatment of Abinoah shows he was not averse to using violence on a personal level. The quality of much of his speech reveals and revels in violence, although Rosenberg himself saw it slightly differently:

Moses symbolises the fierce desire for virility, and original action in contrast to slavery of the most abject kind (CW, page 350).

This is very much in keeping with the Nietzschean attitude toward violence which is also evident in Yeats's play The Unicorn from the Stars, which was published in 1908:

Destroy, destroy, destruction is the life-giver!
destroy! (Collected Plays, page 346).

This view is justified by Yeats's Martin, as it is by Rosenberg's Moses: the purpose of such destruction is:

To bring again the old disturbed exalted life, the old splendour . . . (ibid., page 349)

--while one page later the priest, Father John, gives a qualified assent to violence if it will end materialism:

Ah, if one could change it all in a minute, even by war and violence! (ibid., page 350)

On another occasion he wrote to Miss Seaton about the Mosaic creed being "a vindictive, savage creed" (CW, page 371). This mention of strength in action leads D. W. Harding to comment aptly that "Rosenberg never fully defined his attitude to violence as distinct from strength" (in Scrutiny, Vol. III, March 1935, page 359). (Marius Bewley's essay on Rosenberg⁵ picks up this point when he asks if the individual's bulwark against spiritual destruction is

primarily an affair of the consciousness, a kind of inviolable spiritual integrity, why is it expressed so predominantly in physical terms?

He in fact provides the best answer to his own question by

⁵ Commentary, Vol. VII, (1949), page 43.

referring us to the symbolic figures of the Jews' deliverers from spiritual and physical tyranny--such as Moses and the Maccabees--who are always fierce and militant). It is certainly true that in The Unicorn Rosenberg's emphasis has shifted:

Saul and Lilith are ordinary folk into whose ordinary lives the Unicorn bursts. It is to be a play of terror--terror of hidden things and the fear of the supernatural (CW, page 375).

The appearance of terror may be connected with Rosenberg's own experiences in the front line, for by the time he wrote this letter to Edward Marsh he had already been in France for more than a year.

It is very probable that Rosenberg's experiences as a soldier on active duty led him to consider the similarity of his predicament to those of the Maccabees about 150 B.C. Judas led an ultimately successful revolt against what seemed to be the detestable idolatry of Hellenism then being imposed on them by the Seleucid emperor, Antiochus IV Epiphanes; he lived for a number of years in the hills as the leader of a group of fugitives from persecution who used guerrilla tactics against the Seleucid authorities and their Jewish supporters. When Rosenberg wrote to both Mrs. Cohen and Laurence Binyon (see letters quoted above) he gave as one reason for his interest in Judas that "I have much real material here". Although the front line cannot have had very much in common physically with the atmosphere generated by a band of Jewish resistance fighters, the parallel between the primitive living conditions of the British Expeditionary Force and those of second century B.C. religious outcasts must be what Rosenberg had in mind. The parallel is not simply that of the existence of a state of war, nor is there

any reason to suppose that Rosenberg saw the Germans as the spearhead of an anti-Semitic movement, but the fact that Rosenberg found something in common between Old Testament legend and sophisticated twentieth-century Europe is an indictment of the degrading conditions under which European soldiers were expected to live and fight. In March 1916 he had mentioned to Abercrombie:

. . . the army is the most detestable invention on this earth and nobody but a private in the army knows what it is to be a slave (CW, page 347).

The quality in Judas Maccabeus which Rosenberg singled out for mention in his letters was his magnanimity. Judas was a popular leader in the sense that Moses never was. Like him, however, Judas (whose nickname means "the hammer") founded a lasting organization: Moses left a Jewish nation in Canaan, while Judas re-established the practice of Judaism in Jerusalem and also founded a ruling dynasty. What interested Rosenberg in the person of Judas Maccabeus is probably the latter's emerging as a leader, a focal point of protest at a decisive time; both Moses and Judas were surrounded by a band of devotees, but Judas may well have been less cunning, less ruthless, more humane and sympathetic than the Moses in Rosenberg's play. The pressure of Rosenberg's own experience, no matter how marked were the resemblances between trench life and an outlaw's existence in the Judaeen foothills, presumably led him to desert this idea in favour of another legendary situation into which he could weave more freely his own reactions to his unnatural life. He wanted a vehicle to express fully his conclusions about "war and all the devastating forces let loose by an ambitious and unscrupulous will" (CW, page 379). After

February 1917 we hear no more of Judas and Rosenberg's thoughts now ran back to legends from the Apocrypha and minor prophets in his notions for a play originally entitled Adam and Lilith, which he had first given notice of in June 1916.

The idea of a play on this subject remained with him at least until October when he complained to Marsh that his duties had prevented him working on his plan:

. . . labours of a most colossal and uncongenial shape have usurped her place and driven her blonde and growing beauty away (CW, page 313).

All that is left of this stage of his thought is Fragment I ("Adam"), a snatch of dialogue between Lilith and the Spirit of Dissolution, from which it appears that Lilith is a spirit--"I am a ghost and you are"--the possession of whom Adam has usurped from this Spirit; she is resisting the Spirit's blandishments to consent to the destruction of Adam and his race. Coupled with this is the suggestion that Lilith is the type of earth-mother, thus she is not confined by time, and so is more enduring than Adam.

Certain elements of this fragment survive into The Amulet and The Unicorn which were to follow it. The Spirit of Dissolution is only a personification of the force of evil at work in the world which the Nubian is to tell Lilith is the cause of her loss of Saul's love. Just like his successors, the Nubian and Tel, the Spirit of Dissolution desires Lilith and is rendered powerless by her beauty (we recollect at this point, that Moses, by contrast, had grown in stature beyond the reach of a woman's attractiveness). Another idea which Rosenberg preserved in his later elaborations of this theme is that Adam has ceased to love Lilith, thus she is

the more susceptible to the Spirit's temptation: she has nothing to lose by betraying her "widower". To all appearances she will submit voluntarily to the Spirit, the one condition she requires fulfilled being that the Spirit proves himself stronger than Adam. Does this mean that Lilith shares Eve's weakness, the inability to resist a force stronger (both morally and physically) than the wishes of her husband? Or is Lilith simply obeying the law of the jungle that the female goes to the stronger of two males as he will be better able to protect her? Only on this one occasion does this question arise, for in The Amulet we shall see that when tempted by the Nubian she only toys with the idea of deserting Saul and is soon brought back to the realities of her failed marriage and her responsibilities as a mother by the sound of her son's cry when he gets trapped beneath Saul's shield. In The Unicorn, which moves still further away from this moment of decision, Lilith does not voluntarily submit to Tel at all for she faints and is therefore seized by Tel; she had felt curiously attracted to him but her fear of him as an alien had restrained her from any sign of compliance.

The thirty-one lines of this fragment are nonetheless important for they do contain the germ that was to ripen and develop into the unpolished but impressive The Unicorn.

In his letters from the trenches Rosenberg made no further reference to his work on a play from October 1916 until a letter to Marsh which is undated, but the accompanying envelope in the Marsh Letter Collection is postmarked 27th May 1917. Within these seven months Rosenberg had written and discarded The Amulet, and when we remember the conditions under which he was obliged to work this speed of

gestation and composition is remarkable. There may be some ground for thinking that Rosenberg worked more intensively and, in a sense, more fruitfully, when under pressure: certainly the quality of the best work from the trenches is at least equal to the best of his peacetime writing.

Although Rosenberg dismissed The Amulet so sweepingly, it has something about it which deserves our attention, if only because it is a full-length blueprint for The Unicorn. It is, however, more than a mere quarry from which Rosenberg extracted his rich ore; in its own right it contains some fine poetry--more successfully achieved than in corresponding passages in The Unicorn--as well as the one or two ideas which are central to The Unicorn.

The play opens with an introduction to Saul's wife Lilith and son Amak. The quality of this opening speech has already been commented on (see pages 204-5 above) but despite its shortcomings as dramatic poetry it informs us of the necessary fact that on his travels Saul has met a mysterious stranger who bakes with potent spices and who wears a hypnotizing amulet. Already we suspect that Lilith's marriage is not all that it might be; Saul is at present oblivious in sleep, and Lilith cannot help comparing the mesmeric power the amulet exerted over her will to that once possessed by "Saul's young love".

Lilith then gives a graphic account of Saul's meeting with the stranger amid the glutinous mud which

clung

And licked and clawed and chewed the clogged dragging
wheels . . .

of his cart. In the middle of the storm:

Sudden the lightning flashed upon a figure
Moving as a man moves in the slipping mud
But singing not as a man sings, through the storm,
Which could not drown his sounds.

The figure is a "naked glistening man" who easily frees the cart and accompanies Saul home, bemusing him with his conversation. Lilith herself believes him to be more than mere man:

Was it the storm-spirit, storm's pilot
With all the heaving débris of Noah's sunken days
Dragged on his loins,
Law's spirit wandering to us
Through Nature's anarchy,
Wandering towards us when the Titans yet were young?
Perhaps Moses and Buddha he met.

She sees in him one who can redeem life's mischances and as soon as she draws the Nubian into conversation he reveals himself as a man who has had much experience of the miseries and frustrations of life: he is a person in whom Lilith feels immediate trust, so that she at once pours out her own troubles:

I think there is more sorrow in the world
Than man can bear . . .

--a lament reminiscent of Yeats's early plays, or of the mature Synge. Lilith attributes this sorrow to her own beauty.

The Nubian is not sympathetic toward Lilith's self-dramatizing pity for herself--and, incidentally, his comment "You either bear or break" has a Shakespearian simplicity about it. The beauty Lilith is concerned about is her own purely physical attractiveness, but the Nubian's interest is in beauty of a different order:

both manuscript and typescript versions of the play. The whereabouts of these earlier drafts is now, unhappily, unknown.)

Trapped by her own beauty Lilith may almost wish that she had had the pleasure that went with the defamatory labels of harlot and sorceress. Some measure of defence against this kind of malicious gossip is afforded by their living beneath "the shadow of the pomegranates", (with its hint that they are living in a rural backwater?). Yet her memories are a source of bitterness:

Yet through the shadow of the pomegranates
Filters a poison day by day,
And to a malady turns
The blond, the ample music of my heart.
Inward to eat my heart
My thoughts are worms that suck my softness
all away . . .

which is killing her love for Saul: a situation made all the more painful by her awareness that Saul by now no longer cares for her. His heavy, animal sleep is "over-long" indeed. As in Moses (line 124) sleep is a negation of opportunity. Much in their relationship has changed:

Sleep! hairy hunter, sleep! (Possibly a coinci-
You are not hungry more dental reference Here
Having fed on my deliciousness. to the bible-story of
Esau)
Your sleep is not adultery to me,
For you were wed to a girl
And I am a woman.

My lonely days are not whips to my honour . . .

--and her resentment by now is merely a glowing ember, her

blazing anger and frustration having cooled to sullen discontent.

The Nubian's answer has much in common with the later speech of Tel. He has already been revealed as a figure of great if unobtrusive powers; his nature and function are benevolent, and unlike Moses he has no ambition so he is not aggressive or self-seeking. Seeing Lilith wearing his amulet he begins by soothing remarks on the best way to face life which are reminiscent of Rosenberg's own comments in his letters on the barbarities of trench life--"tolerance is medicinal". What follows immediately after this has even greater significance:

In all our textures are loosed
Pulses straining against strictness
Because an easy issue lies therefrom.

This is the core of the Nubian's advice to Lilith. "Tolerance" must not be confused with resignation--a quality very noticeable in Lilith's comments on her present predicament, for, however much she may resent it, by remaining inactive she in a sense acquiesces in this state of affairs. Inertia, according to the Nubian's view of life, is no answer to the harshness of life. This point of conflict between Lilith and the Nubian does not re-emerge on the meeting of Tel and Lilith in The Unicorn (II). The Nubian defines Lilith's problem as being the jealousy in Saul:

This shadow sits in the texture of Saul's being,
Mauling your love and beauty with its lies . . .
--and he is confident that the powers of the scroll hidden inside his amulet will "shrivel" Saul's "crazed shadow".
This image for jealousy is a curious one and one which

obviously satisfied Rosenberg as it appears in both The Unicorn (II) (lines 157-159), "Adam" (lines 1-2) and "At Night" (lines 1-2 and 19-20), where its symbolism is explained. A shadow normally needs a source of light to create it, most commonly the sun; but jealousy is a venomous shadow which can exist without an obvious cause--remember Emilia in Othello: "They're jealous for they're jealous".

Once the Nubian discovers that Amak has unwittingly destroyed this source of power, he admits that he can do nothing to help Lilith, and he is at once exposed to the power of her beauty. The storm in nature which brought him into contact with Saul has its counterpart in the emotional upheaval which he now experiences:

What is this ecstasy in form,
This lightning
That found the lightning in my blood,
Searing my spirit's lips aghast and naked?

This is another expression which reappears in The Unicorn (II) (lines 223-225) though in a more compact and less consciously decorative manner. The Nubian, once in a position to dispense healing power, is now himself defenceless--

I am strewn as the cypher is strewn . . .
--and he is dazzled by Lilith's blond beauty which is such a contrast to the dusky brunettes of his own region. The amulet's twofold power of restoring lost love and of protecting its owner against the lure of women has been dissipated.

Your honey spilt round that small dazzling face
Shakes me to golden tremors.

I have no life at all,

Only thin golden tremors . . .

also expressed for Rosenberg what he wanted the Nubian to

feel at this time, a nervelessness, a loss of personal identity and will-power, and so these lines recur in both "Tel's Song" (lines 6-8) and The Unicorn (II) (lines 156-157): as remarked in connection with lines 173-176 above the latest version of the lines is the most condensed, the least wordy and in context the most satisfying. Lilith's beauty arouses the Nubian's desire, hence his cry about the cracking-up of "the scaled glaciers from under me": his response to it is a wholly emotional one, unlike Moses' self-awakening which was predominantly intellectual and required the suppression of human passions. Any move toward Lilith which he might have made at this point is thwarted by Amak's cry for help which both interrupts the Nubian's expression of his passion and also Lilith's spell-bound neglect of what has been going on around her. Lilith immediately reverts to her habitual role of protective mother and scolding housekeeper, while the Nubian is simultaneously deposed from his elevated position as the dispenser of a panacea to his former place as a domestic slave. Saul awakes from his sleep and Lilith has undoubtedly lost her opportunity of a revitalised and positive life with him.

As a story The Amulet suffers from certain obvious weaknesses: the lack of motivation for the Nubian to help Saul in the first place; the apparently god-like power of the Nubian being wholly dependent on a scrap of paper; or the shadowy ineffectiveness of Saul who hovers over the whole action but whose unconsciousness reduces it to a dialogue. But it has certain strong points too, and these are what Rosenberg preserved in his later draft: the curious meeting of Saul and the stranger; the stranger's other-worldly

impressiveness and power; the complete surrender of his bodily and mental strength on seeing Lilith; the stranger's closeness to "the roots' hid secrecy, old source of race" from which Saul and Lilith have been cut off (by whose agency is immaterial). Rosenberg saw that he had here the makings of a powerful play and he retained these elements while adding others to them--the terrifying and potent symbol of the Unicorn; the remorseless drive of Tel in searching for women to perpetuate his race; the violent defeat of the humdrum soulless existence which Saul and Lilith had created between them (they no longer even have a son now, whose existence is some evidence of a primal will to be creative). It is interesting, in passing, to compare Rosenberg's use of the symbol of the unicorn with its function in Yeats's play, The Unicorn from the Stars, where the priest defines it as follows:

The unicorns strength they meant, virginal strength, a rushing, lasting, tireless strength (Collected Plays, page 338).

Rosenberg's development of the basic situation of a mysterious stranger bursting into the quiet domesticity of an ordinary couple was a fruitful one, for to it he was able to add a version of the classical Rape of the Sabines legend. In a letter to Marsh, postmarked 27th May, 1917 he talks of his new idea in just these terms:

I believe I have a good idea at bottom. Its a kind of 'Rape of the Sabine Women', idea. Some strange race of wanderers have settled in some wild place and are perishing out for lack of women. The prince of these explores some country near where the women are most fair. But the natives will not hear of foreign marriages and he plots another rape of the Sabines, but he is trapped in the act. Finis (CW, page 318).

In a letter postmarked almost exactly two months later he had obviously forgotten his earlier explanation and announced

he had decided

not to send the Amulet because Ive changed the idea completely and I think if I can work it out on the new lines it will be most clear and most extraordinary. Its called 'The Unicorn' now. I am stuck in the most difficult part; I have to feel a set of unusual emotions which I simply cant feel yet (CW, page 319).

The fact that he had already outlined to Marsh the plot of his new play had also been driven from his mind:

In my next letter I will try and send an idea of the The Unicorn (CW, page 319).

At the same time he was describing to Bottomley how his predicament forced upon him a piecemeal method of composition:

We are more busy now than when I last wrote, but I generally manage to knock something up if my brain means to, and I am sketching out a little play. My great fear is that I may lose what I've written, which can happen here so easily. I send home any bit I write, for safety, but that can easily get lost in transmission (CW, page 376).

Presumably Marsh had been asking him about the possibility of including a section of The Unicorn in his forthcoming Georgian anthology (Georgian Poetry III, published in September 1917, which contained the "Ah! Koelue" speech from Moses), for in August Rosenberg answered:

I don't think I'll get my play complete for it in time, though it will hardly take much space, it's so slight. If I could get home on leave I'd work at it and get it done, no doubt, but leaves are so chancy (CW, page 377).

This letter also mentions a small elaboration to the plot, but it has not survived in the existing drafts, save perhaps in Fragment IB (see page 287 below):

The chief's Unicorn breaks away and he goes in chase. The Unicorn is found by boys outside a city and brought in, and breaks away again. Saul, who has seen the Unicorn on his way to the city for the week's victuals, gives chase in his cart (CW, page 377).

Had he retained this idea the result would have been a rather lengthy and insignificant introduction to the momentous incident of Saul's first encounter with the Unicorn which is the

true starting-point.

During the last months of 1917 Rosenberg continued to write in small units, hoping, no doubt, for a leave which would give him the opportunity he so much wanted to synthesise his intermittent jottings. His clear intention was to develop and expand what he had already written, for in his earlier comments on his scheme he had remarked to Marsh: "I think I have a subject here that could make a gigantic play" (CW, page 375). A spell in hospital (caused by his weak lungs) gave him some respite from front-line drudgery, and in a letter to Bottomley postmarked 26th February, 1918 he wrote that he had written some further instalments and had tried to follow Bottomley's suggestion to divide it into four acts. As soon as he left this temporary sanctuary, however, his creative impulse was once more stunted and starved by the sheer physical effort of remaining alive:

. . . since I left the hospital all the poetry has gone quite out of me. I seem even to forget words, and I believe if I met anybody with ideas I'd be dumb (CW, page 378).

This sense of poetic frustration remained with him up to within a month of his death, for in his last reference to it in a letter to Miss Seaton, dated 8th March, 1918, he lamented the fact that he

had the whole of it planned out, but since then I've had no chance of working on it and it may have gone quite out of my mind (CW, page 379).

It is here that he formulates for the last time the direction he was intending the poem to take; this passage will be found on page 195 above.

Two small lyrical poems are printed together with the larger fragments of Draft I of The Unicorn. From their content it is obvious that they relate to certain moments in

the drama, but they both exist "without dramatic context". "The Tower of Skulls" expresses the feelings of the Nubians at the prospect of obliteration--which is one of the new elements Rosenberg was to graft on to The Amulet. Even allowing for the incantatory effect which Rosenberg sought in writing these lines to be spoken by a chorus, the language and thought here is of the highly-condensed, elliptical style which has been commented on earlier. Since this is so, a few words of explanation may illuminate some of the paradoxes.

As the chorus of mourners recoils from the serried piles of skulls of their ancestors they experience the kind of leap between two kinds of sensory perception experienced by Macbeth in his--

What hands are here? ha! they pluck out mine eyes!
--a correlation of eyes to hands which is echoed by Rosenberg's line here:

Through my thin hands they touch my eyes.
The Biblical paradox "In the midst of life we are in death" finds a new expression in lines 4-5:

Everywhere, everywhere is a pregnant birth,
And here in death's land is a pregnant birth . . .
--although "birth" and "death" have no Christian connotations: the lamentations of the Nubians will outlive both their bodies and (non-Christian) souls, in the sense that a race may die out, but lamentation and despair is one of the perpetual conditions of the existence of all human races. Crying is of itself valueless and ephemeral since even a parrot can copy it and mock empty skulls with it while remaining unaware of the suffering which causes it.

The third stanza requires close reading to obtain more than a vague impression of dereliction. The sequence of time, an ever-increasing circle of ripples on the pool's surface, has been interrupted and has left this race "cast" with no hope of their being drawn once more within the concentric circles of time. One way of easing this syntactical knot is to take "Cast" (line 14) as being a finite verb, which has the effect of relating this destruction of a race closely to "Thou"--a nameless malignant force--thus attributing the Nubians' fate to some vague external force~~x~~ more explicitly than if "cast" is merely a participial adjective. "Unenchanted" must obviously be a finite verb and one's hesitation here is over the shade of meaning which differentiates it from 'disenchanted'. The nameless malignant power has broken the sequence of days which seems to evolve from itself as autonomously as if under a spell, but it has not completely destroyed the sequence and so this spell; a link has been detached from the chain but the break will be repaired, the only difference being that the Nubians are now excluded from the chain. By ^{being} excluded from the cycle of time (akin here to Nietzsche's "Eternal recurrence") these mere men become extinct.

Stanza four ends the poem on a note of guarded optimism, an expression of the older generation's trust and confidence in their children--but this is severely qualified when the reader recalls that the Nubians, in The Unicorn, at least, have no children. These lines, therefore, are the words they would like to be able to speak and to believe. Mortal men possess god-like ability to create in their own image. But the Nubians cannot produce "the interminable panorama".

This faith in human potency is sharply contrasted by Bottomley's "Homunculus in Penumbra" (1912) whose tone is wholly pessimistic, though in Rosenberg's line 15 the phrasing is similar:

When I look down my limbs and moving breast
I know that on a day these will commence
To contradict my being that bids them be
And sets the harmony by which they live.

It is clear that the ability to reproduce is for Rosenberg here the "root"--the source of both life and of the survival of civilization. This element relates it very closely to both the third Fragment of Draft I of The Unicorn and to The Unicorn Draft II, in fact more closely to the second draft than the first. The only tangible survival of this lyric in Tel's words is to be found at lines 210-211 of The Unicorn (II):

There is a tower of skulls,
Where birds make nests . . .

which are obviously a conflation and compression of lines 1-2 and 8-9 of the present poem:

These layers of piled-up skulls,
These layers of gleaming horror--stark horror!

Your own crying you parrot takes up

And from your empty skull cries it afterwards

Lines 16-19 of this poem are, in turn, an expansion of the idea at the very end of the "Adam" fragment:

Let him be a king without a kingdom,
Let me destroy a city, his people.

These thoughts expressed in such terms are appropriate in the context of "Adam", for they verbalise in Biblical terms

an image to be found in mediaeval paintings--the image which identifies primaeval Adam with the legendary Tree of Jesse.

The second of these two poems, "Tel's Song", has already been used to provide an example of Rosenberg's tendency to leave an image incompletely realized in order to increase the richness of its allusive power (above, page 235) but it raises more questions than just this one in the reader's mind. Part of the difficulty of reading this poem arises from its tight-packed content, a subject which had caused Rosenberg considerable trouble, the conflict of emotions in Tel on first beholding a woman (see his letters quoted on page 206 above). The poem has obvious kinship with lines 165-196 of The Amulet, so the question suggests itself as to which of the two versions is the earlier. On the evidence of other parallel versions (such as lines 279-289 of Moses (II) and lines 457-469 of Moses (III) cited above on pages 261-262) it is likely that the longer passage is a reworking of this germinal idea, for Rosenberg more often expanded his expressions than contracted them in rewriting, probably to escape charges of obscurity.

Woman's beauty has the mystic power, it seems, of making the beholder of it immortal (compare in this context Faustus' yearning cry:

Sweet Helen, make me immortal with a kiss)
maybe only because the sight of her removes his fear of approaching death. An alternative interpretation is that he feels he will live on in her mind and so become a legendary figure to her descendants; but the most likely solution--in the light of The Unicorn (II)--is that he intends to propagate himself through her. In fact, the first two lines of

this poem are identical with line 232 of The Unicorn (II). Another echoed expression is that occurring in lines 6-8; this appears recognizably in "Adam", lines 3-4:

I am a tremor in space,

Caught in your beauty's grasp . . .

--which is probably its first expression in a linked group of poems--and then in both The Amulet, lines 189-190:

. . . Shakes me to golden tremors.

I have no life at all,

Only thin golden tremors . . .

--and in The Unicorn (II), lines 56-57:

What shakes my life to golden tremors?

I have no life at all . . . I am a crazed
shadow . . .

The original formulation of this musical and striking phrase can be detected in a poem dated 1912, "O'er the Celestial Pathways", line six:

. . . Until some shadow wavers by and leaves him but a
trembling shade , . .

Here a man is reduced by the shadow of something fearful to a shadow of his former self. The "Adam" lines probably mark the next stage in this developing image, that feminine beauty can render a man impotent with desire, as it is not till the appearance of "Sleep" (published 1916) that the "tremors" become "golden". Here the sense is that in sleep our pulses (which indicate our emotional stability as our temperature does our physical equilibrium) have nothing of their normal daytime activity about them, "golden" being here equated with sunlight: in other words, conscious volition is suspended in sleep. From this point "golden tremors" as a complete phrase is used to represent the loss of will-power, the

mental deterioration of a physically strong man is rendered as insubstantial as wavering rays of light. The final use of the image in Draft II of The Unicorn is a slight condensation (and so a reinforcing) of the expression found in "Adam".

"The abyss of days" is an expression we have encountered in The Amulet (line 177) and will meet again at lines 161-162 of The Unicorn (II). In each case the words seem for Rosenberg to be not so much a straightforward echo--conscious or unconscious--of the Shakespearian "dark backward and abysm of time" as a powerful suggestion of the eternity of extinction to come. If this is so, the interpretation in The Amulet, where no racial extinction threatens the Nubian, is likely to be that either he is thinking of his own individual death to come or else that Lilith's beauty has dislocated his existence in time, an idea very close to that noted in "The Tower of Skulls" above (page 231). The remaining lines of the poem have already been dealt with (see page 235).

Three other fragments of The Unicorn are printed in Complete Works and in Collected Poems, and they represent an earlier draft than the complete one which is printed immediately after them. This first draft has been till now referred to as Draft I and the three disconnected sections that constitute it will be labelled (A), (B) and (C), for clarity. Each of these three passages is identifiable in Draft II, so it is clear that they were composed at the stage of Rosenberg's work which intervened between The Amulet and The Unicorn (II): they may in fact be the

bits I wrote for the 'Unicorn' while I was in hospital

he mentions in his February 1918 letter to Bottomley (CW, page 378).

Fragment IA (CW, page 104) is four times the length of either (B) or (C) and is a recasting of the opening section of The Amulet into a more dramatic, more naturalistically conversational mode than the early attempt. Saul is talking to a dealer about the Unicorn he has seen, but the latter thinks that Saul has been reading too many of the legends which he has lent to Lilith. One of these is the myth about "barren men, strange beasts", and he will hunt out the sequel of this myth to bring Lilith. Once this vital piece of information has been communicated, the way is clear for Saul to recall that he has already seen the Unicorn once before: he was jerked to a stop as the Unicorn rushed by his cart, and he was terror-stricken. To reinforce his experience, the Unicorn rushes past again now, as he is speaking; Saul's reaction is similar to his earlier one but, surprisingly, he does not seek for a cause for this apparition--"It is no use if things are ordered so". His response is that of a person with atrophied nerves, a fatalistic resignation to the inexplicable intrusion of the supernatural. He even wonders in a curiously detached way, whether the Unicorn was some sort of emissary of death who has visited him so that his presence on earth now is simply his existence as a spirit which is tied to this place by Lilith's love for him (lines 30-35). This piece of near-metaphysical speculation at the moment when he is recovering from a severe shock leads Saul on, over a lacuna in the text, to a realization that his love for Lilith is not yet dead. This moment of speculation is retained in an expanded and weaker form in The Unicorn (II)

(lines 76-80), but it does not there result in a reassertion of Saul's love, as here. In the final draft Rosenberg decided that the brutal climax to the play might be weakened if it were set against a rather sentimental reconciliation: as it is, the end of The Unicorn (II) presents us with scenes of unrelieved harshness. So Saul's indifference to Lilith softens here as does the "metallic sky, scintillant"--note the highly effective assonance and alliteration which produces a mirror-like surface--and he comments, as the rain beats down, "I ride eyeless", a comment peculiarly apposite in relation to what we know of his behaviour toward Lilith when Tel is in the house: he is indeed blind.

Fragment IB (printed on page 106 of CW) is a survival from that phase of the play's development outlined in the letter to Bottomley of August 1917 already referred to above (page 278)--"The chief's Unicorn breaks away and he goes in chase. The Unicorn is found by boys outside a city and brought in, and breaks away again." At this juncture, Tel has tracked the Unicorn to Saul's house where it is apparently cornered in the cellar. While Saul and Amak prepare a chain to fasten the Unicorn, Tel is telling Lilith about the significance of beauty in human life, a beauty which is created by striving after an ideal. These lines are an expansion of those already noted at lines 78-80 of The Amulet and they also reappear as lines 147-153 of The Unicorn (II): in their final form, however, they stress not the positive attributes derived from "yearning" (as here) but instead record how lack of commitment to a lofty ideal will pervert the harmonious music of human life into sounds "mixed in windless darkness". Thus we can see that the Nubian's phi-

philosophy of life remains unchanged as he develops in other ways through these drafts. Lilith is hardly responsive to Tel here; she cannot find such purpose in her own life which as a result has been aimless and miserable: "Most secret, hidden, is my own music from me". Tel identifies himself with the Unicorn in fearing Saul's chains, but their conversation is interrupted by a Trader who bursts in to announce that the Unicorn and the Nubian riders have captured all their women.

The final Fragment, IC (printed in CW on page 107), is the most cryptic of the three as it stands without context. We deduce from its ending that it occurs at the very end of the play, at the moment where Lilith shrieks and faints in Draft II. Lilith regards the Unicorn as symbolic of man's "mateless soul". Just as the Unicorn is seen to be blindly seeking for a mate (to achieve continuity, a desire also of its master) so man, it appears, is looking for something which he cannot even define. In just such a way do the cries of terrified animals fly impetuously past Saul in the opening lines of The Unicorn (II). Tel, however, takes this opportunity of the Unicorn being mentioned to announce that he will abandon his hitherto beloved unicorn, Umisol, as it is barren and Lilith is fertile--from their union will spring a super-race, Titans. This coincides precisely with the conclusion of Draft II, and it is now time to turn to this.

The final draft of The Unicorn, sent to Bottomley (so the editors of the Complete Works inform us) only a few days before he was killed, displays more of a gain in coherence than a loss through diffuseness. There is also an increase in the amount of action over the almost motionless tableaux

of The Amulet and The Unicorn (I). We can appreciate the difference this makes in the opening lines of the draft, for we are at once plunged into Saul's predicament: he has just seen the Unicorn and is terrified, the degree of his fear having disorientated and practically unbalanced him. Comment has already been made (above, page 205) on the frequency of "wail" in lines 7-12, but the mood is successfully captured by such lines as "I am a shivering grass in a chill wind". As in Draft IA, Saul realizes that the cause of his terror is a supernatural force, but he momentarily identifies himself with the Unicorn because all the misery it has evoked is being paraded past him (lines 14-17) and in addition he has already seen it twice. The form that this misery takes is that of the separation of lovers or married couples--as the apparition on Enoch on horseback searching for his Dora indicates.

Saul's fear for Lilith's safety is aroused:

How chilled my spirit is, how clutched with terror,
Lilith, my Lilith
Like my hands in the membranes of my brain
To pluck your blond hair out . . .

which suggests that his love for her is not quite dead; yet either the oppressive, storm-laden atmosphere or his projected fear of what he might find at home roots him to the spot. His recollections of what he has just seen made all the fleeing humans seem disembodied wraiths pursued by "balls of fire", the glaring eyes of the Unicorn (and in one instance those of Tel) which are similarly described in lines 132, 209 and 219. Such a phrase is also applicable to phenomena such as meteors, which were often taken to be some

kind of supernatural omen. As already noted in The Unicorn (IA) his pause for recollection seems to bring on another visitation--a voice calls out Unicorn's name "Umusol" but in his state of bemusement he thinks the name called was his. His state of enervated helplessness is closely akin to the later reaction of Tel on first seeing Lilith--and fear is a part of the latter's experience also.

As in Fragment[A], Saul accepts the supernatural as part of the order of things: his only reaction to it is to seek the anonymity of death (lines 41-42). When he stoops to try extricating his wagon from the mire we anticipate that we shall actually witness at first-hand his encounter with Tel, not just learn of it through Lilith's conversation (contrast Rosenberg's handling of this incident in The Amulet, page 270 above); the gain in immediacy and in dramatic tension is apparent. Saul hears a voice calling and laughing--"just the laughter of ours", but he hides his eyes as the Unicorn rushes past again and is amazed to find "a naked black giant" standing before him.

The remark about laughter finds a close parallel in the experience of Martin Hearne, the protagonist of Yeats's The Unicorn from the Stars, who remembers his trance:

I am sure there was a command given, and there was a great burst of laughter. What was it? What was the command? Everything seemed to tremble round me
(Collected Plays, page 338).

In a similar way, Saul's words about the "swift white horse" abducting a girl (lines 64-66, and also the final stage-directions of the play) seem to be a half-echo of Martin Hearne's vision:

There were horses--white horses rushing by, with white shining riders--there was a horse without a rider, and someone caught me up and put me upon him and we rode

away, with the wind, like the wind --(Collected Plays, page 337).

Given this degree of coincidence and remembering Rosenberg's great interest in Blake, Rosenberg may have been aware of the Yeats and Ellis edition of Blake--published in 1893. But Blake's Book of Thel, despite the similarity of name, is irrelevant to The Unicorn, since Blake's character is weak and pitying and quite unlike Rosenberg's Tel. Nor is there any evidence apart from these resemblances that Rosenberg showed particular interest in the work of Yeats.

Why, one wonders, did Rosenberg make his superman a negro? The memories of his experiences in South Africa may have served him here, although the process was very likely an unconscious one. Staying as he did with his sister and their well-to-do friends he must have become aware of the gulf between the blond Boers and the virile negroes. Although this division was not then rigidified by a policy of apartheid, many of the negroes whom Rosenberg saw must have been employed in helping the white man; this help on occasions doubtless took the form of manual labours which required sheer physical strength, such as loading up carts or shifting heavy loads. To Rosenberg who had already expressed (in lines 449-450 of Moses) his faith in the

primeval elements,

The roots' hid secrecy, old source of race . . .
the South African negro in his physical power and relative lack of Western 'sophi^stication' may well have symbolized all that he considered to be worth preserving in human nature and culture. An interesting sidelight on the appearance of this superman is offered by Edwin Muir's account of a superstition of his native Orkney: a farmer at his threshing

would sometimes find himself being aided in his task by an "enormous, naked, coal-black man with a fine upcurling tail", an unusual variant of Auld Nick (Autobiography, page 13).

On his way home in his cart, with the negro sitting beside him, Saul wonders at the man's size and build. He is, thinks Saul, no god, (lines 57-59) yet he is undoubtedly the incarnation of some eternal earth spirit, some cataclysmic power which will cleanse and purge all the old corruption and lethargy, as Moses was to do. The negro's power was originally both deeper and wider than Moses' if we followed the hint in lines 58-61 of The Amulet that he was: see the lines quoted on page 271 above. However Rosenberg excluded these lines from Draft II with the obvious intention of making Tel appear more as a human agent than as a supernatural force: from his behaviour in the scene with Lilith it is only too clear that Tel is mere man, although a potent and mysterious one. There is a clear development in the human quality of Tel. Starting off as the Spirit of Dissolution, he becomes more personalized as the Nubian, but only acceptably human--because no longer possessed of superhuman or magical powers--when he becomes Tel. Since this is so he bears some resemblance to Nietzsche's Superman, in that he is free from the petty conventions of an ordered and civilized social group, because he is a solitary.

A survival of the hint that Lilith is more of a legendary type than simply a flesh and blood woman is found in lines 82-85:

And my heart utterance was Lilith,
Whose face seemed cast in faded centuries
While the beast was rushing back towards her,

Sweeping past me, leaving me so with the years . . .
--an idea which was noted in the "Adam" fragment (page 268 above). Saul sees Lilith here as the ageless victim-figure of a legend which is being re-enacted in the present; she is separated from him by the Unicorn's heading towards her on a timelessly preordained course while he remains trapped within the web of human time. This feeling is reinforced later (line 146) when Tel first sees Lilith, for he comments:

Somewhere I know those looks, I lost it somewhere . . . ("it" refers to his soul). This seems like an echo--very likely unconscious--just as musical and emotive in its own right, of the unforgettably haunting lines in Henryson's The Testament of Cresseid when the "nobill Troylus" traces the resemblance of his former love's face to that of the degraded leper-woman who confronts him:

. . . And with ane blenk it come into his thocht,

That he sumtime hir face befoir had sene (lines 499-500).
By escaping from the dimension of time, the former Spirit of Dissolution can circumvent "the old dreamy Adam" and "other things of dust", and so can capture the demonic Lilith. At this point in The Unicorn (II) we can see that Saul, for all his limitations, has an inkling of this fear.

Saul is content to lay the responsibility for these unhappy events at the feet of a malevolent God, in terms which repeat exactly lines 338-339 of Moses, and he consoles himself with the thought that no inherited experience could have prepared him for this suffering; moreover, will he be able to convince other men of the truth of his experiences? Joseph Cohen's essay offers a helpful gloss on Saul's predicament:

Saul accuses God for the catastrophe of Lilith's rape and abduction and his own imminent death, but nowhere in the play does Rosenberg permit him to contest God's will. Rather he bows to that will, going to his destruction without any reason to believe in infinite purpose, love, or salvation, for he sees clearly that the energy of the universe is invested and regenerated in the forces of terror and violence (Tulane Studies in English, 1960, page 141).

A small point of interest emerges at line 98, where "glistening" has had its middle syllable elided in order to produce a disyllable: such elision is only worth recording because it is so rare in Rosenberg's verse. Such an elision is not common in 19th century poetry. It is puzzling to know why Rosenberg took the trouble to mark this elision, for in speech the word is normally pronounced as a disyllable even though it is written with three syllables. This is an untypical moment of concern with sound, for we cannot help hearing the concentration of t sounds. Nor is Rosenberg obviously concerned with metrical pattern--save, possibly, for his attempts to echo a dramatic moment in speech (as at lines 28-36 of this draft, where Saul's panic at seeing the unicorn is well conveyed by the fragmented lines)--and his customary medium is a very ^{free} blank verse.

My house my blood all lean to its weird flight . . . presents a curious idea, which also occurs in "At Night" (lines 7-8). The flight of an evil, supernatural creature, it seems, draws houses after it. The suggestion that in the present context "house" and "blood" may both be metaphors for Saul's human body is helpful ("horse" standing for 'house of soul' and "blood", obviously, for 'life-blood'), for he himself declares later that he both "yearns and fears"--he longs to follow after the Unicorn to see what devastation it has wrought, but at the same time he fears what he may find

at his home. Ironically enough, Tel's fear at the prospect of meeting Lilith, from whom he has already fled once, is equally as great as Saul's.

Toaa perceptive husband, Lilith's agitation on his arrival (so great that at first she does not recognize her husband) would have indicated her need for his company. Although this weakness in construction has been mentioned earlier (page 206), no explanation was then offered. Several possible reasons can be considered; firstly, the thought that Tel is merely asserting his rights as a husband within his own home (suggested by E. O. G. Davies in his unpublished thesis)--an idea which would carry more conviction if Saul had not appeared so completely unassertive up till now. Secondly, we might assume, on the evidence of The Amulet, that he is indifferent to Lilith: but his fear for her (expressed in lines 82, 101-104 and 114-115) had sounded sincere. Could it be, thirdly, that he is lacking in foresight? Once more, lines 101-104 and 114-115 show him only too aware of the potential threat to Lilith. A fourth possibility seems to be the most fruitful--that he will not question chances and incidents, but with fatalistic indolence he fails to recognize this as a moment of decision, unaware of it involving any risk, or possessing any significance for his marriage. Whatever the reasons, Saul disappears to dry off, commanding Lilith to soothe him with music as King Saul had once demanded.

Lilith comments on the violence of the storm, and Rosenberg's intention to make his play symbolic of war emerges, in line 134:

The roots of a torn universe are wrenched . . .

Unlike the storm in The Amulet, it is clear that this elemental disorder is destructive and also that it echoes the turmoil existing inside Tel and Lilith. Tel refers to Lilith as "Secret Mother of my orphan spirit" which once more suggests Lilith as an archetype, an Earth-mother figure, this idea being reinforced by the realization that Tel's own name may have derived from the Latin 'tellus', meaning 'earth'.

Tel's reaction to Lilith's playing is one of physical nervelessness and spiritual agitation. His comment--"Those looks tread out my soul"--is only the last in a series of expressions which try to represent in a fresh way the commonplace that a man whose soul is entrapped by a woman's eyes is a willing victim, that he can appreciate her attractiveness as he is overwhelmed by it. The earliest appearance of this phrasing is that found in Fragment XXVIII, lines 3-4:

Each soul finds you while tread your eyes

Its intricate infinities . . .

Repetitions of this phrase (whose "intricate infinities" has a pleasing articulation and rhythmical balance) then follow in "The Female God" (line ten), "My Soul is Robbed" (I) and (II) (lines 1-2) and "The Poet" (III) (lines 18-19)--all of which date from 1914 or 1915, and are dealt with in Chapter II.

Lilith's song repeats lines 1-7 of The Unicorn (IB), but these philosophical views on the necessity of beauty (the result of effort) to human life are no longer spoken by Tel. With the change in speaker has come a change in emphasis. Tel had earlier explained how "yearning", or seeking for some ideal above the mundane level of ordinary life, produced all that is most human and humane in society:

. . . Beauty and music, faith, and hope and dreams,

Religion, love, endeavour, stability
Of man's whole universe.

Lilith now colours these words with her own peculiarly negative cast of mind (as already mentioned on page above): the search for beauty, for a meaning to life is much less certain in its outcome than Tel had asserted it to be:

He cannot hold it or know it ever . . .

and if man once abandons the search for some goal above and beyond himself he ceases to live as an aesthetic being:

Ah! when he yearns not shall be not wither?

For music then will have no place

In the world's ear, but mix in windless darkness.

By stressing so plaintively the dangers of abandoning the effort needed to keep oneself alive spiritually, Lilith appears to have already surrendered her will to inert acquiescence: note her repetition of "yearns". More clearly than anything else in The Unicorn (II) this passage depicts the attitude of those who accept the "easy issue" (The Amulet, line 137) from the tensions of life, an attitude against which Tel asserts his desperate need to commit himself and his followers to a positive, even brutal, course of action: the basic urge to reproduce shatters the thin veneer of respectability and conventional behaviour with which Saul and Lilith have protected themselves against the more disturbing demands of human existence. Saul and Lilith are "withered"; they have no inner "music" (compare The Unicorn (IB), line eight). The whole speech is reminiscent of an earlier Fragment, dated 1914, ^{which} by contrast brings out clearly the pessimistic tone of Lilith's words here:

But I am thrown with beauty's breath

Climbing my soul, driven in

Like a music wherein is pressed

All the power that withers the mountain

And maketh trees to grow. (Fragment XV, lines

1-5. Further reference to this Fragment will be found on page 55).

Tel's response expresses his powerlessness in those condensed phrases which have already been noted, "golden tremors" and "crazed shadow" (see comments on The Amulet and "Tel's Song" on pages 275 and 284 respectively). Even though he feels as if he is losing his control over his own mind he is compelled to look at Lilith; his sobbing in frustration leads Lilith to think that the storm has turned his brain, as, in a sense, it has--and she calls vainly for Saul. Tel begs to be allowed a little longer with her, but his words are incoherent and spasmodic: the striking images in lines 175-177 have already been remarked on (page 206 above), but the opening lines of the speech convey a state of confusion so severe that he can no longer distinguish his speech from his thoughts. His attempt to make himself coherent:

. . . Let my dazed blood resolve itself to words . . .
also recurs later in line 229:

. . . My blood knocks . . . inarticulate to make you
understand . . .

and suggests the balance between mind-consciousness and blood-consciousness most frequently associated with D. H. Lawrence. Another version of this idea is to be found in the description of a Daughter of War's manner of speaking in the poem of that name:

. . . Essenced to language . . .

which again involves the process of the Amazon's speech being

non-linguistic and so unintelligible to mere humans: the emotion or utterance has to be verbalised, reduced to the scale of inadequate words. This is immediately followed here in The Unicorn by another use of a much-repeated image, the simile of "heights of night ringing with unseen larks" which has already been examined earlier (page 207): on this occasion, as mentioned on page 209 the image carries the suggestion of the danger lurking behind both the appearance of beauty and of the dark. What differentiates this use of the expression from all the others is that it is coupled to the preceding line--"An instant flashes a large face of dusk" (line 175); "dusk" here seems to have less connection with "night" in line 176 than might appear at first; and there is reason to wonder whether the "face of dusk" is not the vision of a Nubian face which swims in front of Tel at this moment of emotional crisis to remind him not to neglect the plight of the remainder of his race in the process of falling under the spell of Lilith's beauty. In support of this explanation we can see that from this point onwards in the plot Tel for the next fifty lines sinks his own personal reactions in the predicament of his people; this vision was a timely and effective reminder.

From line 178 Tel's speech turns to depicting the unnatural life of the Nubians, although his narrative is far from dispassionate in tone. How, it may occur to us, did Rosenberg come to devise this story of a race facing extinction from a lack of women? An obvious answer lies to hand in the classical Rape of the Sabines legend, but was there anything in Rosenberg's experience that might have helped to bring it to his mind? Nubia was a desert province of the

Roman Empire, situated in Northeast Africa, and so, as E. O. G. Davies notes, the barrenness of the soil is reflected in the inhabitants' lack of sexual fruition. As a result of Roman Imperial activities, Nubians were used by wealthy Egyptians as slaves. So it is not too fanciful to consider that Saul and Lilith could be Egyptians--their spiritual malaise is remarkably close to that of Egyptian society in Moses--and in this play Tel's revolt could be the rebellion of a slave-race. This is a satisfying 'literary' explanation, yet there may be another, more immediate cause. The unnaturalness and brutality of trench life has already been glanced at (above, page 267), but in no way was this life more unnatural, more separated from normal, civilized conditions, than in the lack of women--a point Ernest Hemingway was to echo partially in entitling his book of short stories Men without Women. This lack of women over a period of weeks and months is wholly different from women being excluded from an all-male preserve, such as in a trade union or exclusive club (not that Rosenberg is likely to have had much personal experience of either) for such exclusion is invariably operating on a short-term basis. With awareness of such background as this to the figure of Tel it is not too fanciful to suppose that some of Tel's remarks on lack of women echo at one remove the kind of feelings prevalent in the trenches.

The degeneration of man into beast mentioned by Tel at line 183:

. . . Bestial man shapes ride dark impulses . . .
is only another consequence of trench warfare; the Nubians are overwhelmed with a desire to breed, but what degraded the British Expeditionary Force soldier to the level of

animal behaviour was more likely the conditions he was expected to endure, rather than sexual frustration alone. The Nubians are "unnatured by their craving" and have recourse to unnatural methods in an attempt to preserve their race--their practice of intercourse with animals is not made explicit until lines 193-194 and 216-217, but the self-loathing which these desperate measures produce is clearly shown in lines 183-185:

Bestial man shapes ride dark impulses
Through roots in the bleak blood, then hide
In shuddering light from their self loathing.

The desert light of their country is "arid", contrary to Rosenberg's customary regard for light--as an attribute of the sun--being fruitful. This epithet calls to mind line nine of "Girl to Soldier on Leave":

Pallid days arid and wan . . .

where the Titan-soldier's lover refers to the restraints imposed upon her "splendid rebel" by civilian life in a peacetime city: until the coming of war his spirit had been suppressed, frustrated in its desire for self-expression, his days lacked purpose or fertility, the benefits of sunlight bestowed by Prometheus (pages 210-211 above). This link between The Unicorn and the contemporary Trench Poems is not mere coincidence: some of them must spring from the same sources as those underlying The Unicorn.

In a reminder of "Tower of Skulls", Tel then goes on to describe how the dead Nubians outnumber the present generation of survivors (lines 191-192) and this is followed almost immediately by a recollection of the Amazons in "Daughters of War", though in glancing at this poem we need to reverse

the telescope. A few lines ago, a connection was indicated between the Nubians' plight and that of the confined Titan-spirit lurking within a girl's lover: the girl reluctantly relinquishes her claim on him to Bellona, goddess of war (an implicit rather than overt conclusion) and ultimately her soldier will, if killed, be captured by the Daughters of War who hover around battlefields to seize young newly-dead warriors to be their lovers. Thus the spirit presiding at a soldier's death, argues Rosenberg, is female, and the female is a symbol of fertility: it is possible to link in this roundabout way the Amazons with "The incarnate female soul of generation", while remembering that in "Daughters of War" the dominant influence is that of the female while here it is the male.

Lines 197-204 present a problem in interpretation, again because of Rosenberg's elliptical style: the line of thought which they provoke is dealt with on page 200 where some account is taken of Rosenberg's apparent inability (and also unwillingness--for he believed that poetry must contain "something hidden and felt to be there") to verbalise fully the intuitions he wanted to convey. We can observe, in passing to the play's climax, the deftness of touch which juxtaposes an image of the Nubian's extinction--"That they should be as an uttered sound in the wind"--with the audible shrieking of fertile women whom the Nubians have captured in the city.

Saul appears, momentarily and it seems ineffectively, at the doorway with "smouldering eyes"; in fact, the direct result of his intrusion at this point is to impel Tel into action. His burning eyes remind Lilith of the Unicorn's "balls of fire" and Tel recalls the image noted earlier in

"Tower of Skulls" which laments that even beasts are fertile while their race of men is not; another reminder of the Nubians' predicament is given by the noise of Saul preparing, down in the cellar, chains for the capture of the Unicorn, which brings to his mind the barbaric breeding procedures they have been driven to adapt. In reply to Lilith's fearful query about her cousin Dora and her "Are you men? . . . tell me", Tel once more begins to express his passion in a manner almost as inarticulate as that of the earlier lines 169-180. It is worth observing about Tel that he appears inconsistently drawn: he is presented to us as the epitome of a ruthless, instinctive drive to racial preservation and yet even while the disaster his men have brought upon the city is ringing in our ears we see him muttering, inarticulately, almost animal-like noises of appetite. Reeling under the impact of his own emotions he gasps out his demands for Lilith:

Voluptuous

Crude vast terrible hunger overpowers . . .

A gap . . . a yawning . . .

My blood knocks . . . inarticulate to make

you understand,

To shut you in itself

Uncontrollable.

Small dazzling face I shut you in my soul--

--in terms that recall (at lines 223-225) lines 173-176 of The Amulet (already quoted on page 275 above); line 229 of this draft repeats lines 171-173 (see page 298), while line 232 echoes line 187 of The Amulet as well as lines 1-2 of "Tel's Song" (as noted on page 282). In each of these reappearances this latter version of the idea is the more

compact, less self-consciously decorative one: under stress of emotion Tel speaks plainly and simply, therefore more convincingly.

At the moment when Tel reaches for Lilith she shrieks, and Saul appears looking dazed and carrying a chain. Was he really not suspicious of Tel up till this moment? If it is not the shock of discovery that knocks him off balance, how else can we account for his "looking about dazed"? This weak moment is probably something that Rosenberg would have attended to in revision. When Enoch bursts in, demanding news of his Dora, the sight of the women being abducted is too much for both Saul and himself to withstand; so without further protest they both leap through the window and patent-ly to their deaths. The coast is thus left clear for Tel to pick up the unconscious Lilith and to carry her off on the Unicorn.

The resemblances between Moses and Tel should now be fairly easy to pinpoint. He, like Moses, is at once the destroyer of an old, inert, soulless society and at the same time the saviour of his own group of followers. Rosenberg seems clear that the only way to replace an old corrupt system of living is to replace it by a revolution; by definition, revolution implies violence, and Rosenberg does not shrink from showing this. But it is helpful to recall here the opening comments of this section on the attitude to war displayed in "On Receiving News of the War" (see page 195); here we discern once more that if, as Harding says, he never "defined his attitude to violence as distinct from strength", at least his attitude to violence was ambivalent. Necessary violence is that which changes the old order for the better,

although the authority which decides to employ violence against an existing social order is--though less so in Moses than in The Unicorn, outside that social order, and therefore has little legal or moral right to exert it. If such an exertion of hostile will seems to us indefensible, we should remember that Austria's and Germany's behaviour which resulted in European war very likely appeared just as indefensible to Georgian England. Thus, it can be argued, The Unicorn symbolizes the intrusion of war into a civilian society in yet another way.

As already suggested on more than one occasion (as, for example, on page 292), Tel, in his descent from Moses is a marked improvement on his forebear in terms of psychological realism. Moses was harsh, ambitious and unscrupulous, concerned only to achieve (and to justify) his own aspirations, a man who arrogates to himself a god-like condescension to his followers, the human epitome of the monotheistic system he advocates. He seeks to release into society the "unreasoned reason of the savage instinct"; in this, Moses is identifiable with the Unicorn of Yeats's play, when Martin Hearne acknowledges what its presence means:

. . . we have to burn away a great deal that men have piled up upon the earth. We must bring men once more to the wildness of the clean green earth (Collected Plays, page 358).

But Moses' attitude is paternal and aristocratic--he does not possess these virtues himself. This is probably the point of Marius Bewley's comment that:

Moses emerges as a figure of great force, but lacks a proportionate moral definition (Commentary, Vol. VII, January 1949, page 39).

Tel, by contrast, is a man of passions, driven by his instinctual need to perpetuate his race, and is prepared to

employ violent methods in order to achieve this end. In the process of developing Tel from Moses via the Spirit of Dissolution and The Nubian, Rosenberg has hardly changed his qualifications for a leader at all. The Spirit of Dissolution displays Moses' selfishness intensified to the degree of abstraction: his target is precisely the seduction of Lilith and the destruction of Adam, nothing more: he is, however, a non-human agency and so closely resembles the Serpent who tempts Eve. By the time Rosenberg was working on The Amulet he had concluded that the central actor in his drama must be more human than demoniac, a sample of the heroic human leader who resembles more closely Judas Maccabaeus than he did Moses (note discussion of their relative merits on page 267 above). Thus the Nubian is a totally different personality from Moses: he is kind, immensely strong, benevolent, and possessed of beneficent occult powers. In helping Lilith he has (till the protection afforded him by his amulet is destroyed) no designs upon her or Saul; he merely wishes to restore a moribund relationship, to bring life to the 'withered' souls of Saul and Lilith. The Nubian is, as Charles Tomlinson notes in his unpublished essay

associated not merely with 'Nature's anarchy', the chaos of the storm, but with 'Law's spirit'.

Tel may still be immensely strong but he is no longer kind or benevolent (apart from his initial act of helping Saul, but this was presumably motivated by the desire to get to closer quarters with one of the women of the land)--and he certainly lacks any mystical powers or charms. If anything, Lilith charms him. Tel possesses a new dimension to his character, in that he is identified with his race in their hunt for fertile women; although a leader he is one of his

people, in a way in which Moses never is, for he has not taken charge of the Nubians simply in order to fulfil his own dreams of mastery but is merely the representative of a band of fellow-sufferers. If we recall the conclusion expressed on page 202 that in exchanging Pharoah's rule for his the Hebrews would merely be replacing one man's despotism by another's, the inference follows easily that any social organization instituted by Tel will be of a very different nature; for Tel is very much closer than Moses to a democratic, liberal leader. He is not selfish as is Moses: although he as an individual is aroused by Lilith's beauty he does not for long forget his duty to his tribe. When Moses can talk with contempt of the "rude touched heart of the mauled sweaty horde" (Moses, lines 84-86), Tel speaks compassionately about "men misused flying from misuse" (line 201). With this distinction between them noted, they both reflect in varying degrees something of the qualities of the Nietzschean Superman, which will be considered later on.

Of the three main characters, Lilith is the one who alters least. Her basic problem, that of having lost Saul's love, remains with her throughout appearances in all four drafts. In the "Adam" fragment she was like the Spirit of Dissolution, herself more spirit than human (compare line 28) and her loyalty to Adam is in doubt: however, we possess insufficient material to make any detailed assessment of her personality and motives. Reference has already been made (at page 296 above) to her as an earth-mother figure and we can find a later echo of this idea in Shaw's Back to Methuselah. In Act I his Serpent speaks to Eve as follows:

I am the old serpent, older than Adam, older than Eve.
I remember Lilith, who came before Adam and Eve. I

was her darling as I am yours. She was alone: there was no man with her.

This speech also typifies Lilith as a figure with "a mighty will" who desired so strongly to reproduce herself that she gave birth to Adam and Eve; these are not characteristics found in Rosenberg's Lilith. Like Tel, however, she becomes more human and less symbolic a figure as she reappears in succeeding drafts; from this point in her development onwards, in fact, she is portrayed as a full-blooded, mature and blonde attractive woman, subject to human frailty and possessing no superhuman or mythical powers. The loss of Saul's love for her remains a constant factor (although in The Unicorn (I) it was explicitly reawoken by the stress of his own experiences, as noted on page 286 --The Unicorn (IA) lines 36-41, and in The Unicorn (II), lines 82, 101-104, 114-115--Saul does express in her absence affection and concern for her which evaporates as soon as he arrives home.) We might have expected that their mutual experience of terror (The Unicorn) and Lilith's of the supernatural (The Amulet) would have drawn them together, but it only makes their separation even more irrevocable. Lilith of The Amulet is preoccupied with self-pity:

Can one choose to break? To bear,

To wearily bear, is misery . . .

and turns to the Nubian for comfort; his analysis of the situation is not so welcome as is the discovery that he has a magical amulet which will make everything all right once more, without any exertion on her part--a clean denial of the conditions for living laid down by the Nubian. "God, restore me his love", she exclaims with relief, at the exact moment when the Nubian discovers his scroll has been destroyed.

She behaves as a wronged woman but it is clear that she has made no positive contribution toward her marriage; worse still, having been rejected by Saul she is prepared to acquiesce in a loveless and so fruitless partnership in which neither member is prepared to make one constructive move, not even that of separation. Saul and Lilith are bound together by inertia.

From the first draft of The Unicorn we can gain little fresh knowledge of her, save that in her remarks to Tel on the significance of the unicorn in (IC) she talks of frustrated searchings in a way that suggests she may have experienced them too. In The Unicorn (II) Lilith plays a minor role, in terms of the amount she speaks, but her function is still central to the plot. She is no longer the intermediary through whose eyes we see Saul's encounter with the Unicorn, for we now witness this for ourselves: she is no longer needed to link us to the immediate past, for in Draft II all the action happens in the present (the only reported events being the lives of Tel's race of wanderers). By Saul's expressions of fear for Lilith we are prepared to meet a weak, protected woman--and we do. Gone are her protests against the unfairness of life, her conviction that

there is more sorrow in the world

Than man can bear . . .

Now Lilith is reduced to a quiet, passive, fearful yet still attractive woman who remains largely ignorant of the paralyzing effect her beauty is having on Tel. Unlike Lilith of The Amulet she hardly communicates with him: only just before the end does she ask him the one direct question, the rest of her speeches being thoughts (on one occasion a song)

which completely involve her in herself. She fears Tel as she fears the Unicorn, and when Tel reaches for her she shrieks and is unconscious by the time she is loaded on to the Unicorn. Thus, Lilith has become a weaker, more shadowy figure, who is finally reduced to the level of her ineffective husband.

In "Adam" Lilith's husband does not appear and is presented as a hapless being about whom these two more potent figures are concluding a bargain: Lilith is apparently going behind Adam's back and so we feel a stirring of sympathy for a man so hoodwinked. In The Amulet, Lilith's husband (now called Saul, maybe in order to escape giving the impression that Rosenberg was writing about a pre-Biblical myth rather than about the malaise of contemporary society) is as much a background figure as before, but this time because he is asleep. His marriage is a failure, and he lets Lilith sit alone with only the Nubian for company while he sleeps the heavy passionless sleep of animal indifference. His presence hovers over the dialogue and he finally ends it by waking up. The feelings of sympathy with Saul give way to exasperation at his cruelty and stupidity.

The two drafts of The Unicorn again change our response from one of contempt to some degree of acceptance of Saul with all his shortcomings. Draft I shows him turning again toward Lilith, his hostile impassivity relenting just as the sky above melts into rain:

My taciturn ways, cold, laconic

Like this metallic sky, scintillant.

No, no, I feel the wet drops.

This suggests to the reader that if there is to be a reconciliation with Lilith it will be the result of his own

constructive action. Much of his behaviour in the final draft has already been touched on in the comments on The Unicorn (II) (pages 288-296) and little needs to be added here. He is a feeble figure, weakly accepting whatever happens as in Draft I:

. . . I will lie down and die . . .

--but he is under strain:

What have I lived and agonised today, today.
His concern for Lilith is brought out clearly in certain lines already referred to:

And my heart utterance was Lilith . . . (line 82)

. . . And makes me think of Lilith

And that swift beast, it went that way.

My house my blood all lean to its weird flight.

But Lilith will be sleeping . . . ah miss

my Lilith (lines 101-104)

I feared to see it vanished

On the ground from Lilith . . . (lines 114-115)

and on returning home he kisses her before his mystifying disappearance from the scene. As the story has developed Saul has been continuously diminishing in stature and dramatic importance. Having confronted the Unicorn and now brought Tel and Lilith together his functional significance is at an end, so Rosenberg dispenses with him: the drama of the futures of Saul's and of Tel's races is acted out by Tel and Lilith, and Saul's final reappearance and death is the pathetic gesture of a man who only realizes too late the implications of what he has done.

To sum up, the ultimate failure of Saul and Lilith to preserve themselves and the inability of Saul to act with any

conviction both stem from the fact that they have cut themselves off from

the springs, primeval elements . . .

the symbol of fertility which Tel has found in Lilith. (It must be this atmosphere of spiritual sterility which caused David Daiches to comment (in Commentary, Vol. X, July 1950, page 92) that

'The Unicorn' is Rosenberg's Waste Land.)

Lilith's body is fertile even if her mind is not, but Tel can compensate for any lack of spiritual energy. Saul possesses no fertility of mind or body, thus, like the Nubians of former times he is consigned to becoming

an uttered sound in the wind.

His personality is not even substantial enough for him to die as an active opponent of the invaders; the end of the play may be a personal tragedy for Saul, but an awareness of this is overwhelmed by the certainty that Tel and his race are about to put on a new strength. In terms of that poem quoted on page 195), the Nubians have achieved, through their own efforts and suffering, their own regeneration: their triumph is that what they have done will

Give back this universe

Its pristine bloom.

The Influence of Nietzsche and Parallels with Freud

Nietzsche has had a demonstrable influence on Rosenberg's conception of his 'strong' men: his works were being translated and published in England for the first time during the first decade or so of this century, thus the stir that his violent form of philosophy produced would have reached

Rosenberg during his formative years as a poet.

The Birth of Tragedy (published in 1909 in Oscar Levy's edition) has significance for a study of Rosenberg because in it Nietzsche outlines the difference between two types of artist which he was to call Apollonian and Dionysian: the Apollonian figure exerts a restraining influence on civilization (what may be loosely termed 'classical'), while the Dionysian is a releaser of life-forces (one can equally vaguely call this 'romantic'). Although Rosenberg's verse plays nowhere use any terminology like this, the similarities which emerge on comparing Moses and Tel, as well as the Egyptian society and Saul and Lilith, are striking.

To begin with Moses clearly possesses something of the Dionysian spirit about him, for when he declares:

All that's low I'll charm;

Barbaric love sweeten to tenderness . . .

we can also read that Nietzsche's Dionysian artist aims to produce universal harmony of man with man, with animal, and with the rest of nature as a whole:

Of her own accord earth proffers her gifts, and peacefully the beasts of prey approach from the desert and the rocks. The chariot of Dionysus is bedecked with flowers and garlands: panthers and tigers pass beneath his yoke (Section 1, pages 26-27).

Despite Nietzsche's assertion that such an influence is "purely artistic, purely anti-Christian" (ibid., pages 10-11) his vision of the future is remarkably close to Isaiah's vision about the Second Coming:

The wolf shall also dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid . . . (Isaiah 11:vi)

The main contention of Nietzsche in this book is to show that both the classical and romantic elements in art needed to fuse together to produce the sublimity of Greek tragedy.

What evidence is there that Moses as a heroic figure possesses the qualities of both gods?

It seems at first as if Moses must be almost wholly Dionysian, in Nietzsche's terminology, for he is a rebel whose aim is to bring new life to the people, a variant on the Prometheus legend. Nietzsche himself saw a connection between the Semitic myth of the fall of man which he thought was caused by

curiosity, beguilement, seducibility, wantonness--in short, a whole series of pre-eminently feminine passions . . . (op. cit., Section 9, page 79)

and the Aryan myth of Prometheus, which accounts for the origin of evil. This latter myth doubtless has affinities with the Greek legend of Pandora, a beautiful woman made from clay by Zeus to revenge himself on Prometheus and who opened the box in which Prometheus had imprisoned "the Spites that might plague mankind" (Robert Graves, The Greek Myths, Vol. 1, page 145).

In this connection, Nietzsche comments:

What distinguishes the Aryan representation is the sublime view of active sin as the properly Promethean virtue . . . He who understands this innermost core of the tale of Prometheus--namely, the necessity of crime imposed upon the titanically striving individual--will at once be conscious of the un-Apollonian nature of this pessimistic representation (op. cit., Section 9, pages 78-79)

We can clearly see the crime in Moses' life--he is the Promethean rebel and also the murderer (possibly executioner) of Abinoah: in Nietzsche's eyes this "active sin" would confirm the presence of Promethean virtue in Moses.

Moses' Dionysian role seems to be confirmed by his statement of aims:

Here is the quarry quiet for me to hew,
Here are the springs, primeval elements,

The roots' hid secrecy, old source of race,
Unreasoned reason of the savage instinct . . .

(Moses, lines 448-451)

--for in Nietzsche the Dionysian artist declares:

All our hopes . . . stretch out longingly towards the perception that beneath this restlessly palpitating civilised life and educational convulsion there is concealed a glorious, intrinsically healthy, primeval power, which, to be sure, stirs vigorously only at intervals in stupendous moments . . . (op. cit., Section 23, page 174)

Moreover, when in a letter to R. C. Trevelyan postmarked 15th June, 1916 Rosenberg wrote that Moses

. . . symbolises the fierce desire for virility, and original action in contrast to slavery of the most abject kind . . . (CW, page 350)

he seems to be paraphrasing Nietzsche:

. . . the Dionysian, as compared with Apollonian, exhibits itself as the eternal and original artistic force . . . (op. cit., Section 25, page 186)

--or to be restating Bergson's "élan vital".

Despite all these indications, Moses' personal role in his projected revolt is Apollonian rather than Dionysian for although he wishes to produce a better world for the Hebrews there is no doubt that he fully intends to be its master: his feelings for "the mauled sweaty horde" are unambiguous. In this way he begins to move toward the position of Zarathustra. Thus the references to the sun in the first two versions of Moses relate to one of the characteristics which Nietzsche attributes to his Apollonian artist (see page 252 above). But before turning to the latter, one more comment of Nietzsche's catches the eye, this time describing the unhealthy society:

. . . in vain does one seek help by imitating all the great productive periods and natures, in vain does one accumulate the entire 'world-literature' around modern

man for his comfort, in vain does one place one's self in the midst of the art-styles and artists of all ages . . . one still continues the eternal hungerer, the 'critic' without joy and energy (ibid., Section 18, page 141).

This is without doubt the society whose intellectual and cultural aspirations Moses ridicules at line 160 as "easy and mimic energy": the empty "forms" of Egyptian civilization have been seen through by Moses as

. . . Old myths never known, and yet already foregone. . .
Martyrdoms of uncreated things . . . (lines 127-129)

or:

As ladies' perfumes are
Obnoxious to stern natures,
This miasma of a rotting god
Is to me . . . (lines 142-145)

In Thus Spake Zarathustra (published in English as early as 1896) the affinities between Moses and Zarathustra emerge in the context of the qualities needed for leadership. Neither of them suffer from any false modesty. Where Moses exclaims:

But human life's inarticulate mass
Throb the pulse of a thing
Whose mountain flanks awry
Beg my mastery--mine! (lines 193-196)

--Zarathustra echoes him thus:

Ye look upward when longing to be exalted. And I look downward because I am exalted (Thus Spake Zarathustra, page 49).

Similarly, both men regard human love as an experience that a great prophetic leader has to live through and overcome:

What were the use, if my sight grew,
And its far branches were cloud-hung,
You, small at the roots, like grass?

While the new lips my spirit would kiss
Were not red lips of flesh,

But the huge kiss of power? (lines 184-189)

Zarathustra expresses his view with remarkable similarity:

The loving one will create, because he despiseth!
What knoweth he of love whose lot it hath not been to
despise just what he loved! (op. cit., page 87)

The growing-out beyond individual love is as necessary for
Zarathustra's Superman as it is for Moses.

The petty limitations of morality and social codes of
behaviour must be disregarded, and this freedom is exalting:

I am rough now, and new, and will have no tailor
(Moses, line 51)

and he has already expressed his impatience of:

. . . priests and forms,

This rigid dry-boned refinement . . . (lines 140-141).

Zarathustra sees it like this:

Free from the happiness of slaves; saved from Gods and
adorations; fearless and fear-inspiring; great and
lonely; this is the will of the truthful one (op. cit.,
page 145).

Moses seeks to rule the Hebrews because he feels it is
his destiny to do so as well as satisfying his personal ambi-
tion. Like the Superman Moses sees his leadership as a
natural concomitant of his excellence:

. . . what is best, shall rule; what is best, will rule!
(op. cit., page 313)

But such a demand for power is justified by Nietzsche's
assertion that this power is not sought as an end in itself
but as a means of uplifting and educating lesser men.
Rosenberg's Moses departs from this altruism for his attitude
is overtly dictatorial:

So grandly fashion these rude elements
Into some newer nature, a consciousness

Like naked light seizing the all-eyed soul,
Oppressing with its gorgeous tyranny
Until they take it thus--or die (lines 465-469).

Reference has already been made on page 254 above to the link between Nietzsche and Blake, not that there is any evidence to suggest that Nietzsche ever read Blake: and Rosenberg's admiration for Blake is evident in his letters (see CW, page 340). Moses' question:

Who has . . . put . . . man's mind in a groove?
(lines 146-149)

echoes Blake's "London":

In every voice, in every ban
The mind-forged manacles I hear.

It is to A. R. Orage, editor of The New Age, that we owe the striking but greatly oversimplified equation:

Blake is Nietzsche in English (Nietzsche, the Dionysian Spirit of the Age (1906), page 75).

Its value, however, rests in the realization that Orc and Los, no less than Zarathustra and Moses, are presented to us as the liberators of mankind. In this sense, Moses' planned revolution is meant to be acceptable because the end will justify the means: violence directed toward achieving a better society is tolerable, maybe even laudable. Certainly it would be so in Zarathustra's eyes:

Change of values--ie. change of creators! He who is obliged to be a creator ever destroyeth (Thus Spake Zarathustra, page 79).

If the old order is entrenched, only violence can overturn it.

It is this thread of Nietzsche's thought that runs on into The Unicorn and less noticeably into The Amulet. The Apollonian artist is like both the Nubian and Tel who remark on the power that music has to harmonise the unevennesses of

life:

. . . in so far as he interprets music by means of pictures, he himself rests in the quiet calm of Apollonian contemplation, however much all around him which he beholds through the medium of music is in a state of confused and violent motion (The Birth of Tragedy, Section 6, page 54).

Both of Rosenberg's 'uncivilised' males possess this power of detachment from the experience and suffering of a Saul or Lilith. Moreover, they possess inner reserves of moral strength which seem to be connected--so far as Tel is concerned, at least--with a power of myth-making, or myth-telling. In one of the Unicorn fragments (IA) Lilith reads a borrowed book of myths which suggests that she is unaware of the imminent appearance of the Unicorn and feels a lack of such an element in her life. With this in mind one can appreciate the relevance of Nietzsche's view:

Without myth . . . every culture loses its healthy creative natural power. . . . The mythical figures have to be invisibly omnipresent genii, under care of which the young soul grows to maturity, by the signs of which the man gives a meaning to his life and struggles: and the state itself knows no more powerful unwritten law than the mythical foundation which vouches for its connection with religion and its growth from mythical ideas (op. cit., Section 23, page 174).

Saul and Lilith are manifestations of what happens when a myth-less society is challenged, for on the arrival of Tel they become incapable of decisive action. The response of Saul, in particular is that of the type whom Zarathustra considers to be

he who careth not to defend himself, who swalloweth down poisonous spittle and evil looks, the all-too-patient one, the sufferer of everything, the all-too-contented one; for that is the way of slaves (Thus Spake Zarathustra, page 283).

When Lilith recalls the Nubian's superhuman qualities in these words:

Sudden the lightning flashed upon a figure

Moving as a man moves in the slipping mud

But singing not as a man sings, through the storm . . .

(The Amulet, lines 30-32)

she is remarkably close to Zarathustra's response to the tantalizing sound he hears from another plane of existence:

O my brethren, I heard a laughter that was no man's laughter. And now a thirst gnaweth at me, a longing that is never stilled (Thus Spake Zarathustra, page 233).

Tel's appearance, too, is described similarly:

Hark . . . was that a human voice?

Sh . . . when that crash ceases.

Like laughter . . . like laughter,

Sure that was laughter . . . just the

laughter of ours (The Unicorn (II), lines 50-53).

Tel, because of his mission, is patently a symbol of creativity, both in the physical sense (and accompanied by his unicorn, the mediaeval symbol of lust) as well as in the spiritual one. He overcomes the moribund society represented by Saul and at the end of the play is about to embark on a new era of fulfilment, with his tribe. In this way Tel's destiny conforms to Nietzsche's equation of will with creation: the relevant passage also has a slight affinity with Schopenhauer's doctrine of the irrational will:

Willing delivereth! For willing is creating. Thus I teach. And only for the purpose of creating shall ye learn! (op. cit., page 307).

Of course Tel has not (unlike Zarathustra's Supermen) been educated specifically for this task of creative leadership: such a task has been thrust on him by destiny. His emergence is explained by Nietzsche in The Will to Power, a collection of notes published posthumously in 1901 but not appearing in an English translation till 1914: as human nature, Nietzsche argues, becomes increasingly ignoble and

uninspired, so the pressure of society will thrust forward individuals who involuntarily have to assume leadership:

The same reasons that produce the increasing smallness of man drive the stronger and rarer individuals up to greatness (Will to Power, Note 109, page 68).

This comparison of Rosenberg's dramatic characters to Nietzsche's cultural personifications shows the close similarity of the two types, but it is wrong to think that we should identify Moses or the Nubian or Tel with either Apollo, Dionysus or the Superman. There is considerable overlap in Rosenberg's and Nietzsche's conception of the redeemer of society, but since Rosenberg's emphases are more purely artistic than philosophical (although there is some philosophizing element in the plays), some differences in direction are inevitable. It is interesting that--even when allowing for the pervasive influence of Nietzsche on twentieth-century thought and literature--there is such a close resemblance as these last few pages indicate.

By drawing attention to the affinity of ideas between Nietzsche and Rosenberg in his plays, we can see in anticipation how little chance there is of Rosenberg being easily classifiable in respect of either style or content. So Joseph Cohen's essay, "Romantic to Classic" (Tulane Studies in English, 1960), which seeks to show Rosenberg as becoming increasingly 'classical' (in Hulme's sense) in his use of language, can clearly be seen to present only a part of the picture. Rosenberg's proximity to the Nietzschean concept of the hero could equally well be seen as a symptom of the 'romanticism' which Cohen claims he was outgrowing: but this neglects the irrefutable fact that, together with his Trench Poems, Rosenberg was working on The Unicorn at the time of

his death.

Why should Nietzsche have had such an appeal to Rosenberg? The most likely reason is the prophetic tone of the German writer. His impassioned style does, after all, have something in common with the hortatory quality of Old Testament prophetic books which had such an influence on Rosenberg's earliest verse (see "Ode to David's Harp" or "Zion"). Yet in terms of their family background, life-standards and careers they could hardly be more different. *Yet it must be remembered that Nietzsche was very fashionable among young English writers up to 1914*

There are also interesting but purely coincidental resemblances between Rosenberg's Moses and the central figure of Freud's Moses and Monotheism, which was not published in England until 1939. There is, however, no evidence to suggest that Freud ever read, or even knew of, Rosenberg, and Freud's book aims to discover something of the character of Moses as distinct from the legends which have grown up around him. Freud recalls that the Biblical Moses has certain features which render him human rather than archetypal, and Rosenberg retains them in his portrayal of Moses. Such a feature is Moses' legendary hot-temper: he kills the overseer in a fit of temper and later he smashes stone tables given to him on Mount Sinai in angry resentment at his people's defection from God. As Freud points out (on page 53), such a trait does not seem like the result of transmuting a man into a legend: it would detract from his glorification, and so is likely to have been a surviving characteristic of the historical Moses. Compare with this the Young Hebrew's picture of

a madman's piteous craving for

A monstrous balked perfection (Moses, lines 249-250).

Another quality of Moses which the Bible mentions is that he is "slow of speech" and so had to have Aaron as his interpreter in his discussions with Pharoah. Such a fact lends weight to Freud's hypothesis that Moses was in fact an Egyptian, most probably of noble birth, who has been transformed by Judaic myth into a Jew whose parents were unknown. Freud suggests that Moses spoke another language (that of the Egyptian court) and therefore needed an interpreter to talk to his "semitic neo-Egyptians". In this connection, note Rosenberg's reference (at line 248) to Moses' "halt tongue".

In his book Freud traces a connection between imperialistic rule and the growth of a monotheistic form of religion: the divine hierarchy was modelled on the imperial so that God was conceived, in a sense, as a reflection of the autocratic Pharoah. The parallel with Rosenberg's Moses is a corollary of this monotheism--as Pharoah becomes sole God, so Moses, imitating Pharoah, sets himself up as sole leader. Rosenberg's Moses, in fact, links Egyptian God and Pharoah very closely together:

Pharoah well peruked and oiled,
And your admirable pyramids,
And your interminable procession
Of crowded kings,
Your are my little fishing rods
Wherewith I catch the fish
To suit my hungry belly . . . (lines 44-50)

.

As ladies' perfumes are
Obnoxious to stern natures,

This miasma of a rotting god

Is to me. . . . (lines 142-145)

--and in his turn he sets out to reach the level of a demi-god at least. Autocracy, as a method of wielding power, is, we see, an alluring example: however much Rosenberg's Moses rejects Pharoah and his God he plans to adopt his enemies' method of ruling.

Because of his assuming an autocratic attitude toward his followers, Rosenberg's Moses conforms neatly to Freud's assessment of the historical Moses as a leader. How was it, he asks, that one man alone could

develop such extraordinary effectiveness, that he can create out of indifferent individuals and families one people, can stamp this people with its definite character and determine its fate for millenia to come? (page 169)

The close coincidence of Freud's phrasing with lines 452-454 of Moses is immediately striking:

I'd shape one impulse through the contraries
Of vain ambitious men, selfish and callous,
And frail life-drifters, reticent, delicate.

Freud later argues that Moses may well have incorporated into his presentation to his people of God some of his own personal characteristics, such as his irascibility and implacability (page 174). Hence, he concludes, we should not wonder that the Jews had difficulty separating their image of their leader from that of his God. How exactly the Second Hebrew illustrates this fusion of two leaders in one man can be seen at lines 235-246:

He spoke! since yesterday
Am I not larger grown?

.

. . . there is a famine in ripe harvest
When hungry giants come as guests,
Come knead the hills and ocean into food.
There is none for him.

The Biblical God is father to the Jews, but in Rosenberg's handling of the legend Moses intends to replace God in their eyes as their father-figure. He displays both the attributes of a father which Freud lists as decisiveness of thought, strength^k of will and forcefulness in action, together with supreme self-reliance and independence which to Freud characterizes the great man; such complete conviction that he is doing what is the best may result in a leader being ruthless. Such a leader, it is clear, in Freud's words

must be admired, he may be trusted, he is also to be feared (page 174).

The degree to which Rosenberg's Moses seeks to replace God finds an echo in Freud's theory that Moses set out to identify himself with his God. Moses' conception of God, according to Rosenberg, is not as a father-figure with whom he can merge his own personality, but as a despotic tyrant who is to be opposed and, if possible, outwitted. Moses' ambition is to stand in the Jews' eyes for both God and Pharoah, as both these figures were to him symbols of a repressive and corrupt authority: his rule would in its own way be no less autocratic than theirs, but it would provide fresh incentives and opportunities for spiritual growth.

This note on Freud is meant merely to offer an interesting sidelight on Rosenberg's conception of Moses. The degree of coincidence between this great twentieth-century psychologist's view and Rosenberg's on the personality underlying the Biblical figure of Moses only emphasises how accurate

and plausible is Rosenberg's characterization. Rosenberg gives us in his play a study at once consistent and credible, in terms of early twentieth-century psychology, of the domineering type.

CHAPTER IV

ROSENBERG'S TRENCH POEMS:

THE MATURING OF TALENT

These Trench Poems do represent the maturity of his talent, but they are the climax of a long period of apprenticeship and not a sudden, sporadic outburst. The space already given to the Earlier Poems in this thesis is hereby justified, as the maturity of the Trench Poems cannot be fully understood unless seen in the light of his consistent commitment to poetry and his continuing development. As will be seen, the preoccupations and habits of language found in the earlier poems are carried forward into the Trench Poems.

Rosenberg's reputation as a poet is based, for the majority of readers, on his Trench Poems (1916-1918). In Complete Works and Collected Poems twenty poems are grouped under this heading, but scattered throughout other sections of the book there are five other poems which should be included in a study of this kind. These five are "Spring 1916"; "Marching" (as seen from the Left File); "On Receiving News of the War"; "The Dead Heroes"; "Christmas Card Verse" and they will be considered in due order.

Unlike Owen, with whom he invites comparison on so many counts, Rosenberg's war poems form only a small part of his total output. His first published poem was written in 1905

and Complete Works and Collected Poems provide evidence that the bulk of his surviving work was written before 1914, and of course his privately printed pamphlets--Night and Day, Youth and Moses were published in 1912, 1915 and 1916 respectively. The earlier examination of Rosenberg's verse plays should demonstrate that by the time he left for France in the summer of 1916 Rosenberg had developed a style of language and a highly individual response to ideas before he was exposed to the rigours of war. By comparison, Owen's pre-war poetry lacks the sinew and seriousness characteristic of Rosenberg's work. War made Owen into a poet, but Rosenberg had reached greater poetic maturity than this before he enlisted.

Both poets began to write under the predominant influence of the 1890s and the fulsome diction of that period can be found in both. Hence Owen's sonnet "Written in a Wood, September 1910":

Full ninety autumns hath this ancient beech
Helped with its myriad leafy tongues to swell
The dirges of the deep-toned western gale,
And ninety times hath all its power of speech
Been stricken dumb, at sound of winter's yell,
Since Adonais, no more strong and hale,
Might have rejoiced to linger here and teach
His thoughts in sonnets to the listening dell . . .
(lines 1-8)

can be matched by Rosenberg's "Death" (1910):

Death waits, and when she has kissed Life's warm lips
With her pale mouth, and made him one with her;
Held to him Lethe's wine whereof he sips;
And stilled Time's wings, earth-shadowing sleepless
whir;

Outside of strife, beyond the world's blood-drips,
Shadowed by peace, Rest dwells and makes no stir

(lines 9-14).

Physical and artistic development accounts for the 'pruning-out' of some of this excess during the years which followed, but once both men were involved in front-line life a distinction becomes apparent: while Rosenberg escapes permanently from his earlier luxuriant style, Owen in December 1917 can still produce verse of the calibre of lines 1-8 of "Hospital Barge at C erisy":

Budging the sluggard ripples of the Somme,
A barge round old Cerisy slowly slewed.
Softly her engines down the current screwed
And chuckled in her, with contented hum.
Till fairy tinklings struck their crooning dumb.
The waters rumpling at the stern subdued.
The lock-gate took her bulging amplitude.
Gently from out the gurgling lock she swum.

There seems little doubt that Owen was developing toward a maturity of style but the process was less advanced in his case than it was in Rosenberg's.

Temperament and background obviously play some part in this 'gap' between two poets who were in most respects contemporary (Owen was five ^{years} Rosenberg's junior, being born in 1895). Owen's sheltered, middle-class background, his early sympathy toward the established Church, his early devotion to Keats and the Romantic poets is in marked contrast to Rosenberg's harsh, impecunious early life in the East End, his struggle to find humane employment, the difficulties of his spell at the Slade, and his reasons for actually enlisting; finally what Bergonzi calls his lack of "English

pastoral nostalgia to set against front-line experience".¹

The development from civilian to war poetry is a more organic one in Rosenberg than it is in Owen. Rosenberg had had the opportunity before war came to map out lines of his poetical thought. There is a detectable progress from the poems of pre-1912 -1914 to those of 1915 and later: his early preoccupations with the traditional themes of love and death have given way to the wider canvas of man's relationship to society and to his own drives (seen most clearly in Moses and The Amulet and The Unicorn). Thus the ground had already been prepared for his Trench Poems: in them Rosenberg's speculations about the nature of man and his reciprocal obligations to society ^{are} ~~is~~ simply looked at from another angle, that of the slit trench. And despite the sub-human conditions in which he found himself, Rosenberg's essential humanity remains unimpaired. Even at the worst moments of degradation Rosenberg's faith in the dignity of man stands unshaken; if men are being exploited by the institutions of their society then there is implied a need for these institutions to be removed and replaced. Social violence to achieve this end may be permissible and even necessary, and in his poems Rosenberg never speaks out against the war in condemnatory terms. The depth of his revulsion and horror at the experiences of himself and his contemporaries is undeniable, although he never appears as an anti-war propagandist. In a celebrated passage from a letter of 1916 to Binyon (CW, page 373) he writes of his determination to immerse himself thoroughly in his strange new war

¹ Heroes' Twilight, page 110

experiences in the hope that they will enrich his personality and his poetry. These lines often provide ammunition for writers who believe Rosenberg to have been cold-heartedly detached and inhumanly objective about the whole business of war when they compare him with Owen. What these words really express, however, is merely another version of Keats's famous remarks on "negative capability". There is little detectable difference between that remark of Rosenberg's and Keats's comment that

A Poet is the most unpoetical of any thing in existence; because he has no Identity--he is continually informing and filling some other Body . . .²

Moreover, Owen came, near the end of his life, to think of himself as a propagandist, whereas Rosenberg was always striving to be primarily a poet. "The poetry is in the pity" means, in one sense, that Owen was more concerned with what he wrote rather than the way he wrote it; Rosenberg's letters reveal his concern as being more 'aesthetic'--his belief in "something hidden and felt to be there" reveals his awareness of the mysterious in poetry, an awareness that poetry very often means more than it says, that some of the effects of poems are finally incommunicable. The word 'aesthetic' is not here being used in the disparaging manner employed by Maurice Hussey who observes, in the Introduction to his own Poetry of the First World War, that in France Rosenberg's

only problems were aesthetic ones (page 40).

Hussey regards Rosenberg as a writer who

found the torture of his own generation a subject for calm appraisal (ibid., page 41).

² Letter to Richard Woodhouse, 27th October, 1818
(Selected Letters of John Keats, ed. Robert Gittings,
page 157).

Reference to Rosenberg's letters quickly dispels this narrow view of his wartime problems. Owen, by contrast, has in his major poems always a 'message' and the poem's raison d'être is to communicate this message, though often in a lofty, impassioned and figurative way.

Rosenberg's continuous concern always to achieve an artistic utterance goes some way toward explaining the obliquity of his major poems which some critics--as Bergonzi acknowledges (op. cit., page 118)--have found disquieting. Although "Dead Man's Dump" is generally regarded as Rosenberg's greatest war poem many writers find it severely flawed, as does John H. Johnston, who considers it impressive but fragmentary--"A succession of brilliant lyric fragments" (English Poetry of the First World War, page 238). That this texture was not deliberately sought by Rosenberg is clear from two references made to this poem in letters from France. The first, to Edward Marsh (postmarked 8th May, 1917--CW, page 316) clearly concerns the poem at an early stage of its development:

Ive written some lines suggested by going out wiring, or rather carrying wire up the line on limbers and running over dead bodies lying about. I dont think what Ive written is very good but I think the substance is, and when I work on it Ill make it fine.

Within three weeks of this he was writing again to Marsh in response to the latter's remarks on the poem:

I liked your criticism of 'Dead mans dump'. Mr Binyon has often sermonised lengthily over my working on two different principles in the same thing and I know how it spoils the unity of a poem. But if I couldn't before, I can now, I am sure plead the absolute necessity of fixing an idea before it is lost, because of the situation its concieved in (CW, pages 316-317).

From this it is clear that Rosenberg was aware of a certain polarity in the poem. Christopher Hassall, on page 411 of his biography of Marsh suggests that what Edward Marsh had

objected to was Rosenberg's mixture of measured and free verse within the same poem: Rosenberg is not notable as a metrical innovator, but he evidently favoured a relaxed and almost 'throw-away' delivery for many of his lines, and D. H. Lawrence's remarks to Edward Marsh earlier (9th November, 1913) demonstrate how little sympathy Marsh had with this manner of writing:

You are a bit of a policeman in poetry . . . 'It satisfies my ear,' you say. Well, I don't write for your ear . . . If your ear has got stiff and a bit mechanical, don't blame my poetry (Edward Marsh--a Biography, page 260).

In fact, the detectable influences behind the free verse of this poem are those of stress-metre as well as of Biblical rhythms. Is it not equally likely that what Binyon was actually commenting on was the oscillation observable in the poem between isolated passages of keen observation on the one hand and loosely metaphysical speculations on the other? A look at the poem itself will help us to decide whether it is as polarised as Johnston suggests.

The opening two lines of "Dead Man's Dump" have an uneven, rocking and swaying metre which well suits the progress of the "plunging limbers": this impact is reinforced by the harsh, metallic rattle of "track/racketed". Stanza one also recalls Owen's "Exposure" in the description of the coils of wire round stakes as if they symbolized Christ's sacrificial crown of thorns. If, in such a setting, Christ's sacrifice seems futile, so also is the histrionic gesture of Canute in attempting to stem the tide; the soldiers themselves might just as hopelessly seek to avoid the waves of death and mutilation which will overrun them. Neatly and undramatically Rosenberg presents for our evaluation the

pre-1914 commonplace that the enemy are "brutish" while the British are, of course, "our brothers dear"; The final epithet might at first appear heavily ironic, but this would run counter to the mood of the rest of the poem. Silkin suggests (Out of Battle, page 282) that Rosenberg here is recreating his own response toward the enemy, and that he is not making a value-judgment. However, in view of the non-partisan tone of the poem it seems equally probable that "brothers dear" refers to the suffering victims on both sides, to whom their victorious adversaries appear "brutish". Our earlier examination of Rosenberg's imagery should incline us to accept that such a degree of 'sophistication' (I do not use the word derogatively) in an apparently simple phrase is not uncommon in Rosenberg. Such 'packed' words and phrases, it may be remembered, were "root", "gleam" and "iron" which were commented on several pages earlier (pages 212-215).

The second stanza continues the opening narrative spell by treating us to a view of the battlefield as detached and at the same time as pitying as that of Owen's "The Show":

Across its beard, that horror of harsh wire,
There moved thin caterpillars, slowly uncoiled.
It seemed they pushed themselves to be as plugs
Of ditches, where they writhed and shrivelled, killed
(lines 6-9).

The consonantal clustering of "lurched" and "crunched" echoes only too successfully the sound of dead limbs being crushed by ponderous wheels. But at the moment where his reader feels inclined to react violently to this pathetic and gratuitous mutilation of the dead Rosenberg stops the words in

our throats with the blunt, almost tight-lipped monosyllables:

Their shut mouths made no moan.

By chance, it seems, Rosenberg has here caught the lilting intonation of Anglo-Saxon half-line alliterative metre--a phenomenon also observable in line 13. If there was any doubt about the non-partisan view of the war which is characteristic of Rosenberg and wholly evident here, then line 10 should resolve this. Even in death, these luckless men are deprived of dignity. The line which follows it seems to be a metrical 'in-filler' rather than a significant qualification of its predecessor, although it carries a charge of meaning, (provided by the echo from the Prayer Book Burial Service--"Man that is born of a woman hath but a short time to live and is full of misery.") A similar phenomenon occurs, apparently, in lines 30-31 of Owen's "Strange Meeting":

Courage was mine, and I had mystery,

Wisdom was mine, and I had mastery . . .

where it seems that the exigencies of metre and rhyme have been allowed precedence over matter. (Both poets, had they survived 1918, might well have recast these lines on further consideration. Though in support of line 11 it could be claimed that there is some assonantal connection between "woman" and "over them" in the following line). Other affinities with Owen emerge in this stanza, such as the closeness of line 12 to line seven of Owen's "Anthem for Doomed Youth":

. . . The shrill, demented choirs of wailing shells . . .
Yet this is an idea Rosenberg used before in "Break of Day", lines 20-21, and so all that can be safely said of this similarity is that it derived from first-hand experience

which is common to them both. The same implication follows, however, in both poets, that the wailing of the shells is the only sound of mourning which will accompany their annihilation. The same applies to line 13 whose humming n's so well convey monotony, and whose elegiac echo can be found in line 39 of Owen's "Insensibility":

. . . From larger day to huger night.

For Owen in "Futility" Earth was the source of life for both plants and men:

--O what made fatuous sunbeams toil

To break earth's sleep at all? (lines 13-14)

but Rosenberg has developed this image beyond this point to the extent that earth has become impatient to engulf them (it is not simply the provider of graves, but is a force actively seeking to capture soldiers)--an idea which foreshadows the role of the Amazons in "Daughters of War". At the instant of death, the men's lives are at once simplified and elevated to the plane of greatness:

In the strength of their strength

Suspended--

we are reminded of earlier occasions where Rosenberg admires men's ennobling assertion of willpower. At this point in the poem the direct narrative ceases and is not resumed till the sixth stanza.

What happens at this juncture is that Rosenberg is absorbed by speculation about the destination of human spirits torn so abruptly and violently from their bodies. (A reader familiar with Eliot's "La Figlia Che Piange" may notice the similarity between Rosenberg's lines:

. . . And flung on your hard back

Is their soul's sack

Emptied of God-ancestralled essences.

Who hurled them out? Who hurled?

--and Eliot's:

. . . As the soul leaves the body torn and bruised . . .
There is, however, little chance of influence between the
two poets, in either direction.) The bodies remain, dis-
carded husks, on the surface, but the spirits cannot simply
have evaporated. The mystery of the spirit's migration is
superbly caught in lines of admirable vividness and restraint:

None saw their spirits' shadow shake the grass,
Or stood aside for the half used life to pass
Out of those doomed nostrils and the doomed mouth,
When the swift iron burning bee
Drained the wild honey of their youth

(lines 27-31).

Here we see the destruction of "the wild honey of their youth"
by the iron as mentioned in the earlier "August 1914" (lines
5-8). Next, our attention is briefly redirected toward the
experience of those involuntary participants who survive the
cataclysm. Survival, however, is precarious and inexplicable;
soldiers may appear physically unscathed, with "lucky limbs
as on ichor fed" (my emphasis), but shock or fear can kill
them just as effectively as mines and shells--a seizure can
choke the life out of them.

In the next stanza (the seventh) the poet gazes round at
the incomprehensible confusion, the immediacy of this experi-
ence weakened only by what appears as a feeble inversion in
line 41 which Rosenberg has contrived to achieve a half-
rhyme with the preceding "fire": but, of course, if the
word order ran "are ceaseless", the result would be metrically

impossible. Moreover, a suggestion of reverberating hollow-ness, the echoing of battle-noise, is conveyed by the continuation of the open vowel-sounds in "dark", "air" and "spurts". The sharp juxtapositions in lines 42-43 point up the unreality of the division between life and death (the syntax of "timelessly" as an adverb modifying "strode" is curious), then we return to those less fortunate than the dead, who are wounded by shrapnel and instantly deprived of their consciousness of belonging to loving relatives.

The eighth stanza was omitted from the poem's original appearance in Poems (1922), maybe because the apostrophization of the earth here appeared hysterical, lacking in the dignity which characterizes the rest of the poem. But these lines are emotionally essential to the poem's structure; they are the climax to thoughts about the mystery of death. We shall notice a similar passionate outburst in lines 16-21 of the superbly restrained "Break of Day". These have an affinity with the impassioned invocation frequently found in Blake's prophetic books. From this moment the poem runs to its conclusion on the more mundane level of the actualities of battlefield experience. For the last time Rosenberg reverts to the sexual imagery of lines 14-17 to relate his response to violent death: the "iron love" of shells penetrating the earth-mother results in the birth of new dead. Pathos lies in the realization that men bring this destruction on themselves unwittingly and almost involuntarily ("blind fingers"). Curiously enough, Rosenberg's sister Annie also omitted this stanza in error when she made a fair copy to send to Marsh. This is acknowledged in one of the Berg Collection letters to Marsh from Annie, dated 3rd June,

1917. Minor differences between this and the printed text occur where an s is added to "bowel" in line 48; two small details of punctuation in lines 49 and 51 make no difference to the meaning; the most significant of the three is the more condemnatory appearance of line 54--"which suicide man's self dug . . ." which Rosenberg later simplified, quite rightly.

The horrific impact of lines 55-56, which strikes us without prior warning, accurately transmits the experience they contain. The following line slides past on soft s's and the stanza ends with a poignant statement of the pity of war; the pity this time is in the poetry, the reader's emotion being stirred by the realization that human pity is unavailing and useless. This quiet close also initiates another movement in the poem which continues the notion of death by drowning which we see in stanzas 10 and 11. Sea imagery is not inappropriate here and may well not be metaphorical at all if we remember the glutinous and voracious trench mud. Is it mere coincidence that Saul's misery in both The Amulet and The Unicorn originates from mud's tenacity?

The slime clung

And licked and clawed and chewed the clogged
dragging wheels

Till they sunk right to the axle . . . (lines 22-
24).

By the striking phrase, "older dead" Rosenberg once more recalls to us the slenderness of the division between life and death: some corpses have been born into death earlier than this one and this suggests a hierarchy (by age) among the dead, a hierarchy we meet again in "Daughters of War" where the Amazon^{who} speaks envies her sisters their present

possession of "lovers" as she is still awaiting hers.

The number of monosyllables in stanza ten brings home the motionlessness of the corpses whose faces are already showing signs of the alien influence of death. "Great sunk silences" captures exactly the subterranean atmosphere of Owen's "Strange Meeting", though, as Silkin points out, "sunk" carries a double implication (op. cit., page 287); if the dead are sunk in the tomb-like earth, the living observer is also sunk in silent speculation about the riddle of the newly-dead.

The poem ends with the episode of the soldier Rosenberg saw dying, but the pathos he generates therefrom is not particularised. With his perceptions already darkened by the oncoming shades of death the man cries out with his last breath to the living men he hears approaching him. In lines 75-77 "break" appears three times, with curious intensity (though on its third appearance the staccato effect of this repetition is softened by the following "over", which introduces a tinge of lyricism); it recalls the limber of lines 7-9 which will soon crush his lifeless bones at the same time as it describes the incoming tide of death--the hapless soldier seems to desire escape into death from the tantalising din of his companions' approach. In Poems (1922) the punctuation at the end of line 77 was a comma and line 78 was in direct speech. Presumably the difference we see in both later editions was an editorial decision that the man never actually uttered these words, and the result is that we see his last moments from the approaching limber rather than within earshot of his feeble scream; the resultant distancing only increases our sense of helplessness. ~~In the~~

In the despairing speed of the last few lines the fact that lines 79-82 are not a grammatical sentence escapes our notice. If the 1922 punctuation (which, on balance, seems preferable) were retained, then "Even" (line 79) belongs with "Cried" (line 77) as an adverb. With the later punctuation, there is a temptation for the reader to regard "Even" as introducing a simile ("as the mixed hoofs of the mules") and the second appearance of "mixed" (line 81) as a past participle. But the sense demands that this second "mixed" should be a preterite form, for then the dimming of the man's perceptions with the onset of death is well-conveyed by the muddling of what he sees ("quivering-bellied mules") and what he hears ("mixed hoofs" and "rushing wheels").

The last four lines place us firmly on the rattling limber ("crashed" makes a very strong sound here), compelled to share in the torturing impotence of those who see the man sink rapidly away from their proffered consolation. We feel the prodigal futility of pity or sympathy on such an occasion. Though Rosenberg's words are scrupulously unemotional his attitude is clearly anything but that of a wholly detached observer.

The foregoing remarks should have brought out the tension in the poem between the intense "lyric fragments" and the restrained reactions of the poet's sensibility. This is the poem's strength; the subject-matter demands that the poet should comment on what he observes. In this respect "Dead Man's Dump" has a much more direct appeal than "Daughters of War" which simply takes the observed phenomenon of death on the battlefield as its point of departure. The technique here is familiar to readers of Owen's "seared conscience"

poems--we see through the eyes of a sensitive man who is at once a horrified observer as well as being an impotent victim of war's process. The blending of the harshly physical with the visionary saves the poem from both the morbid excesses of photographic 'realism' and from the initially impenetrable obliqueness of "Daughters of War". Rosenberg's innate tact gives the poem a 'matt finish': he resists the temptation of a moralistic conclusion. Simple anger or grief is too easy a reaction, so we are left with an anguish deeper than Owen's "pity", an anguish springing from the knowledge that pity for those who will continue to die in this way cannot comfort them any more than it can those who are left alive.

"Dead Man's Dump" is by no means the only one of Rosenberg's poems in which such a blending is visible. In comparison with it, "In War" seems a slight and disappointingly self-conscious piece of verse. Despite its apparent crudities, however, it makes an illuminating comparison-piece as it is similar in form and layout while its relative surface simplicity and figurative poverty coupled with its more overt didacticism suggest that it was an earlier version of the long narrative and reflective poem, of which "Dead Man's Dump" is so clearly a first-rate example.

The origin of "In War" is uncertain, but no evidence has emerged to suggest that the incident it contains came within Rosenberg's personal experience (his own brother, Dave, was wounded in the very same week in 1918 in which he himself was killed, but nevertheless survived the war)³; in all probability, though, he had had witnessed at first-hand such a cruel tragedy striking one of his companions. The first

³ Interview with Mrs. Ray Lyons, May 1974.

four stanzas set the atmosphere of stillness and foreboding by musing rather obviously on the inexorable continuity of time and on the oppressive stillness of silence caused by the absence of his brother's voice. Yet the feeling behind lines 11-15 is, perhaps, more appropriate when addressed to a woman than to a brother. In fact, these first four stanzas, if they stood alone, would pass as an impressively mournful love poem.

The fifth stanza begins the story, with sensuous phrases redolent of an earlier style of writing:

. . . And the rose of beauty faded

And pined in the great gloom . . .

The reader may catch an echo of Owen in:

. . . the flower of men . . .

and:

. . . pined in the great gloom . . .

--for Owen's "Insensibility" has:

. . . not flowers

For poets' tearful fooling . . . (lines 7-8)

--while "The Seed" ("1914") contains in its second line the phrase "perishing great darkness". The next two stanzas are effective understatement, the routine quality of soldiers' existence characterised by the baldness of line 26. Stanza eight contains two ideas already noted in "Dead Man's Dump", namely that the survivors' lives are "Bonds to the whims of murder" and that the living are worse off than the dead; their manner of presentation here makes them both seem less significant and singular than they are in "Dead Man's Dump". In the latter poem these ideas have an organic unity with the rest of the poem while here they are merely presented and left undeveloped.

The lines leading up to the announcement of his brother's death are, by their very flatness, a warning that something dramatic is about to occur, and the shock of hearing his brother's name read out is cushioned for us by the preceding two lines (lines 49-50). The announcement and the reaction it produces is a moment of horrific melodrama, but the poem's overt attempt to seek an emotional response here weakens its impact, and is in sharp contrast to the low-keyed dignity and simplicity of the remainder of the poem. These two qualities emerge most clearly in the final stanza, which relates this particular event to loftier generalizations on the lot of man in war. Here personal loss and misery are balanced against "the great sceptred dooms" and found to outweigh them. This stanza also contains much of the emotion distilled in "Dead Man's Dump", and this feeling is enhanced by the reappearance here of techniques noted earlier in that poem--the wave metaphor, the "flood of brutish man" breaking itself on the sceptres/stakes. The closing two lines are epic in their simplicity and yet full of tragic pathos; the poignancy of helpless resignation to the inevitable is heightened by the use of the present tense to suggest both the remorseless continuity and inescapability of this process. One slight reservation deserves to be noted here, a question of whether such a long build-up is justifiable artistically, even for such a fine last stanza. On balance it is difficult to avoid a negative answer.

"In War", then, cannot be counted among Rosenberg's most memorable war poems, but it has touches of greatness in the elemental simplicity of man's relationship to the earth as well as in the "haunting impression of timelessness" which

Johnston notes (op. cit., page 227), along with an almost dream-like unreality. This fine restraint is also the hallmark of a much more successful and unified poem, "Break of Day in the Trenches", which shares with the other the outline which begins with the harsh experiences of an individual and ends by considering such experience in relation to general destruction.

This remarkable poem was written very soon after Rosenberg arrived in the trenches in mid-1916 for in an undated letter sent to Sonia Cohen it appears in the form of a fragment entitled "In the Trenches" (CW, pages 352-353):

I snatched two poppies
From the parapets ledge,
Two bright red poppies
That winked on the ledge.
Behind my ear
I stuck one through,
One blood red poppy
I gave to you.

The sandbags narrowed
And screwed out our jest,
And tore the poppy
You had on your breast. . .
Down--a shell--O! Christ,
I am choked . . . safe . . . dust blind, I
See trench floor poppies
Strewn. Smashed you lie.

(Support for a conjectural dating of 1916 for this letter is offered by another letter to Marsh postmarked 30th June, 1916 (CW, page 310), which may well refer to "In the Trenches":

I'll write you out a dramatic thing of the trenches
some time and shan't say anything here).

An interesting parallel use of the poppy-symbol is made
by lines 17-22 of Herbert Asquith's "After the Salvo", but
the lines also betray the sentimental attitude of Asquith
toward it:

Where the salvo fell, on a splintered ledge
Of ruin, at the crater's edge,
A poppy lives: and young, and fair,
The dewdrop hangs on the spider's stair,
With every rainbow still unhurt,
From leaflet unto leaflet girt . . .

We have already seen in his reworking of Moses how
Rosenberg's later remodelling does not always improve a
poem, so the first thing to be done is to consider whether
in fact the published version is superior to the earlier
one. Two published versions actually exist, the one in CW
and an earlier one which appeared in Poetry (Chicago)--
through the agency of Ezra Pound--in December 1916. In
the Poetry version, line eight was followed by

. . . (And God knows what antipathies) . . .

a line which was retained in Poems (1922) and still appears
in some later anthology versions (such as Michael Roberts'
Faber Book of Modern Verse, published in 1936). But
Bottomley and Harding presumably had authority for stating
(CW, page 386) "In a later version Rosenberg deleted this
line." His instinct here was surely right as the line is
superfluous and the implication of "Your cosmopolitan
sympathies" is the richer for being left unstated. There is,
on reflection, a Poundian flippancy about this line, very
uncharacteristic of Rosenberg, which invites the speculation

that this parenthesis might have been Pound's 'improvement' to the manuscript. Another variation, however, is less easy to evaluate. The Poetry version of the poem follows the CW text (save for line nine) up to line 19, but the remaining lines are:

What do you see in our eyes [line 19]
At the boom, the hiss, the swiftness,
The irrevocable earth buffet--
A shell's haphazard fury.
What rootless poppies dropping? . . .
But mine in my ear is safe,
Just a little white with the dust.

The two final lines, of course, are identical with those in CW. This earlier version does continue the restrained, self-denying mood of the preceding section. The "shrieking iron and flame" is a melodramatic, hysterical outburst, verging on cliché, whereas "the boom, the hiss, the swiftness, / The irrevocable earth buffet" is a much more concrete, onomatopoeic description, more in keeping with the preceding lines. On the other hand, the "rootless poppies dropping" are given richer significance by explicitly referring their chances of survival to those of the soldiers in "Poppies whose roots are in man's veins": this line clinches the poetic necessity for the poppy-motif, whereas in the Poetry version the poppies remain merely as evidence of first-hand observation. In the still earlier letter version it is clear that the poppies are more decorative and incidental than integral. When compared with the version printed in CW this first version is seen as a highly personal record of a trench incident; the final version is immeasurably strengthened by the removal of this

element of personal involvement and the melodramatic pathos of the first version has given way to a dignified and ironic meditation which is strikingly poignant.

Yet the final version still poses difficulties for the reader. One of these is the choice of particular words, such as "crumbles" in the first line, to describe the way in which the protective covering of darkness is gradually eaten away by dawn; or the curiously appropriate epithet "Druid" to suggest the malign behaviour of time. At first sight the word may appear as simply a borrowing from the early Yeats (see the figure in "To the Rose upon the Rood of Time"

. . . Who cast round Fergus dreams, and ruin untold . . .
line five).

--but the associations of this word soon begin to cluster around: there is a fairly clear reference to the ancient British druids with their worship of light and their human sacrifices which now appear as the historical forerunner of battlefield slaughter. Dawn was the traditional time for a German attack (as we can see in Owen's "Exposure") and the sacrifice which accompanies its arrival is seen as an equally barbaric, non-Christian activity; and at the same time the historical image of the druid suggests the persistence of society's need for scapegoats, the feeling that a sinister and cynical power has been operating through the centuries, still crumbling the darkness in order to produce more slaughter. The length of this comment upon a single image demonstrates the wealth of meaning and half-conscious suggestion which Rosenberg at his most condensed can contain in a little space, and this explication is not exhaustive.

The rat in the fifth line is "sardonic" because he

projects Rosenberg's own feelings about the situation. As a Jew, Rosenberg himself was conscious of being both cosmopolitan and isolated. From their emergence as international traders and financiers the Jews had developed a loyalty to no one nation, but a loyalty only to their own Jewishness; they function, on one level, as go-betweens in the same way that the rat does, and non-Jews could feel that they were motivated by ethnic self-interest just as the rat is driven to scavenge by his appetite. The rat in this poem is not a spokesman for the Jewish point of view, let it be clear, but it is detached from the crisis and despised by some on both sides of the conflict. What Rosenberg has done here is to use the time-hallowed ironic technique of turning a humble animal into the representative of a rational and civilized point of view, employing fable as it is used with the Yahoos and Houyhnhnms as well as with the denizens of Animal Farm. Hence on the battlefield such an enlightened observer appears as "droll", sharing with the Jews a measure of detachment toward this incomprehensible conflict.

"Chanced" (line 15) in its form here as a passive past participle is probably unique; at a first reading it seems cumbersome, but its value lies (once again) in its compression, for no other single word can be found to do quite the same job. The soldiers' lives are 'bonds' in the sense that they have been pledged as if toward the repayment of a debt and will become mature at a certain date--their future existence has been mortgaged. (There is a similar use of the expression to be found in the second section of Herbert Read's The End of a War, where he refers to soldiers as "the bands/bonded to slaughter"). The impact of "chanced" is

reinforced by the reappearance of the poppies: they are literally rooted in the veins of the dead soldiers and at the same time are a tangible metamorphosis of the dead blood which nourishes them. Evidence of the curious kinship with the flowers that the soldier poets, at least, acknowledged is offered by Owen's comment to Sassoon in a letter of 10th October, 1918:

. . . I have found brave companionship in a poppy, behind whose stalk I took cover from five machine-guns and several howitzers (Collected Poems of Wilfred Owen, Appendix I, page 176).

The poem ends on a note of tension, the moment of escape for man and poppy being balanced against the multiple associations of "dust", which suggest mortality; yet again it is equally likely that the final line might not be meant symbolically at all and what we are seeing is Rosenberg choosing to end one of his most poignant poems obliquely.

In his Scrutiny article⁴ of 1935 D. W. Harding comes close to explaining what makes this poem so memorably moving. He remarks that the poet distributes his attention equally between the rat, the poppy and the man. The simple record of a trench experience (so apparent in the earliest version) has been transformed into an evaluation of twentieth-century man's conduct as exemplified by the war. The witness to this degradation of man is, as Silkin writes, no longer a compassionate God but a malign yet admirable rat (op. cit., pages 277-278). The centre of the poem is the affinity which we can witness between the rat and the speaker; both are alive and have cosmopolitan sympathies. Once this is accepted it becomes impossible to agree with Marius Bewley⁵ that

⁴ Scrutiny, Vol. III, March 1935, page 364.

⁵ Commentary, Vol. VII, 1949, page 42.

the poet has lost the power to react to his experiences, for the poem is not a lament of resignation; the poet does react positively to his situation, since to recognize the loss of man's individuality and potential he must first implicitly accept human values.

This reversal of the roles of man and rat involves an ironic outlook, a quality which is not frequent in Rosenberg. The ironic tone is heightened by the style which Rosenberg himself accurately described in a letter of 4th August to Marsh (CW, page 311) as being "surely as simple as ordinary talk". This conversational idiom coupled with strong and sensuous imagery makes this poem unique among the Trench Poems.

More frequently in these Poems we experience one which originates in a moment of experience but moves away from it to end on a metaphysical or philosophic plane, and the best example of this is "Returning, we hear the Larks". The poem is a celebration of beauty and joy found in the midst of danger and discomfort, as well as the realization that such joy can be a trap; it interweaves fear of the unpredictable with a sensitive appreciation of natural beauty. It opens with the knell-like "sombre" which reverberates through the first three lines; this bell-sound of the first word reminds the soldiers how tenuous their hold on life is. The following three lines particularize their suffering for us in strong words which depict their exhaustion; "anguish" and "poison-blasted" are in direct contrast to the homely "little safe sleep" (which partially echoes the serenity of resolution at the end of The Tempest) and their impact is reinforced by the simple "only" which shows that the men's minds

are so fatigued that sleep has become an obsession which excludes all else.

This gloom is broken by the ejaculations of line seven as the burst of song floats down to the battlefield; "hark!" and "lo!"--both Biblical utterances--increase the mystical quality of this experience. The expression "heights of night ringing with unseen larks" has itself a musical lilt and has been shown earlier (pages 208-210 above) to be the earliest and completest expression of a motif that was to recur in subsequent poems. The pleasing assonance of "heights of night" may owe something to the example of Swinburne who uses this phrase twice, though in very different contexts:

The height of night is shaken, the skies break . . .

("The Eve of Revolution", line 34)

and:

From the height of night,

Was not thine the star . . .

("Christmas Antiphones" I, lines 56-57).

To the minor objection that larks do not sing at night we can reply that patrols often returned from No-man's-Land at first light; and the phenomenon of birdsong on the battlefield has been noted by another poet:

And yet all sorts of things do make me happy--villages,
the city in ruins, the larks in the bloody dirty dawn,
the partridges, the magpies floating about among shell-
fire and once a bat. . . (Letter dated 23rd March,
1917: in Letters from Edward Thomas to Gordon Bottomley,
page 280)

The larksong marks the return of light, the return of activity, but for the soldiers this inevitably means more fighting and death. The elision of "list'ning" is sufficiently unusual to call for comment: this is only the second example of it in the whole of the poems--the first occurrence

of it was noted on page 294 above--but a look at the text of Poems (1922) shows that this instance is an editorial refinement. The ninth line presents us with a vivid picture of these exhausted figures with their faces raised to receive the beneficent shower of music.

The final stanza leaves this battlefield tableau and in highly original images explores the implications of this experience. This realization that what dropped on them could well have been more harmful than it was is an afterthought, which has not obtruded into our re-living of this incident. Once again, lines 13-16 have already been discussed in the earlier examination of Rosenberg's practice of reworking images and phrases (see pages 208-209 above). Suffice it here to say that the peculiar allure of danger is well conveyed by these two images because of their fruitfulness; the blind man is lulled by the smooth sound of the water which could threaten him and will obliterate the aspiring ideas he has scratched on the sand. The girl with the attractive dark hair is unconsciously a Delilah, her physical beauty being an invitation to disaster--another recurrent motif in Rosenberg (for treatment of this see pages 207-209 above); her kisses recall the kisses of Eve's serpent. The unobtrusive use of rhyme in lines 14-16 is no accident, and the open vowel gives a sense of continuity rather than one of finality. Whether or not we regard the larks' music as Siren melodies is of lesser consequence than is the relevance of these poetic images for danger to the central experience of the poem. Silkin claims (op. cit., page 294) that the situations of the girl and the blind man are not closely enough related to the predicament of the soldiers; war is

lethal in a way in which their situations are not, and this, he implies, is a weakness. This is not so, however:

7 Rosenberg is here translating the harshness of experience into decidedly aesthetic images, which is a traditional poetic ^{occupation} ~~pastime~~. The figures of the girl and the blind man represent the threat of spiritual danger, whereas the soldier's peril is more immediately physical; they have an affinity with the soldiers in that they may all of them escape unharmed if certain conditions remain unfulfilled.

The menace to a fragile security is forcibly realized, and the poet is here evidently sharing in the experiences of the infantry patrol; he seems to be, as Joseph Cohen comments in his Tulane Studies in English essay (page 138), a member of this returning patrol, but while his observations are coolly restrained they are neither as insensitive nor as impersonal as Cohen goes on to argue. Rosenberg's stance as an involved yet undemonstrative observer allows him to probe here the complexity of conflicting emotions without the least trace of sentimentality. And that is no mean achievement.

In less than a month after his letters referring to "Dead Man's Dump", Rosenberg is announcing to Marsh that he is working on

a much finer poem . . . Don't think from this I've time to write. This last poem is only about 70 lines long and I started it about October (CW, page 317).

So, on his own admission, Rosenberg had evolved the germ of "Daughters of War" in the autumn of 1916 within four months of "Break of Day", seven months before he makes any mention of "Dead Man's Dump". This comparison of dates and the evidence afforded by CW that he was writing during 1917 (mainly to Marsh) about the stages of reworking parts of it all goes

to show how much time and trouble "Daughters of War" cost him. In a letter to Marsh postmarked 30th July, 1917 he writes, for example, of how:

It has taken me about a year to write; for I have changed and rechanged it and thought hard over that poem and striven to get that sense of inexorableness the human (or unhuman) side of this war has (CW, page 319).

Several pages further on he writes:

Later on I will try and work on it; because I think it a pity if the ideas are to be lost for want of work (CW, page 375).

For this reason alone, if for no other, Rosenberg deserves a respectful hearing when he says on more than one occasion that he felt it to be his best poem.

Professor Harding published an earlier version of this complex poem in the March 1935 issue of Scrutiny (pages 354-355) and a collation of this with the 1937 version is highly instructive. (We should note that this earlier version is only about forty-five lines long, thus it antedates the version of "about 70 lines" which Rosenberg writes of in his first letter about the poem to Marsh recently referred to):

Space beats in vain the ruddy freedom of their limbs
In naked dances with man's spirit new bared
By the root side of the tree of life.
The old bark burnt with iron wars
5 They have blown to a live flame
To char the young green days.
We were satisfied of our Lords the moon and the sun
To take our wage of sleep and bread and warmth . . .
These maidens came . . . these strong everliving
 Amazons,
10 And in an easy might their wrists
Of night's sway and noon's sway the sceptres brake,
Clouding the wild . . . the soft lustres of our eyes.

Clouding the wild lustres, the clinging tender lights;
Driving the darkness into the flame of day,
15 With the Amazonian wind of them
Over our corroding faces
That must be broken . . . broken for evermore
So the soul can leap out
Into their huge embraces.

- 20 Tho' there are human faces
Best sculptures of Deity
And sinews lusted after
By the Archangels tall
Even these must leap to the love heat of these
 maidens
- 25 From the flame of terrene days
Leaving grey ashes to the wind . . . to the wind.
- One whose great lifted face,
Where wisdom's strength and beauty's strength
And the thewed strength of large beasts
- 30 Transfiguring lit,
Was speaking, surely, as the earth men's earth fell
 away;
Whose new hearing drunk the sound
Where pictures lutes and mountains mixed
With the loosed spirit of a thought.
- 35 'My sisters forced their males
From the doomed earth, from the doomed glee
And hankering of hearts.
Frail hearts stick up through the human quagmire and
 lips of ash
Seem to wail, as in sad faded paintings
- 40 Far sunken and strange.
- My sisters have their males
Clean of the dust of old days
That clings about those white hands,
And yearns in those voices sad,
- 45 But these shall not see them,
Or think of them in any days or years,
They are my sisters' lovers in other days and years.

For ease of reference, let the uncollected version be labelled (A) and the published version (B). The first three lines of both are very similar save for the excision in lines one and two of (B) of single qualifying words which tightens up and condenses the opening. The Complete Works version of the second line, with its repetition of "naked", is more effective than the earlier version which pairs "naked" with "new bared". "Space beats" is a difficult concept, but presumably Rosenberg is trying here to suggest bodies which are intangible but which have no density and no 'edges'. They are also ubiquitous, for they are both in space and beneath the tree of life.

The next ten lines of (B) do not correspond to anything

in the text of (A). What these lines add to the original is firstly an emphasis on the inaccessibility to living mortals of the Daughters' hunting-ground; secondly comes the introduction of the poet's persona ("I") by means of which we are drawn into contact with the events in the poem more closely than by the third-person narration of (A). We also receive a detailed description of the Daughters' dances of allurement which (A) mentions only in passing. The speaker only has imperfect glimpses ("prophetic gleams") of how these Amazons/Valkyries behave. The last five lines of this later interpolation convey the erotic passion they feel for the human warrior-spirits, a new element not evident in draft (A); this introduction of a quasi-human emotion into the poems adds an interest lacking in the earlier version, for it makes the Daughters slightly more human to see them envious of earthly women and resentful of the men's mortal bodies, the "mortal boughs" of the tree of life which so closely resembles Ygdrasil.

Lines 15-17 of version (B) are identical to 4-6 of (A) save that in the former Rosenberg has changed the tense to the present in order to convey more vividly the unfolding of the action before us. The next two lines of (B) are a simple addition to present us more clearly with the paradox that the Daughters depend on Death for their own life; they do not, it seems, just wait passively for men to die, but have warriors killed to join them in their Valhalla. Lines 20-47 of (B) correspond very closely to lines 7-34 of (A), save that line 45 of (B) corrects the erroneous past tense of 'drink' which appeared at line 32 of (A). In the preceding chapter a remarkable resemblance between Rosenberg's and

Yeats's use of the unicorn emblem as noted, and in the present context there is another affinity deriving principally from both writers' partiality to myth. Thus in his play, The Shadowy Waters (1911), Yeats describes one of the alluring spirits in bird-form who lead Forgael to continue his voyaging, in these terms:

. . . Some Ever-living woman as you think,

One that can cast no shadow, being unearthly . . .

(Collected Plays, page 150)

The inexorableness of woman in relation to men at war is also brought out by Deirdre, in Yeats's play which bears her name (1907):

Although we are so delicately made

There's something brutal in us, and we are won

By those who can shed blood . . .

(Collected Plays, page 199)

This similarity may suggest to us that Rosenberg might have made a fairly close reading of Yeats, though he only refers to him once, as "the established great man" (CW, page 348).

This section of the poem faces the reader with certain difficulties of interpretation. Lines 20-25 of (B) seem to be the thoughts of those martial spirits after they have left their "soul's sack", for they were content with life beneath the rule of moon and sun until the Amazons dislocated the sequence of time. The rhythm of "night's sway and noon's sway" in line 24 is very important, and to remove the slightly archaic inversion of "sceptres brake" would be to destroy this rhythm. One meaning of line ²⁵would be that men undergoing this apotheosis can no longer distinguish between the light of day and that of night which used to be reflected in their eyes. Memories of Keats are conjured up by "lustres",

used in the connection in which he often used it, but this poem seems closer kin to his later Hyperion than to his earlier romantic verse.

In the next section the voice speaking appears to be that of the poetic "I" rather than that of one of the Daughters' lovers. These lines bring out the juxtaposition of life and death, emphasised by the sculptural "corroding" and "broken" (this is the action of death on the living--see "Burnt black by strange decay" in "Dead Man's Dump"). Like imperfect statues men's bodies must be broken so that their souls can be reborn--but reborn in a pagan, erotic context. The observation that even those possessing faces and bodies which were the envy of heaven are captured by the Amazons recalls the Genesis story of archangels lusting after the daughters of men. Clearly this is a Creation of a very different order from the orthodox one, for the Amazons are explicitly contrasted to both "Deity" (line 34) and "Archangels" in line 36. The physical quality of the doomed soldiers' lives is at its intensest at the moment of their death (a concept already suggested in "Dead Man's Dump"). As the men die among the flames and smoke of the battlefield so they are consumed by "the love-heat of these maidens"; all that is left of them on earth is grey ashes (the result of "char[-ring] young green days"), whether these ashes are physical or emotional.

The fourth section is in many ways the most obscure and intractable. Certainly Marsh demanded some explanation of it from Rosenberg. His letter of reply, however, (printed on page 375 of CW) itself poses something of a puzzle:

I believe I can see the obscurities in the 'Daughters',

but hardly hope to clear them up in France. The first part, the picture of the Daughters dancing and calling to the spirits of the slain before their last ones have ceased among the boughs of the tree of life, I must still work on. In that part obscure the description of the voice of the Daughter I have not made clear, I see; I have tried to suggest the wonderful sound of her voice, spiritual and voluptuous at the same time. The end is an attempt to imagine the severance of all human relationship and the fading away of human love. Later on I will try and work on it, because I think it a pity if the ideas are to be lost for want of work.

The second sentence, which outlines the shape of the beginning, is plainly unsatisfactory as it is printed, and the difficulty lies in the word "ones"; but here an orthographic solution suggests itself. If "their last ones" is in fact what Rosenberg wrote it is still possible to make some sense of this sentence if "last ones" can be taken to mean the last Daughters, who cannot survive without a fresh supply of men, just as the Nubians in The Unicorn cannot survive without a fresh supply of women. But such a reading is tenuous. The word Rosenberg wrote may in fact have been "cries", but the r and i ran together to resemble n--and this guess certainly makes good sense. However, the following sentence begins with an entirely un-English word order which sends the reader back over it again to extract the meaning, which is plain enough, ultimately. Such obscurity is rare in Rosenberg's letters and it is eloquent evidence of the strain under which he must have been writing and persistently working.

The Amazon in this verse is reminiscent of Keats's Moneta, talking of the fall of the old order of gods; her appearance is statuesque, and impression heightened by the 'slabbiness' of the open vowels. (Once again, there is a parallel to be found in Swinburne's description of a Titan-woman in lines 63-66 of his "Ave atque Vale":

. . . The solemn slope of mighty limbs asleep,

The weight of awful tresses that still keep
The savour and shade of old-world pine-forests
Where the wet hill-winds weep?)

Her "strength" (whose thick sound recurs three times in two lines) is a combination of wisdom, beauty and physical might. Line 43 of (B) expands the simpler but less effective "Transfiguring lit" of version (A); five lines later this latter version contains a line missing in the (A) text which renders explicitly the non-verbal quality of the Daughters' speech, so increasing the sense of mystery and superhumanity which surrounds them. This speech, expressed in faculties other than speech is, fittingly enough, absorbed by the newly-dead by means of 'osmosis' rather than by simple hearing; it is experienced as a multi-sensory perception, but has to be reduced to words for our restricted hearing. If the last four lines of this section seem cumbersome, it is helpful to recall Rosenberg's remark that he likes poetry to contain "something hidden and felt to be there"; he is here attempting to describe a supra-human enlargement of man's faculties, a non-verbal activity, in mere words. He certainly had a very definite idea of what it was he wanted to convey, but was not content to express complexity in a simplified way.

In the last section one Daughter explains how she and her sisters wrest their lovers from the physical earth and from human emotion. Line 38 of the (A) version suggests disembodied hearts literally 'sticking up' from the ashes of destruction, but in his second draft Rosenberg refined the idea by substituting the evocative "Frail hands gleam up". The "human quagmire" suggests at once both the layer of

rotting corpses covering the battlefield and the moral morass into which humanity has plunged itself. Lines 56 and 57 of draft (B) have the characteristic Poundian (two long-syllable) endings--compare Mauberley V where "old days" also appears. The "dust" which the soldiers slough off is at once the dust of mortality and the dust of the battlefield, as Silkin suggests (op. cit., page 290). The last problem in the text is the reference of "these" in line 59; it could denote the human lovers and relatives (with "voices sad") of the newly-dead, who will have the consolation of soon forgetting them, but it is more likely that "these" refers to the new lovers who will not see their earthly companions again. The spirits of the new dead now take on a new existence outside time, the strangeness of the new dimension being emphasised by the contrast between "any days or years" (that is, human time) and "other days and years" (the new dispensation). "Are" only serves to underline the unending permanence of these changed conditions.

This extended comparison of the two drafts of this poem brings out the advance of the second version over the first. An increase in length is not inevitably an advantage, but in this case it is so, for Rosenberg has used it to express more positively the mystery of the Daughters and at the same time he has neatened and occasionally condensed some expressions in the earlier version which results in a more intense and coherent texture.

When all this has been said, however, it remains to evaluate this major poem. It deals with a wholly visionary world and so needs to be underpinned by the precision and realism of "Dead Man's Dump". Johnston finds it lacks

credibility and emotional force (op. cit., page 231), but this emotional force is, in fact, continuously generated by the tension in our minds between this mythological world and its basis in man's belligerent behaviour. His further charge that the poem shows little of the inexorability which Rosenberg observed in war is substantiated, for the Daughters manifestly possess a femininity and mystery which makes them interesting rather than menacing; though doubtless Rosenberg's intention was to mingle horror with a sense of religious awe. This wholly symbolic poem is loftily impressive, but only a qualified success, for this label cannot be confidently affixed to a poem whose meaning remains ambiguous. Hardy and--to a lesser extent--Swinburne may be regarded as having had greater success than Rosenberg in a large-scale work, but mythic figures present numerous difficulties to the poet as Keats's abandonment of Hyperion demonstrates. Turning to Rosenberg's admired mentor Blake, it is difficult to escape the conclusion that although his prophetic books are fascinating structures they lack the immediate compelling power essential to successful poetry. "Daughters of War", regarded in isolation, is lacking in the same respect; but if seen against the background of Rosenberg's developing technique in coming to terms with war--as exemplified by the preceding poems--it is at once the eloquent climax and conclusion of his individualistic line of exploration.

It is tempting to regard this poem as essentially an expansion of lines 14-17 of "Dead Man's Dump". But, according to the incomplete evidence of the letters as presented above, "Daughters of War" was substantially developed before we hear of him working on "Dead Man's Dump". Clearly there is a link

between these two poems, but possibly the most fruitful way of regarding it is as a complementary relationship rather than one in which one poem derives from the other and depends on it.

In the end, the most profitable method of approach to "Daughters of War" is to treat it as an attempt to discover and communicate some metaphysical justification for war, since Rosenberg could see no other. As an artist who valued highly human dignity and man's quasi-divine creativity he cast about for some ultimately creative goal which could underlie the senseless carnage which he saw going on around him. Lady Gollancz, who knew Rosenberg before he volunteered, has spoken of his remarkable powers of concentration which could insulate him completely from his surroundings⁶; it is very likely that this concentration, which emerges here in his mythical presentation of war, was what enabled him to escape at intervals from the pressing realities of trench life and gave him the stoical endurance needed to survive twenty months in the trenches--let alone to write major poems during this period. Mrs. Ray Lyons remembers that one of Rosenberg's commanding officers actually allowed him to write while resting in the trenches⁷, and ordered him to be left in peace to do so, but even then the task could not have been easy.

"Daughters of War" may mark the end of one line of development in the Trench Poems but there were others being worked on during the same time, and it is not always easy to

⁶ Interview with Lady Gollancz, December 1970.

⁷ Interview with Mrs. Ray Lyons, May 1974.

see the chronological development of one view into another. What is discernible is a shift away from a treatment which invests war with dignity, a trait which is evident in a few pieces which suggests that they were written in a mood of earlier idealism. One such example of this earlier confidence is provided by "The Dead Heroes" which was published in 1915 as part of the pamphlet entitled Youth.

Here archaic phraseology is reinforced by invocations to skies, seraphim, Song and England, the writer's attitude is summed up by "the rich Dead" and as such invites comparison with Brooke's "1914" sonnet sequence, especially Sonnets III and IV. The dead are sacrificial victims, symbolic figures, not suffering men at all; their heavenly apotheosis is assured by the appearance of "mailed seraphim", by their "baptismal tread". The first four of the poem's regular four-line stanzas with chiming singsong rhythm begin with hortatory verbs which express the confidence of the speaker--"Flame out" (three times), "Flash", "Thrills"--but their assurance is achieved at the cost of awkward inversions (as in line nine:

Thrills their baptismal tread . . .

and line 16:

. . . Our children are).

We are left in no doubt at the conclusion that these noble dead, who were only lent to England by time, have won the blessings of man and the approval of God by their willingness to surrender their temporal existence. This concept of a mortal winning Godhead is strictly a romantic one, and such a neatly-arranged, self-congratulatory apotheosis is divided by more than a temporal gulf from the picture that Rosenberg had evolved of martial after-life within the two years that

followed. It is tempting now to dismiss such a poem as worthless for its sentiments have become unpalatable for the time being: its significance in a study of this kind is that it shows the distance Rosenberg travelled from this point at which he, like Brooke, had had no direct battlefield experience.

Such a claim is immediately qualified by turning to the one poem known to have been written during Rosenberg's brief spell in South Africa--"On Receiving News of the War". The opening metaphor is not strikingly new in itself but the way in which it is handled arrests attention from the first word:

Snow is a strange white word . . .

War seen as the winter of the human spirit is also found in Owen's "1914" (or "The Seed"):

But now, for us, wild Winter, and the need

Of sowings for new Spring, and blood for seed. . . .

--but by placing snow against the background of a southern summer he brings out its totally alien quality; the cataclysm of war is as unprecedented as the arrival of overnight snow (unheralded even by ice or frost) in South Africa. So condensed is the imagery, so elliptical the language, that these first four lines need paraphrasing in this way. In many respects this poem is Rosenberg's counterpart to Owen's "1914", for both express an ambivalent attitude about war in that both men detest this horror equally but also acknowledge that it may have a purgative effect. But this is to anticipate. The "Summer land" of line seven is equally the world at peace and South Africa in August: the sudden cold seizure interrupts the life-cycle. Rosenberg's divergence from Owen comes in stanzas three and four where he examines the origins

of this descent into violence; he attributes its recurrence to man's instinctive nature, thus the reasons for it cannot be understood. The "malign kiss" of a Judas Iscariot is an apt emblem for war's paradox--it can be both outwardly beneficent and inwardly harmful, but is certainly inescapable. "Mould" in the following line is another of Rosenberg's complex usages; although not clearly a noun rather than a verb, it can still refer to either a new shaping pattern into which our lives will henceforth be channelled, or else to the blemishing vegetable growth of decay (as on tombstones--grave mould?) which signifies also the decomposition of beauty, harmony, happiness or peace. Of these two possibilities the latter is more in keeping with the mood of the poem, and thus is preferable. As a verb it would be infinitive and Rosenberg would then be using it in the manner of a hymn, such as "Give us thy ways to learn".

The fourth stanza explicitly accuses men of murdering their God by the suffering they have inflicted on their contemporaries made in His image. The reader may be reminded here of Owen's statement that the soldiers assume the role of the suffering Christ, "Where God seems not to care" ("Greater Love"). But what Rosenberg is saying about men here is much less ennobling--they quite consciously re-enact the crucifixion by killing their fellow-men, and God (it seems) from the isolation of Calvary or Heaven, looks on, powerless to halt the process. Rosenberg may have felt that there were no circumstances under which his God could conceivably condone such slaughter, therefore war exists against His will. God is powerless to withstand the bloodlust innate in mankind.

This poem is not fundamentally concerned with God at all,

and the last stanza reverts to considering war as part of the order of nature. The version printed in Poems (1922) ended line 18 with a semicolon, in which case it would be war which is being appealed to revivify the world. But subsequent editions turn the last two lines into a separate sentence and, read in this way, they could refer to God. Less likely is the possibility that this stanza contrasts the two rôles of God--the vengeful patriarch in lines 17-18 and God the beneficent Son in lines 19-20. The "ancient crimson curse" is contrasted with the "strange white word" of snow, but both are inextricably a part of human life. The human appetite for blood will have to run its course until this thirst is satiated, and God cannot be called to account for condoning it. As was noted earlier (in connection with "Daughters of War") what Rosenberg seems to be doing here is finding an explanation for behaviour which is ultimately incomprehensible. The only justification that emerges from this initial reaction to the outbreak of war is that it may prove regenerative. The winter of destruction is primarily purgative, but secondarily restorative. If the effect of such large-scale human sacrifice is, in the end, beneficial, then--these lines imply--it is possible to view war as a God-given means of cleansing a sinful society. But the impression left by this last stanza is that war does not deserve such an altruistic justification--and this despite the fact that "pristine bloom" not only refers to the cycle of natural reproduction but also rather wistfully recalls the beauty and freshness of Eden before the Fall. Such a well-developed attitude as this toward the conflict illustrates Rosenberg's perceptiveness--for (and the point is worth repeating) at

this stage he had seen no more of the war than had the Brooke who wrote "1914".

"Spring 1916", despite its title, was written before "August 1914"--the former was included in the Moses pamphlet (published in 1916), whereas the latter was not published at all by Rosenberg and was gathered by the editors into the Trench Poems section of the Complete Works. "Spring 1916" was written shortly before Rosenberg left for France in May-June of 1916--as it is one of the poems referred to in a letter to Sydney Schiff from his camp in Farnborough (published in the Leeds Exhibition catalogue):

I have written two small poems since I joined and I think they are my strongest work (page 14).

The version in the Complete Works differs in two minor respects from the one in Bottomley's Poems (1922). The unexpected sombre, slow-moving mood of the opening lines sets the tone of the poem which contrasts the superficial joyfulness of the season with the harsh reality which it overlays. "The time is out of joint" to such an extent that there is no correlation between the moods of nature and man: universal sympathy is no more. This description of harmonious co-existence is the result of man's activity. The extent to which traditional reactions to Spring have been reversed is shown by the appearance of "as through granite air" which contradicts wholly the customary expectations about spring-time air, and connects with "her own sister in stone" in line eight. In the 1922 edition this phrase appears as "a difficult air", and although the later emendation is both more graphic and more compact than the original, we can only assume that Bottomley and Harding had manuscript authority which was not available in 1922. As does the second stanza, the first

one ends with the idea of ruin. This Spring has been nourished by the three preceding seasons of carnage, a poison which has turned her life and joy to a merely deceitful masquerade.

Rosenberg draws a poignant contrast between this year's spring and that of two years ago: the delicate pink of that May Queen's complexion has been replaced by a darker hue. The second emendation mentioned above occurs in in line ten: where the present edition has "pink neck" the 1922 text read "the pink", so clearly the later version is more explicit, though the fact that "the pink" referred to the maiden's neck could have been deduced from "a necklace". The "necklace of warm snow" is probably a metaphor for blossom, whose white flowers often have a pinkish tinge.

Finally, Spring is revealed for the treacherous mockery it is, yet the poet believes its innocent beauty must have been "lured" to corruption by some other malign influence. Line 13 is to reappear virtually word for word as line five of "A Worm Fed on the Heart of Corinth" which, according to the stated policy of arrangement in the Complete Works, is a later poem. Rosenberg works out the traditional conflict between Spring and death in a straightforward manner and the ending of the poem calls for little comment. Her fertility is seen as murderous--allaying man's thoughts of death by producing fresh vegetation for him as if all is as normal--hence the bitterness of the final comment: "Spring! God pity your mood!"

This is a compact and self-contained poem which shows Rosenberg's ability to conform to a regular rhyme-structure: this very regularity is the mark of an early poem. It is

almost a good poem, but its achievement is marred by the difficulty of the second stanza (verbal rather than conceptual), and also by the grating rhyme in the first stanza of "passes" with "lass is". A typed manuscript of this poem was enclosed in a letter Rosenberg wrote to Abercrombie from his camp at Farnborough shortly before he embarked for France. (The envelope is postmarked 11th March, 1916 and the letter is printed on page 347 of the Complete Works: the original is in the Marsh Letter Collection in New York Public Library). The fact that the manuscript is typed suggests that the poem had reached some degree of 'fixedness', but alterations to line five show that Rosenberg did not regard this typed version as definitive. His holograph emendation is, in itself, slight enough: the second half of the line originally ran--

What forbidden food . . .

which became:

What food banned and rare . . .

--a slightly more elaborate concept, reflecting, perhaps, Swinburne's fondness for 'and':

And the same wind sang and the same waves whitened,

And or ever the garden's last petals were shed . .

("A Forsaken Garden", lines 45-46)

--as well as illustrating Rosenberg's awareness of the demands of rhyme. A further alteration produces the version that is printed in Complete Works and Collected Poems. Line 14 in the manuscript has been made more explicit since that was typed--for the letter version simply presents the isolated and unsyntactical "that strained chill thing" which clearly had to be related more satisfactorily than this to what precedes and follows.

Soon after he had arrived in France Rosenberg wrote to
Mr. Cohen:

Ive freshly written this thing--red from the anvil
(CW, page 348).

Bottomley and Harding treat this as a reference to "August 1914" and there is no reason to dispute this. It has affinities with the preceding poem which support a suggested dating in this period. Once more, the life-principle is balanced against war's destruction--a theme already developed in "On Receiving News"--but the view is a darker one. It is as if his physical experience of actual conditions removed the last traces of the dogged optimism which characterized the Cape Town poem; the destructiveness of war is no longer counter-balanced by the suggestion that such devastation may ultimately be regenerative. Although their titles hint that the poems are contemporary, two years separate their composition.

The clarity and economy of "August 1914" has recommended it to Johnston and Bergonzi who rightly consider that it works round its three central images of "Iron, honey, gold" and the non-discursive metaphors of the final stanza. (There is a tenuous similarity between this physical trinity in line six and the divine symbols in lines 58-60 of Swinburne's "Madonna Mia":

. . . That white and gold and red,
God's three chief words, man's bread
And oil and wine . . .

--and a closer link between Rosenberg and Swinburne in the latter's "Perinde ac Cadaver" (lines 201-205):

Time shall tread on his name
That was written for honour of old,
Who hath taken in change for fame
Dust, and silver, and shame,

Ashes, and iron, and gold).

Once more the reader will sense the parallel between this and Owen's "The Seed", though it lacks his philosophical conclusion. Rosenberg has seen the irony of a holocaust bursting upon the world in harvest-time and this underlying paradox enriches the poem's texture. The first stanza suggests that our "heart's dear granary" will lack the fertility necessary for future survival because the stubble-burning has consumed the crop at its prime--it is as if the sequence of the natural harvesting processes has been disrupted.

What is remarkable about this poem is the way in which each stanza evolves organically from its predecessor. So the destructive fire of the first stanza destroys the gold and the honey (both harvest fruits) in the lives of the young soldiers drawn into it and this in turn burns a swath through the ripe cornfield. This picture of tranquillity and plenty is marred by such an intrusion, which in turn finds expression in the sharply visual "A fair mouth's broken tooth". Iron is at once the means of devastation (in the form of shells and bullets) and also the rigour and hardship which results from its use; the creative spirit in man is dulled by the agency of age and also the spiritual winter of war--thus experience renders man's life increasingly metallic and unproductive: "hard and cold". Another way to view the iron-image is to supply "though" at the end of the ninth line so the sense is that our lives are made iron throughout, but in youth this iron is molten till the experience of war hardens it. Whichever interpretation is adopted, the conclusion is the same.

The marring of an attractive scene--the sight of harvest-fields in northern France ruined by trenches and bombardment--

is more than an aesthetic tragedy: natural harmony and the life-principle are set aside. The peculiar force of these final images is explained by Bergonzi's observation that they operate simultaneously on the literal and the figurative level (op. cit., page 112).

The unpretentious tidiness and economy of the poem is its strength. The succession of images in the final stanza recalls the "dry and hard" requirements of Hulme or the earlier principles of the Imagists which Rosenberg outgrew. Once more, such a treatment of his material is objective, yet his letters of this period show clearly enough that he had experienced personally the disintegration of settlements and of values, which he here distils into a highly effective and formal--yet characteristically rich--poem.

This feeling that youth, enthusiasm, and even normal human behaviour are doomed to destruction, with no hint of reprieve or ultimately benign purpose--a feeling expressed so eloquently in "August 1914"--finds even gloomier expression in "A Worm Fed on the Heart of Corinth" which sees decay as an inevitable process and not just as one stage in a recurring cycle. Here England is seen as joining the great cities and empires of the past, in a prophetic vision akin to that of the Old Testament Revelations, or the very different Eternal Recurrence of Nietzsche. Something similar is also to be found in lines 15-16 of Rudyard Kipling's "Recessional" (1897):

. . . Lo, all our pomp of yesterday

Is one with Nineveh and Tyre!

This historical view is what distinguishes the poem from any of the others so far considered, though it is the mode of treatment Rosenberg employs again in the group of poems

usually regarded as his final ones--a group to be considered later. The writing here is terse and condensed, and although the general sense of the poem is absorbed on a first reading, several details call for closer scrutiny.

The initial image of the worm as an agent of destruction is archetypal; it can be seen in the Bible and will certainly be familiar to readers of Blake. In fact the link with Blake here is significant for the worm is not only destructive, but as erotic as "the worm that flies in the night". For the first two lines, however, our attention is directed solely toward the worm's destructive aspect. The same agency was responsible for the fall of three illustrious city-states, so we are told; but what have these three cities in common with one another, apart from their legendary past? Corinth, which gave its name to the most elaborate of Greek architectural styles, here stands for a materially successful and self-indulgent culture which is by implication contrasted with the intellectual rigour of Athens or the martial discipline of Sparta. Babylon, rather more clearly, is traditionally the home of the Jews in exile and Jewish writers continually see it as the profane city, directly opposed to the standards and culture of Jerusalem. Rome, it seems, is included in this category as it too (despite its immensely cultural influence) is regarded as a focus of early anti-Semitism, as in the time of the Maccabees (see earlier page 266). Helen, the paragon of female beauty, was destroyed not so much by man's desire as by this worm. She may here represent more than sheer physical beauty, if we recall the existence of another legend which claims that she left Greece, not for Troy, but for the decadent court-life of Egypt where she stayed for ten years. This is the Helen who figures in

g Euripides' play which bears her name. If Rosenberg had this companion-legend in mind, then Helen's ruin is not so much that of beauty ravaged by lust but more like a moral degradation--and this fits neatly into the tenor of these lines.

The worm is referred to as being "incestuous" and "shadowless" which are both puzzling epithets. This creature may be in love with itself and its power or we are meant to realize (more appropriately) that it can perpetuate itself with the aid of foolish man, of whose nature it is an ineradicable part. The "worm", which has the power to lure a Helen to her physical and moral degeneration, connotes several ideas simultaneously: it represents, on its simplest level, the assertion of a private will over national interests (exemplified by Trojan War legend); it suggests sexual desire, by association with "raped", "incestuous", "beauty", and "more amorous than Solomon"; finally it also stands for the innate human love of violence and war.

In the final four lines, Rosenberg links England's name with that of Helen's. Such an invocation to Helen can also be found in an untitled poem written by Patrick Shaw-Stewart in Gallipoli:

. . . O hell of ships and cities,

Hell of men like me,

Fatal second Helen,

Why must I follow thee?⁸

In a tone of affection and regret for England he sees her doom as inevitable as that of earlier empires. Why England's bridegroom should be "shadowless" is not at once apparent unless we take it either as a direct reference to Blake's

⁸ Printed in Up the Line to Death, ed. Brian Gardner, page 59.

invisible worm

That flies in the night . . .

or else call to mind how close to the ground an actual worm crawls--it casts no shadow. It is tempting, once the parallel with Blake emerges, to see the appearance of "amorous" in the last line as another echo of "his dark secret love"; but this adjective has more force than that would suggest. If we remember the personality of Solomon as presented to us in the books of Kings and Chronicles we note that he was not there celebrated for his piety or his wisdom: he appears as a successful, worldly potentate, the sort to compose 'The Song of Solomon'--in fine, the leader of a Corinth, a Rome or a Babylon.

The repetition of a trisyllable in the short final line suggests well the veiled menace of such an allurement--and this remark takes our minds back to earlier comments on beauty concealing danger which recur in the earlier "Knowledge":

Yet midst his golden triumph a despair

Lurks like a serpent hidden in his hair. . . .

This canker is at first as unobtrusive as that which eats its way relentlessly to the heart of a rose, yet its power of devastation is infinitely greater. This sombre warning is carried in a highly accomplished poem which fuses ancient and Hebraic mythology so smoothly and conveys vividly a feeling of inescapable doom; a poem which looks forward to the more extensive critiques of war already examined, and, beyond them, to Rosenberg's last group of Trench Poems.

Before turning to these, however, it is worth recording that in the midst of hardship and devastation, Rosenberg's impish sense of humour (as Lady Gollancz recalls it) finds

expression in two of the Trench Poems. It is generally more evident in his letters than in his poems, and one example of it in prose will have to suffice. Being small of stature--about five feet four inches--Rosenberg had found himself in a Bantam brigade, and this had its amusing moments, as he told Marsh:

The king inspected us Thursday. I believe its the first Bantam Brigade been inspected. He must have waited for us to stand up a good while. At a distance we look like soldiers sitting down, you know, legs so short (CW, page 308).

"The Immortals" is an impressively-titled poem which maintains its air of mystery until the effective bathos of the last line. Throughout the poem the reader feels that it could relate to the killing of enemy soldiers, or to the hallucinations the speaker suffers on account of such experiences: only at the end is the rather elevated heroic diction seen in its proper perspective. The speed of the poem increases into a frenzy of slaughter, which is only halted by the ill-concealed bitterness of line 12; this suggests the question of what men are dying for--if "Devils only die for fun", then are the soldiers dying for any nobler cause? Behind this suggestion lurks the conviction that man is being slaughtered with as little compunction as he, in turn, slaughters verminous lice: we remember the disquieting comparison of man to rat in "Break of Day" already mentioned. In the last stanza it is the Devil who is drawn into a degrading relationship with the lice--he is no longer to be associated with the traditional sensuous allurements (wine and women), and certainly has forfeited the dignity of such epic titles as Satan and Beelzebub. The anticlimactic last line has the sting of some of Sassoon's war poems (such as

"The General":

'He's a cheery old card,' grunted Harry to Jack
As they slogged up to Arras with rifle and pack.

.

But he did for them both by his plan of attack.)

whose effect is enhanced by simple, direct language, regular if unremarkable rhyme, and the use of scale in a Swiftian manner to point up an ironic contrast.

"Louse Hunting" opens in such a way that one's attention is caught immediately by its abrupt jerkiness. However, Bottomley and Harding state that this line originated from a manuscript which was already lost by 1937 but that they preferred it to the only extant alternative which is even harsher--"Nudes--stark a-glisten"; the earlier version is more violent and more verbally arresting than the printed line. The vivid visualization of this poem has often been commented upon--the artist's eye selects and determines an approach to this incident which makes us see it as a composition in light and movement rather than as a protest against the insanitariness of the trenches. The pattern of whirling limbs on the floor recalls the flickering movement of flames, yet the compression of "verminously busy" in the following line prevents us from having no humanitarian reaction to the scene. "Yon" seems an inappropriate adjective here, but line seven contains the extremes of Godhead and lice, thus once more employing scale to make an ironic contrast. (The painter's eye is discernible again in lines 14-17 where we get the picture of a frieze in motion, or a shadow-show): this contrast is picked up ten lines later where the loss of human dignity is brought out by means of "supreme flesh" and "supreme littleness" (another recurrence of the motif in

"Break of Day" already noted a few pages above). The situation is treated with humour, hence the aptness of "hot Highland fling": but coupled with the humour are the suggestions of a witches' sabbath scene--the candlelight, grotesque contortions of "dancers", the cumulative effect of "wizard vermin" (we remember the "sardonic rat"), "this revel" and "dark music" (although this last refers to calm before and after the louse-hunt). The flickering unearthliness of the scene is further intensified by the contrast made between light and dark in such expressions as "glistening" (no elision here), "aflare", "one fire", "silhouettes" and "shadows".

Lines 21-22 provide another example of minor textual variation. The editors of Complete Works note on page 386 that they have an earlier alternative version of the latter in:

. . . To enchant from the quiet this revel . . .

--and they add that Rosenberg later altered it to the version they print, though "his manuscript is such a rough draft that it is not certain whether he would have remained satisfied with that." The version they print is certainly smoother than its predecessor and it harmonises more neatly with the musing mood of the closing lines. Yet in Poems (1922), Bottomley's text differs slightly again:

. . . Because some wizard vermin willed

To charm from the quiet this revel . . .

The point at issue here is not that the variants themselves are particularly significant, but simply Bottomley's and Harding's remark about their earlier version (substantially the same as the one printed in 1922) being altered by Rosenberg at a later date. Obviously Rosenberg could not

have altered the text after the publication of Bottomley's edition, so the inference is that Rosenberg's manuscripts must have been widely scattered at his death, that they in fact varied amongst themselves so that an editor could not be certain that the manuscript he was using as his authority deserved the primacy he gave it.

The visual quality of the poem which is so apparent is accounted for by a remark in a letter to Marsh, postmarked 8th February, 1917:

I've sketched an amusing little thing called 'the louse hunt, and am trying to write one as well (CW, page 315).

This comment also serves to answer the objection to Rosenberg's apparent unconcern for the soldiers' plight.

Harding originated this reaction when he wrote in Scrutiny:

. . . there is no civilian resentment at the conditions he writes of. Here as in all the war poems his suffering and discomfort are unusually direct; there is no secondary distress arising from the sense that these things ought not to be (Vol. III, No. 4, March 1935, page 363).

This line has been followed by Cohen and most recently by Bergonzi, who asserts:

There is a good example of Rosenberg's aestheticism in a poem called 'Louse Hunting', in which the stress is not on the misery of the lice-infested soldiers but rather on the grotesque visual patterns they make in trying to kill the lice (op. cit., page 113).

(Though Bergonzi does not, as here, always use the word derogatively, as when he equates it with impersonality). He has, however, missed the point of the poem. The letter above found the louse-hunting activity "amusing", and this is the effect of the poem on the reader; it is only too obvious that the situation described is in itself unpleasant, but Rosenberg shows both spirit and originality by treating it in this way rather than by turning it into a polemic about

the living-conditions of soldiers. The comment about the cheapness of life (men's or lice's) is more effective as the kind of understatement typical of his own "sardonic rat". He is not seeking pity for himself and his fellow-soldiers, but nonetheless is not at all insensitive toward what he is describing; the poem simply displays the quality of temperament which Silkin, in another context, calls "gristly", and example of his remarkable resilience.

This resilience is not confined to an admirable ability to withstand physical pain and discomfort: it is a mental attitude as well, an attitude which accepts the fact of war while trying to explore creatively the philosophy (if that is not too academic word) which resulted in it. This attempt to probe the public state of mind is exemplified by two companion-pieces, "Soldier: Twentieth Century" and "Girl to Soldier on Leave". The first named of the two poems is printed first in Complete Works and Collected Poems and seems in many ways to be an earlier version of the second, and in both poems the speaker is a girl praising the militaristic vigour of her hero-lover, which is a reversal of the situation in Moses where Koelue's affection is exchanged by Moses for "the huge kiss of power". This girl is the epitome of the stern females who appeared in recruiting posters of the time, one of which carried the legend "The women of Britain say--GO!" Such a figure is found also in Sassoon and Owen (for example in "Glory of Women" and "Disabled" respectively), though the bitterness that Owen displayed toward such 'patriotic' women is nowhere in evidence here: this girl is not moved by love of the homeland so much as by a primitive (almost erotic) admiration of brute strength.

Thus she speaks of her soldier as a latter-day Titan, seeing him as a heroic rebel in the mould of "Napoleon and Caesar"; she identifies herself with the Superman figure she has created and appears as the human counterpart of the Amazons in "Daughters of War". The poet's condemnation of this attitude is implicit but deeply felt.

The second stanza is syntactically dependent on the third, its four lines being prepositional, appositional then adjectival in turn. "Eyes kissed by death" is an erotic phrase already encountered in "In War" (line 31) and is an example of the technique the reader can find in Owen's "Greater Love". By suffering "unthinkable torture", death, cruelty and pain the military soul is baptised into immortal life. Prometheus is invoked as the archetype of the suffering soldier; by following his example the girl's mortal lover can achieve such legendary heroic stature, becoming a Nietzschean figure. "Daughters of War" (lines 30-32) expressed the same notion of the soldiers' spirits being reborn through suffering, though in that poem such a rebirth involved physical death, whereas here the girl is confident that she will remain in possession of her hero. (We shall see how this assumption is undermined in the following poem.)

In the final stanza the speaker voices her confidence that her latter-day Titan has grown in strength and influence so that he excels all the merely "cruel men" who derive their power from his example. Looked at in another way, the lines indicate how the militaristic attitude has increased in both influence and popularity since the "pallid days" of the Trojan war. "Circe's swine" is the emblem for the spell-bound life of inertia which is in such dramatic contrast with

the violence of the twentieth-century: so also "a word in the brain's ways" is a word sleeping in the labyrinth of the brain, existing but not conscious or active. Such a reading makes attractive anti-war propaganda, and harmonises well with the tone of what has gone before. Once again, when reading this stanza, one gets the feeling that it means more than it says--or as Rosenberg expresses it,

. . . it is understandable and still ungraspable (CW, page 371).

It may be this unresolved ambiguity in the last lines which impelled Rosenberg to make a second draft of this poem, and in this second version the meaning remains constant but the framework of the poem is more clearly defined. In "Girl to Soldier on Leave" several elements which had been implicit now emerge with clarity. For example, the speaker in this poem is unmistakably a female and she is undoubtedly addressing a human soldier who at the close is moving away from her toward death and ultimately into the embraces of the Daughters of War: lines 9-10, in addition, are a gloss on the last stanza of "Soldier: Twentieth Century". Both these factors support the evidence that this poem developed from the former.

The poem opens with--once more--reference to the Greek legend of the Titans' revolt, but her human lover means more to her than any legendary figure. This suggests the end of the reign of Zeus and reminds us of Shelley's vision of a new world of enlightened creativity, this in turn being a restatement of Moses' ambition. Prometheus is admirable as a rebel but the modern soldier is more heroic. When we recall that Prometheus suffered eternal torture for his services to mankind, the effect of "His pangs were joys to

yours" is a bitter indictment of man's capacity for self-torture. In stanza three the "pallid days" are accounted for: these earlier days lacked the splendour of Prometheus-borne sun, from which we conclude that these were the days of peace. Thus the traditional valuation of peace and war is inverted for our critical inspection.

Coupled with the enervating influence of peace is the restricting pressure of urban sophistication. It is tempting to see an autobiographical reference in this dislike of city life, but the principal point of it is its echoing of "This rigid dry-boned refinement" which Moses sought to destroy. Forced to suffer these constrictions on "the springs, primeval elements", the military spirit is practically stifled. But now, in the violence of present times, this spirit flourishes, although one link binds him to this "weary" former existence; this "gyve" is her love for her soldier (or, it could be, the lure of war which is calling him)--she, unfortunately, cannot escape with him to the freedom and glamour of the battlefield. Here her admiration for her soldier is qualified by the human concern for his safety and well-being. Yet Silkin draws attention to dualistic meaning of "tied from" (op. cit., page 298): the surface layer of meaning gives us the link made from the girl's heart but beneath this is a prepositional level which suggests this bond of her admiration for him used to tie him to her at home but now--operating on him from home--ties him to the pursuit of glory on the battlefield and so finally to death. Furthermore, this devotion to heroism ties him firmly away from home.

The outcome of this revelling in man's capacity for violence is unequivocally presented by the final stanza.

Here the girl feels that their love will be stronger than death:

. . . your eyes

Have looked through death at mine . . .

but that he will return to the battlefield having "tempted a grave too much". Having exhorted him so that he would be willing to make the supreme sacrifice (for the cause of glory?) she acknowledges reluctantly that she must let him return to take his chance ("let" can be seen as a present or past tense, although the context suggests that the speaker is regretting her past action. Thus the meaning is either (and equally) "I hindered you" or "I have let you go--and now repent of doing so". Both of these possibilities seem preferable to regarding "let" as a present tense, which would make the line mean "I am letting you tempt a grave now, though reluctantly")--but clearly she believes that he will not return again; indeed, she seems to feel that he is already closer to the (glorious) dead than he is to the living. This is, of course, the reverse side of the coin from that shown in "Daughters of War", for we are seeing in action the "white hands" and "voices sad" of the loved ones the soldier leaves behind when his time comes to "leap to the love-heat of these maidens".

This pair of poems shows us the complexity of civilian feelings about war, but the tension between two conflicting wishes is more finely modulated in the second poem than in the first. What gives this one particular significance is the way in which it presents us with a view of war with which we could be excused for thinking Rosenberg was in sympathy (it is in essence an emotionally-charged restatement of the main lesson of Moses); then in the last two stanzas this

amoral adulation gives way to the poignant human emotion of fear for the beloved, all the more effective for it being unavailing and bleakly resigned.

One of the most striking of Rosenberg's Trench Poems is "Marching (as seen from the Left File)" which was the only other poem of this group to be published during Rosenberg's lifetime as it was included in the Moses pamphlet of 1916. It is also the one which every writer on Rosenberg's war poems has felt compelled to include. Practically everyone comments on the poem's obliqueness--at least, this element is common to the writing of Harding, Johnston, Cohen, Maurice Hussey and (to a lesser extent) of Bergonzi. The result of this comparative wealth of critical comment leaves little fresh to be said, but at least these comments are fair to the poem, at first glance.

The primary impression created by the poem is a visual one: from the first to last lines the language is that of sight. As a trained artist Rosenberg, not surprisingly, regards a marching column of men as a composition in form and colour. What commentators have failed to notice, however, is the change that takes place between stanzas one and two. The opening stanza is a translation of a visual composition: it is wholly given up to the observation of a strange phenomenon--the metamorphosis of men into a machine. The regular rhythm of lines 5-7 captures the marching pace of the column, and this is emphasised by phrases such as "red brick moving glint" and "like flaming pendulums" which themselves convey both uniformity and regularity of movement. A similar observation was made in a poem by W. J. Turner, "Death's Men":

The men of death stand trim and neat,

Their faces stiff as stone,
Click, clack, go four and twenty feet
 From twelve machines of bone.⁹

(Such mindless automata are also to be found in the paintings of Wyndham Lewis and Nevinson). Human attributes, the "ruddy necks", the swinging hands, are transformed into inanimate ones, into the moving colour of brick, into pendula-- even the feet become automatic. Thus this emphasis on the visual impact made by a marching column is more than mere observation; its corollary is the depersonalizing of humanity by war, what Louis MacNeice was later to call "dragoon-[ing] me into a lethal automaton". To view the poem as Cohen does is to oversimplify it:

Rosenberg's trench poems are simply acknowledgments of man's particularly unfortunate situation on the Western Front. Though Rosenberg never acquiesces, he does not make his verse a poetry of personal appeal. He is classically composed, resolute, disinterested, one of the impersonal many who suffer (Tulane Studies in English, 1960, page 138).

The second stanza introduces metaphors of a different order from those in its predecessor. They are now more literary or legendary than the mundane examples in stanza one. This reflects a change in the direction of the poem, away from precise observation and implicit disapproval: the speaker relates his vision of stanza one to his knowledge of human history, and the move away from mechanism is matched by a relaxing of the rhythmical tension and a slowing-down of pace.

The poet relates the age-old celebration of physical strength (for Rosenberg this is, as in Moses and The Unicorn,

⁹ Printed in Up the Line to Death, ed. Brian Gardner, page 18.

a metaphor for moral strength as well) to the equally time-hallowed celebration of the warlike instinct which is glorified in the legends about Mars. Yet while he asserts that the forge of Mars is "not broke"--a more archaic, maybe timeless, alternative to "unbroken", which in any case does not possess the required rhythm--he goes on to claim that the twentieth-century method of celebrating Mars is "subtler" and more sinister; refinement of technique is accompanied by more wholesale destruction. The "subtler brain" is not simply that of the enemy: it is much more likely to be the sophisticated twentieth-century technology which is the product of human society as a whole. The image of hoofs as a malignant, destructive force is found in earlier poems such as "At Night" (1914):

Pale horses ride before the morning
The secret roots of the sun to tread,
With hoofs shod with venom
And ageless dread . . .

and less obviously in lines 21-22 of "Chagrin" (1916).

The last three lines are rich in implication. The "blind fingers" may be those of an uncaring enemy, who has already been physically blinded or perhaps is blinded mentally by hatred or propaganda (or again, it might refer to the hands of the gunners who do not see the men they maim); more fruitful, however, is its use to mean lacking in perception or unseeing of the future--a sense already noted earlier in consideration of Rosenberg's re-use of images (see pages 214-215 above). The "iron cloud", involving another of Rosenberg's favourite epithets, can be seen--as by Bergonzi (op. cit., page 114)--as a generalised symbol for war or as

a more specific phenomenon such as a rain of shells; it also reminds the reader of the "granite air" in "Spring 1916".

A further possibility is, of course, that it represents death, for this "darkness" is "immortal". The "strong eyes" which belong to "these bared necks and hands" may be literally the disillusioned, clear-sighted determined eyes of the soldiers called to heroic suffering; these are soon to be closed by death, or (less probably) by debilitating blindness. "Strong" in connection with eyes also occurs in line 56 of Swinburne's "Illicet":

Thine eyes' strong weeping shall not profit . . .

The tone of the poem is so sombre that it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that Rosenberg is here envisaging death, and not simply disablement. Despite the self-sufficient clarity of the first stanza, which has misled many, the remainder of the poem demands careful examination; and when we study it and reflect on it we can no longer think of it as merely a vividly-realized picture. It is, in essence, a profoundly pessimistic meditation on the violence inherent in human nature which is firmly rooted in scrupulously-detailed perception of the actualities of war, the whole poem being notable for Rosenberg's characteristic understatement.

One other major group of poems remains to be considered, the last one of which appears to have been the final poem Rosenberg wrote (or copied out) before his death on April Fool's Day, 1918. This group consists of three poems--"The Burning of the Temple", "The Destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonian Hordes" and "Through these Pale Cold Days"--whose unifying force is the thread of Hebrew history which runs through them all, maybe a delayed reaction from his work on Moses. In his last letter to Marsh, dated 28th March, 1918,

he indicates how this preoccupation was still with him:

I wanted to write a battle song for the Judains but
can think of nothing strong and wonderful enough yet
(CW, page 322).

The first of these poems, "The Burning of the Temple", is primarily a racial lament for a historical event (which occurred in 586 B.C.). Rosenberg is here relating his war-time experiences to an ethnic myth, an act which helps him to put them into some sort of perspective, to distance himself from them in order to evaluate them. Other middle-class war poets--such as Graves, Sassoon, and Owen--before they arrived in France had already obtained from their education a frame of reference which would help them to come to terms with what they encountered. For them, this reference was to urbane civilian, often rural, life in England in the first decade or so of this century; for Rosenberg there was no sufficient civilian ethos to set against the barbarities he experienced, so he turned to legend and historical myth. The significance of this lies in the realization that this Judaic tone of the last poems was not an artificially-applied motif but evidence of one of the ways in which Rosenberg sought to view war meaningfully. This need to find a significant correlate for his experience was not, of course, an attempt at escape, but it expresses his determination to explore war as human activity in order to discover if it was as incomprehensible as it seemed to him to be. There is also substance in Joseph Cohen's assertion (op. cit., page 140):

Where the pre-war poems never went to Greece or Rome for subject-matter, the trench poems allude to Mars, Helen, Paris, the Amazons, Circe, Zeus, and Prometheus. Furthermore, "The Unicorn" . . . has for its theme, as he described it, "a kind of 'Rape of the Sabine Woman' [sic] idea" . . .

--although the point is not so significant as he then tries

to show.

Dennis Silk¹⁰ rightly remarks that Rosenberg's use of Biblical parallels is not a nostalgic one; there is no appeal to a factitious Golden Age for he is seriously concerned to find illuminating analogies to contemporary Europe in Old Testament history. Thus in "The Burning of the Temple" Solomon is appealed to as a man of wrath, not as a wise law-giver: the degree of civilization which he established is symbolized by the destruction of his temple, the holy of holies. The "red skies" of sunset are a traditional metaphor for the ending of an era, but the following stanza reveals that the coloration in the sky is not natural but man-made. Man destroyed his inheritance then, just as he is doing now. "Molten gold" reminds the reader of those lines in "August 1914" about the effect of iron war on the honey and gold of life; on the literal plane, too, the phrase contributes to the impression of fire devouring the cedarwood temple and melting the rich gold decoration.

Lines 8-9 recall the opening too in suggesting that there is no reaction in heaven to all this destruction. Even the smoke of such a costly burnt offering provokes no divine response. We are left to conclude that man's salvation or total destruction rests in his own hands. The annihilation of so much human achievement turns back the clock, as so much of Solomon's life-work is submerged by animal brutality and violence. Not only Solomon's achievements, but also his aspirations for his people, evaporate with the smoke of his burning temple.

The reader is likely to pause over the syntax of "And"

¹⁰ "Isaac Rosenberg": Judaism, Vol. 14, No. 4, Fall 1965, page 472.

at the beginning of line 13. The sense, however, is fairly clear: the "great king's" deeds and days have been "let not pass" because he had them commemorated in sculpture. The breaking of this sculpture is not only an act of vandalism against art but also a negation of the culture it illustrates.

The note of lament is clearly audible, the irreversibility of destruction summed up in the final line; yet the poem is not inescapably tied to the war, for it could as well be a bitter comment on man's destructiveness (his animal powers drive him either toward destruction or toward creation) when unrelated to a military setting. Only Rosenberg's personal experience at the time leads us to assume that he is talking about war. Nor is it likely to be a poem about man's loss of faith in God--despite the fact that the temple is an expression of this relationship: in Rosenberg's view the building is more significant as an emblem of culture, of learning, of art and of aspirations toward progress.

Rosenberg himself had reservations about the poem's effectiveness, as his letter to Miss Seaton of 8th March, 1918 shows:

Dis I send you a little poem, 'The Burning of the Temple'? I thought it was poor, or rather, difficult in expression, but G. Bottomley thinks it fine. Was it clear to you? (CW, page 379).

Its general purpose remains clear, however, for it meditates on the heritage of violence dating from Old Testament times; and its lesson seems to be that not only is the greatest of men mortal (a truism) but that all his attempts to achieve immortality are mortal too, his enemy being not Time but man's nature. Thus it is a generalised comment about man's nature which is illustrated by a Judaic example. It is difficult for a goy to accept Silkin's suggestion (op. cit., page ⁴⁷²~~304~~)

that the poem is an implied attack upon Jewish inertia which permitted much destruction, for to accept this is to limit the implications of the poem which surely extend beyond a domestic Hebrew complaint.

"The Destruction of Jerusalem" continues the theme of Israel's misfortunes, but on this occasion it is apparent that Rosenberg is turning away from a wider field of reference to an attack upon the reactions of the Hebrews to this national disaster. This is the most fully Judaic poem of the three, and a reader can find in it little reference of any kind to twentieth-century war. Once again the occasion of the poem is a specific event in Jewish history, the overthrow of the Holy City by the Unholy one; this gives it something in common with "A Worm Fed" (see page above) but unlike that poem it does not move outward from the event.

Solemnity of tone is at once established by the predominance of monosyllables in the opening stanza. The low-keyed simplicity of statement is reinforced by assonance and alliteration of "Babylon bare" and "all"/"tall". Stanza two continues this verbal music, where the accumulation of s's suggests the sinister hissing of the deadly seed being sown, or the soft crunch of ash underfoot. The "shadowy sowers" are possibly warning messengers of the Lord who precede the invaders, and the ashes those of Sodom which remain as omens of divine retribution for Jewish hardness of heart.

The "Bull God" of Babylon might be Baal, or the totem-god of an agricultural people. However, what he does is more significant than what he is, for Rosenberg conveys the menace of this figure very forcibly. Silkin accurately analyses this intensity (ibid., pages 299-300) as deriving from the

combination of noun and verb in "bull", and links this to the scale of the idol which can "roof" a city (nor is it irrelevant for us to recall that a roof is also a protection).

For the second time in succession we have a stanza opening with "They" (lines nine and 13). Its first appearance plainly refers to the Babylonians, but the second use of it is open to speculation. On the analogy of the preceding stanza it would be reasonable to relate "they" to the gloomy, grimy invading troops (who have already been contrasted to the cheerful brightness of Lebanon). For this reason it is unlikely that the "they" of line 13 refers to the Israelites who are fleeing to exile amid sweat, grime and the dust of destruction, as the point of this reference to the pools is surely to contrast their present users with their former owners. The "laughing girls" may mean either the concubines of Solomon who formerly used the pools before the grimy soldiers seized them, or more probably that Jewish girls are laughing now in the pools with their invaders, forgetting the earlier sophistication and culture of Solomon's reign, thus showing a reprehensible readiness to accommodate themselves to any king or conqueror. The "Sweet laughter! remembered not" is the happiness of earlier days which is destroyed ("charred") in the wholesale devastation inflicted by the Babylonians. This line also echoes, in both appearance and emotion, one from Shelley's "When the Lamp is Shattered" (which has provided another comparison earlier, on page 75):

When the lute is broken,

Sweet tones are remembered not . . .

The ending of the poem offers a contrast between the indolent, self-indulgent laughter of the Jews which is silenced as

their temple (or city wall) is destroyed, and the malicious jubilation of the destroyers.

The 1922 text has "To a" in place of "The" in line 20 and this helps to arrive at the sense of the line. "Gird" is here used in the unusual meaning of "taunt" or "gibe", so the 1922 text made it clear that the destruction of Jerusalem took place to the accompaniment of Babylonian laughter. "The" in Complete Works and Collected Poems changes this last line from being adverbial into an appositional phrase which in fact makes the unfamiliar "gird" more of an obstacle than it would otherwise have been. Once more, editorial policy was presumably influenced by another manuscript version.

The poem clearly stands as a kind of companion-piece to "The Burning of the Temple" and can therefore be regarded as a protest against the destruction of war--the enemy here are specifically defined but the poet's condemnation falls upon the Jews as well as upon their oppressors. Yet if it is a protest there is little obvious passion in it. Cohen, concerned as he is to establish Rosenberg's progress away from romanticism to classicism, observes that this poem illustrates "classical pessimism" (op. cit., page 139). This seems an inadequate description: what he sees as "classical" in it is its restraint and detachment, but the mood of it is more lyrical than Cohen allows. It is a lament rather than a pessimistic statement, related more closely to the tragedies of Hebrew history than to Rosenberg's own contemporary hardship.

This poem displays very well Rosenberg's formal control of his material. It has a 'finish' which is lacking in, say, "Dead Man's Dump" or "Daughters of War" and this leads one to

conclude that he can achieve completeness of utterance only when he is adapting the framework of an already existent myth whose symbols he can appropriate to his own use. When he is creating his own mythology the result is far less superficially attractive than it is in these three poems and it usually gives rise to the familiar charge of subjective obscurity.

Unlike the two preceding poems, "Through these Pale Cold Days" was not printed in Poems (1922). Speculation about this is likely to prove inconclusive, but it is possible that if, as Harding and Gordon Bottomley later maintained, this is the last poem Rosenberg sent to Marsh then this manuscript might have been the only surviving one and for some reason inaccessible to Gordon Bottomley when preparing his edition. Robert Ross's evidence for claiming that this was not the last poem sent to Marsh will be considered shortly.

The first line of the poem establishes a chill mood with its monosyllables; the days of exile are "pale" (reminding us of the "pallid" days of the warrior-hero in "Soldier: Twentieth Century" and "Girl to Soldier"), lacking the sun of their homeland, the sun which Rosenberg has so many times before perceived as the creative force in human life (as on pages ~~384-5~~ above). The exiles' faces are dark with fruitful promise (recalling the potent Nubians in The Amulet and The Unicorn), contrasting with the pale and unproductive atmosphere in which they will live until they find their own spiritual and geographical home; they "burn" with desire for this reunion, but once again this verb juxtaposes their dark intensity and the insipid fruitlessness of their present way of life. Their fate is one bequeathed to them by history,

for this yearning of theirs has been evident in their faces for the past three thousand years.

As in the previous poem, the longing for a past golden age is voiced; they seek for the holy places of Hebron (it was Abraham's burial place and King David's capital for several years), the rich and beautiful countryside of Lebanon. But the reality of present experience pushes the happiness of such visions into the background, or, more accurately reduces them to the intangibility of "dust behind their tread". The echo of Moses caught in "blond still days" is strengthened by the closing emphasis on clarity of perception: Moses is concerned with degrees of sight and imperceptiveness and so here the exiles' eyes are the only part of them which displays life and animation. Nor is the perception a purely physical one, for it involves realizing their present predicament--an acknowledgment that, cut off from the nourishing contact with a permanent home, they have become rootless and so spiritually dead.

Once more, Rosenberg has written a generalised lament; the emotion generated by contemplating the plight of Jews lacking a fatherland is extended and available to all refugees and exiles--to those exiled from peace no less than from their homeland.

Johnston's remark (op. cit., page 249) that Rosenberg is here treating war in terms more widely valid than those of mere patriotism, humanitarianism or personal involvement is a useful signpost, for the poem does contain all these three elements as well as something in addition--a sense of loss, of an emotion which includes all these attitudes and results in a lofty but above all deeply human statement about the

significance of war.

Doubts have been raised by Robert Ross in his valuable The Georgian Revolt about whether this poem was in fact the one which Rosenberg actually sent with his final letter to Marsh (page 174). The letter itself gives no tangible evidence of which poem is accompanying it (unless one accepts as evidence the suggestion that these poems mark a significant stage in Rosenberg's simplification of concepts and of expression and sees this reflected in the closing comment in that final letter (CW, page 322):

My vocabulary small enough before is impoverished and bare).

Ross's contention is that when he saw the Marsh Letter Collection in London in 1955 (before Christopher Hassall sold it to New York Public Library) the letter he saw pointed to this final poem as being "Returning, We hear the Larks". There are two reasons for questioning this assertion, the first being that "vocabulary . . . impoverished and bare" does not seem an accurate assessment by Rosenberg of "Returning, We hear the Larks"--even allowing for his habitual modesty about his writing. The second objection is more substantial as it questions the evidence for Ross's claim. A New York Public Library microfilm of Rosenberg's letters to Marsh (housed in the Berg Collection)--in the present writer's possession--offers no evidence in support of Ross's claim. The letter on this film, written on three sides of a largeish quarto sheet folded horizontally, incorporates a holograph version of "Through these Pale Cold Days", and there is no sign of any sheets missing. The conclusion we have to draw from this is therefore that Ross is simply mistaken, or that he may have found a version of "Returning, We hear the Larks" accompanying

this letter written on a separate sheet which has since become detached or lost; one other possibility is that he may have seen another letter altogether, which did not go with the rest into the Berg Collection--but Ross specifically identifies the letter as being the one printed in Complete Works on page 322.

Viewing these three poems in relation to other Trench Poems the reader can observe not only a high degree of formal control--as noted earlier--but also a diminution or simplification of vocabulary and suggestiveness. This process has already in part been accounted for, but further explanation is offered by Rosenberg himself in his last letter to Marsh, dated 28th March, 1918 and postmarked a day after his death:

I wanted to write a battle song for the Judains but can think of nothing strong and wonderful enough yet. Heres just a slight thing.

['Through these Pale Cold Days']

Ive seen no poetry for ages now so you mustnt be too critical--My vocabulary small enough before is impoverished and bare (CW, page 322).

Rosenberg appears to be feeling the effects of living under conditions which stretched mental and physical endurance to the limit, and it is as if his brain was now refusing to coin the 'packed' and elliptical expressions with which his readers have become familiar. Having said this, however, we need to add that this small group of poems does not require density of meaning and involved syntax: the poems deal with concepts which need straightforward exposition, their mood being not so much one of bitter protest as one of melancholy resignation. It may not be too fanciful to see in these poems Rosenberg in his battlefront experiences almost reliving the disasters and sorrows of his people's history; here he recreates them for us with their emotional charge

perceptible beneath his dignified restraint.

Rosenberg's own stoic acceptance of war's hardship is immediately visible from the letters he wrote during this period. There was never any doubt in his mind about his attitude to war. As early as 8th August, 1914, he was writing to Marsh from Cape Town "know that I despise war and hate war" (CW, page 297) and a year later, after joining up, he explained his action to Marsh in a letter already referred to on page 14 above:

I never joined the army from patriotic reasons. Nothing can justify war. I suppose we must all fight to get the trouble over. Anyhow before the war I helped at home when I could and I did other things which helped to keep things going. I thought if I'd join there would be the separation allowance for my mother (CW, page 305).

His initial experience of the army involved suffering on two levels--the physical and the temperamental (as already indicated in the opening chapter). Firstly he had trouble with his boots as they were new and virtually unwearable:

My feet now are the trouble. Do you know what privates military boots are? You are given a whole armourys shop to wear--but by God--in a few hours my heels were all blistered and I've been marching and drilling in most horrible pain. I drew three weeks pay and had some money sent me from home and bought a pair of boots 3 or four sizes too large for me my feet had swelled so (CW, page 301).

He lamented thus from Bury. Before long his description was more precise although it was prefaced by a typically self-deprecating: "I suppose my troubles are really laughable". He continues:

Doing coal fatigues and cookhouse work with a torn hand and marching ten miles with a clean hole about an inch round in your heel and bullies swearing at you is not very natural (CW, page 302)

--but in the same letter a solution was suggested:

Nobody thinks of helping you--I mean those who could.

Not till I have been made a thorough cripple an officer said it was absurd to think of wearing those boots and told me to soak it thoroughly in oil to soften it.

If we feel that this business of the boots is rather overplayed in these early war letters, we have only to turn for verification to the experience of Edward Thomas as he described it to Bottomley:

For I am ashamed to say the new boots I wore on my first day's drill so pressed the big tendon at the back of my right foot that I have been given leave for the rest of the week (Letter dated 21st July, 1915, in Letters from Edward Thomas to Gordon Bottomley, pages 252-253).

On a different level, he found the military turn of mind was closed to him and he seemed always to fall foul of petty authority. Evidence of this persists throughout his military service, beginning in the early weeks of soldiering:

Besides this trouble I have a little impudent schoolboy pup for an officer and he has me marked--he has taken a dislike to me I don't know why (CW, page 301)

--and he felt the same at the end of the year:

I have been kept very busy and I find that the actual duties though they are difficult at first and require all one's sticking power are not in themselves unpleasant, it is the brutal militaristic bullying meanness of the way they're served out to us. You're always being threatened with 'clink' (CW, page 304).

Within three months of his departure for France Rosenberg still experienced considerable antipathy to the life he had chosen, for in an apologetic note to Abercrombie he explains:

I send you here my two latest poems, which I have managed to write, though in the utmost distress of mind, or perhaps because of it. Believe me the army is the most detestable invention on this earth and nobody but a private in the army knows what it is to be a slave (CW, page 347).

Despite the unease he obviously felt, his sense of priorities remained unimpaired, as we can see from a remark he made to Marsh once he was in France:

I am aware how fearfully busy you must be, but if

poetry at this time is no use it certainly wont be at any other (CW, pages 309-310).

Nor was he constrained by the rigours of censorship:

I have been forbidden to send poems home, as the censor won't be bothered with going through such rubbish . . . (CW, page 312)

--and he enjoyed talking over contemporary poetry with correspondents like R. C. Trevelyan:

It was a treat to get something about something from home. I cannot now enter into your arguments tho that kind of fighting is more in my line than trench fighting--(CW, page 354).

By the end of 1916 another obstacle was apparent, for which the Army was not directly to blame:

hardships of the That my health is undermined I feel sure of; but I have only lately been medically examined, and absolute fitness was the verdict. My being transferred may be the consequence of my reporting sick or not; I don't know for certain. But though this work does not entail half the *trenches*, the winter and the conditions naturally tells on me, having once suffered from weak lungs, as you know. I have been in the trenches most of the 8 months Ive been here, and the continual damp and exposure is whispering to my old friend consumption, and he may hear the words they say in time. I have nothing outwardly to show, yet, but I feel it inwardly (CW, pages 313-314).

He had already mentioned this in a letter home and on 2nd January his sister Annie wrote to Marsh asking for his assistance in getting Rosenberg some leave. By the time she wrote repeating her request on 12th January Marsh had already asked a friend at the War Office to advise him on the best course of action. The reply, from H. J. Creedy, preserved among the Berg Collection manuscripts, treats the case of "the Hebrew bard" with sympathy but merely outlines the most profitable procedure to be followed; the most memorable remark occurs near the end--"Oddly enough, the men do not perish of lung trouble as much as one would imagine." Marsh then duly directed his request to Rosenberg's company in the

4th Divisional Works Battalion, to which he had been transferred about a month earlier. Captain Normoy reassured Marsh that Rosenberg was now leading a less strenuous life than formerly, but would have him medically examined. The outcome of all this activity was that he was passed as fit, although he felt rather differently:

This winter is a teaser for me; and being so long without a proper rest I feel as if I need one to recuperate and be put to rights again. However I suppose well stick it, if we don't there are still some good poets left who might write me a decent epitaph (CW, pages 314-315).

The summer of 1917 afforded Rosenberg a respite with regard to his health and he was working away at revising The Amulet; life was, for him, a good deal more tolerable,

for: my work pretty much leaves my brain alone especially as I have a decent job now and am not so rushed and worked as I was in the trenches (CW, page 318).

But if he was better off than before physically he still had problems with army discipline, as he remarked to Bottomley about

a punishment I am undergoing for the offence of being endowed with a poor memory, which continually causes me trouble and often punishment. I forgot to wear my gas-helmet one day; in fact, I've often forgotten it, but I was noticed one day, and seven days' pack drill is the consequence, which I do between the hours of going up the line and sleep. My memory, always weak, has become worse since I've been out here (CW, page 376).

After coming to England on leave late on in the summer of 1917, by October he was writing to Trevelyan from hospital where he stayed for about two months; the cause for his being sent down the line is not mentioned in any of his letters, but weak lungs and a slender physique may well account for it, especially when this is coupled with the mental strain observable in a letter of the previous month to Bottomley (and previously quoted on page 20 above):

I am afraid I can do no writing or reading; I feel so restless here and unanchored. We have lived in such an elemental way so long, things here don't look quite right to me somehow; or it may be the consciousness of my so limited time here for freedom--so little time to do so many things bewilders me (CW, pages 377-378).

Once again, the spell in hospital offered him a much-needed break and he began to write pieces for inclusion in The Unicorn. However after Christmas he was abruptly returned to the trenches:

I am back in the trenches which are terrible now. We spend most of our time pulling each other out of the mud. I am not fit at all now and am more in the way than any use . . .

he wrote to Marsh in a letter postmarked 26th January, 1918 (CW, page 320).

This letter, in fact, is the most revealing of all those Rosenberg sent home from France, but the version printed in the Complete Works does not give the whole story. Even so, what is printed is outspoken to a degree visible nowhere else in Rosenberg's writing. What Harding and Bottomley print runs on from the extract as follows:

You see I appear in excellent health and a doctor will make no distinction between health and strength. I am not strong . . .

and then Rosenberg turns aside to enquire about the progress Marsh was making with his life of Brooke. The holograph of this letter is in the Berg Collection and contains at this point three or four deleted lines. The words which Rosenberg wrote have been very heavily deleted and on microfilm it is impossible to make them out. But fortunately the Marsh Letter Collection also contains a letter from Professor Harding to Marsh asking for his opinion about the deletion, and in it he records his reading of what Rosenberg in fact wrote as:

. . . and what is happening to me now is more tragic than the "passion play". Christ never endured what I endure. It is breaking me completely.

With Harding's transcript to hand it is possible to trace the outlines of most of these words, so there is no reason to doubt the accuracy of his deciphering.

His letter to Marsh (dated 29th February, 1935) was to discover whether Marsh thought the scoring-out had been done by Rosenberg himself or by the censor. It is a pity that the reply to it does not appear to have been preserved, but Harding's own observations are worth recording. He comments that the 'blanket' method of scoring out was more systematic than Rosenberg's usual practice, which suggests another's hand. In support of this he wonders why Rosenberg wrote so much before thinking better of it. It would be very helpful to know whether officers, when censoring mail, deleted remarks of a morale-betraying nature as well as obvious breaches of security. On the other hand, Harding observes that the crossing-out on the original was done with an indelible pencil which looked very like the one Rosenberg was using. Certainly the evidence of the microfilm supports this finding, as the writing in other parts of the letter looks as dense and as thick as this scoring. On balance, then, it seems that Rosenberg had second thoughts about letting his guard slip in this way when writing to Marsh. The really significant point, of course, is that Rosenberg actually committed this cri de coeur to paper at all. It is the clearest proof that seventeen months of scarcely interrupted service in the battle area were beginning to take their toll. Yet this outburst is unique in Rosenberg's surviving letters and what remains of subsequent correspondence contains more

generalised complaints about his loss of creative power;

So in February 1918 he can say to Miss Seaton:

. . . there is no chance whatever for seclusion or any hope of writing poetry now. Sometimes I give way and am appalled at the devastation this life seems to have made in my nature. It seems to have blunted me. I seem to be powerless to compel my will to any direction, and all I do is without energy and interest (CW, page 378)

--and within a couple of weeks of this he is making substantially the same statement to Bottomley:

. . . since I left the hospital all the poetry has gone quite out of me. I seem even to forget words, and I believe if I met anybody with ideas I'd be dumb. No drug could be more stupefying than our work (to me anyway), and this goes on like that old torture of water trickling, drop by drop unendingly, on one's helplessness (CW, page 378).

Yet despite this imaginative deprivation he denies any hint of the despair in that January letter:

If only this war were over our eyes would not be on death so much: it seems to underlie even our under-thoughts. Yet when I have been so near to it as anybody could be, the idea has never crossed my mind, certainly not so much as when some lying doctor told me I had consumption (CW, pages 378-379).

The abiding quality of Rosenberg's letters, however, is very close to that of the poems. They present to us a man stoically accepting his fate and not wasting his time and energy in futile mouthings against the ponderous impersonality of mechanised warfare and the military command. We nowhere find for instance any complaints about the tedium of trench life, as recorded by such different writers as T. E. Hulme:

It's simply hopeless. The boredom and discomfort of it, exasperate you to the breaking point ("Diary from the Trenches", Further Speculations, page 157)

--and Charles Sorley:

The alarming sameness with which day passes until this unnatural state of affairs is over is worse than any so-called atrocities; for people enjoy grief, the only unbearable thing is dullness (Letter to Hutchinson dated 25th January, 1915: Letters of Charles Sorley, page 254).

Rosenberg emerges as a man capable of a remarkable degree of detachment--he filters his experience through his mind and does not write from white-hot emotion. It is regrettable that this heroic degree of self-discipline has too often been seen as an almost inhuman indifference to the sufferings of others. Throughout his trench existence he keeps awake his enthusiasm for poetry and references to either his own poetic practice or to the works of his contemporaries abound. Not only do these letters show how he reacted to the current productions of such writers as Abercrombie, Bottomley, Masfield, Gibson and others, but they also indicate who were those earlier writers he considered influential and significant for his own poetic development. In the limited context of war poetry he acknowledges only one touchstone--Whitman's "Drum Taps"; this name recurs in his letters, one instance of it being in a hitherto unpublished letter in the Marsh Letter Collection--where he is commenting on Gibson's "Battle" to Marsh:

Gibson's 'Battle' was sent to me and delighted me. It is as good as Degas. In a way it seems a contradiction that a thinker should take a low plane as he does there instead of the more complex and sensitive personality of a poet in such a situation. Most who have written as poets have been very unreal and it is for this reason their naturalness I think Gibson's so fine. The Homer for this war has yet to be found--Whitman got very near to the mark 50 years ago with 'Drum Taps'.

Whitman appears in the Complete Works (page 358) in a letter to Joseph Leftwich dated 8th December, 1917, and again in a letter about a year earlier to Mrs. Cohen which deals largely with a critique of Brooke:

[War] should be approached in a colder way, more abstract, with less of the million feelings everybody feels; or all these should be concentrated in one distinguished emotion. Walt Whitman in 'Beat, drums,

beat, has said the noblest thing on war (CW, page 348). What was there about Whitman's poems which made Rosenberg rate them so highly? To begin with, the circumstances of the two wars in which they were involved were very similar. The American Civil War was the first of the 'modern' breed, relying as it did on the use of artillery (maybe for bombardment), on men fighting in organized masses like machines, and resulting in large numbers of casualties. When Rosenberg comments on Whitman he refers not to the American's innovations in verse-form, but is impressed by his combination of dignified yet naturalistic speech with an uplifting but unsentimental pity for humanity. Whitman worked for three years as a voluntary missionary in hospitals, tending the wounded who

open a new world somehow to me, giving closer insights, new things, exploring deeper mines than any yet, showing our humanity . . . tried by terrible, fearfulest tests, probed deepest, the living soul's, the body's tragedies, bursting the petty bonds of art (Letter to Nat and Fred Gray, dated 19th March, 1863).

He is, in this sense, a truly democratic poet, a common soldier which enabled Rosenberg to identify himself with his viewpoint on war. In his concern for liberty, equality and fraternity, as well as in his 'rolling' verse, Whitman closely resembles Blake; we know how much Rosenberg admired Blake as an artist.

There are two reasons why it was relevant to turn aside from Rosenberg's poems to look at the nature of his correspondence during this period. The first is, to illustrate Rosenberg's full-time devotion to poetry, for there is not one of his surviving letters which does not contain some

¹¹ Walt Whitman: Complete Poetry and Selected Prose and Letters, ed. Emory Holloway, page 896.

reference to his own or others' work. In this respect he is not at all different from Graves, Sassoon, Owen or Thomas. But the major conclusion follows from this, which is that this single-minded devotion to poetry was maintained against a background of continual deprivation and degradation such as the officer-poets did not have to endure; conditions, moreover, which he did little to improve. Of course war is an uncomfortable business--as poets' letters from the front testify--but, as indicated earlier, Rosenberg's hardships were not wholly physical.

Although it is not a serious affliction, we can sympathise with the men who had to cope with louse-infestation as well as other hardships. Rosenberg's letters to Bottomley of February and April 1917 give adequate proof that the two poems about lice are based on first-hand experience, even though that experience was more demoralising than injurious:

All through this winter I have felt most crotchety, all kinds of small things interfering with my fitness. My hands would get chilblains or bad boots would make my feet sore; and this aggravating a general run-down-ness, I have not felt too happy. I have gone less warmly clad during the winter than through the summer, because of the increased liveliness on my clothing, as I thought it wisest to go cold than lousy. It may have been this that caused all the crotchetyness (CW, page 374).

The evidence of his letters suggests, however, that he was as resilient--for most of his trench existence--toward physical pressure as he was in the face of personal hostility or non-comprehension.

While still in England in 1916 he was working on Moses but found his surroundings uncongenial:

. . . I want you to make allowances for the play as I had to write it in a very scrappy manner and even got into trouble thro it. It made me a bit absent minded and you know what that means in the army (CW, page 308).

A similar explanation, sent to R. C. Trevelyan in response to his comments on Moses, will be found on page 263 above. Pressures from outside may partly account for the weaknesses which Marsh was finding in his work about this time. Before leaving England in June of that year Rosenberg had established contact with Bottomley by sending him a copy of Moses which the latter had found very impressive and had told him so. Marsh felt his critical rigour was in danger of being undermined and warned Bottomley against too enthusiastic a response:

I wrote him a piece of my mind about "Moses", which seems to me really magnificent in parts, especially the speech beginning "Ah Koelue" which I think absolutely one of the finest things ever written--but as a whole it's surely quite ridiculously bad. I hope you mix plenty of powder with your jam. I do want him to renounce the lawless and grotesque manner in which he usually writes and to pay a little attention to form and tradition (Christopher Hassall, Edward Marsh--a Biography, page 401).

Bottomley's response was both more generous and less restricted in outlook:

He interests me because in "Moses" I felt some assurance that in him, at least, has turned up a poet 'de longue haleine' among the youngsters; he has paid the customary allegiance to Poundisme, Unanisme, and the rest with an energy and vividness which distinguishes him from the others (ibid., page 402).

While this exchange between the older men was going on, Rosenberg was writing from France to enter a special plea which must carry weight:

You know the conditions I have always worked under, and particularly with this last lot of poems. You know how earnestly one must wait on ideas, (you cannot coax real ones to you) and let as it were a skin grow naturally round and through them. If you are not free, you can only, when the ideas come hot, sieze them with the skin in tatters raw, crude, in some parts beautiful in others monstrous. Why print it then? Because these rare parts must not be lost. I work more and more as I write into more depth and lucidity, I am sure (CW, pages 310-311).

This last sentence expresses a view which Marsh would have

approved of, but nonetheless there is here ample justification for the lack of sustained application which Marsh perceptively diagnosed as one of his major shortcomings-- in Georgian eyes, at least:

he seems to me entirely without architectonics--both the shaping instinct and the reserve of power that carries a thing through. It's the same in his painting, he does a good sketch of a design and leaves it there. However, let's hope for the best. No one can write a Koelue by accident (Hassall: Edward Marsh--a Biography, page 402).

It is open to doubt whether promotion through the ranks would have alleviated the awkwardness of his existence in the army. He had been offered a stripe before he left England (as was noted on page 15 above), but nothing came of it. His remarks about this to Mrs. Cohen suggest that he was in favour of the idea:

The advantage is, though you have a more responsible position, you are likely to be interfered with by the men, and you become an authority (CW, pages 368-369).

This might well have given him the respite he so much needed earlier:

It is very hard to write here so you must not expect interesting letters there is always behind or through my object some pressing sense of foreign matter, immediate and not personal which hinders and disjoins what would otherwise have coherence and perhaps weight (CW, page 303).

It is unlikely he would have turned down promotion on grounds of being, like Owen, "a conscientious objector with a very seared conscience",¹² as he did not stand back from the life he had embarked on as Owen was to do. More probable, surely, is the reason that such promotion carried with it a degree of responsibility and a demand for attentiveness to the minutiae of trench discipline which he would have found intolerably

¹² Letter of May 1917: in Wilfred Owen: Collected Letters, ed. Harold Owen and John Bell, page 461.

irksome; as a lance-corporal, obviously, any neglect of duties through absent-mindedness would have more serious consequences than if he remained a mere private. Another consideration is that the little free time he enjoyed as a private was at least his own, whereas he possibly felt that a corporal would be left^{less} to himself. Whatever the deciding factor no more was heard about promotion once he had embarked for France.

Certainly near the end of his life the pressure on him as a poet seems to be building up, and we can only speculate about what might have happened if he had survived 1st April. The divergence between the demands made on Rosenberg as a soldier and the requirements made of himself as a poet was increasing, and the letters suggest he was virtually entering on a period of poetic aridity--not a surprising event, in the circumstances. The kind of pressure he was subjected to was more pernicious than a simple erosion of his spare time; physical exhaustion was giving rise to spiritual enervation--and the clearest evidence for this is in the two extracts from letters written to Miss Seaton and to Bottomley in February 1918, printed on page 378 of Complete Works and already quoted (see pages 407 above).

This chapter has so far dealt with eighteen poems which are, by general consensus, considered to be his major achievement in this category. There yet remain several poems of lesser calibre which merit at least a passing mention here, if only to offer a more balanced view of the Trench Poems. For as there are lapses and weaknesses in the verse-dramas, so there are war poems which do not succeed as poetry, nor

even as propaganda.

The earliest of these--"The Troop Ship"--originates in Rosenberg's voyage to France in June 1916, and makes its appearance in what is probably his first letter to Marsh from France (CW, page 309); he also makes reference to it in a letter he sent to R. C. Trevelyan during these early days (CW, page 349). The manuscript sent to Marsh--now in the Berg Collection at New York Public Library--varies in two minor respects from the version printed in the Complete Works: it is completely unpunctuated save in the fifth line (not so much a revolt against poetic convention as an example of his lack of concern for what he considered to be of lesser importance than the ideas themselves); the second difference is that the verb in line ten is in the singular--presumably the editors felt that it made reading easier to allow this verb to be attracted into the plural by the preceding 'feet', though 'is' is grammatically correct. This poem is an unpretentious rendering of experience, comparing favourably with Brooke's more contrived "A Channel Passage" which tries to draw a contrast "'twixt love and nausea, heart and belly".

"The Jew" is not concerned with war overtly, but it is Rosenberg's only direct comment on racial disharmony, of which he presumably had some unpleasant experience. (The editors include it in the Trench Poems section). The generalised theme is that all races are governed by both the Mosaic law and by rules of human blood and instinct. His use of "moon" to symbolize the light of Moses' law is puzzling, as the moon is tradition^{ally} regarded as fitful, feeble and feminine. Possibly Rosenberg meant to suggest that as the light from the moon is reflected light, so these laws are the

reflection of God's will; man can only behold the immutable when it is reflected in the mutable. But to say this is to risk loading a single word with more significance than it can bear. In the end, it is probably fairer to Rosenberg to treat this image (and the types signified by "the bronze, the blond, the ruddy") as being not completely thought through.

"Lusitania" is a rather self-conscious attempt at a public lament which invites unfavourable comparison with Hardy's "The Convergence of the Twain" (The "Titanic" disaster of 1912 preceded the torpedoing of the "Lusitania" by three years). While Hardy exposes the emptiness of vanity about "civilization", Rosenberg is more concerned with the senseless destruction, the wayward lawlessness of international antagonism. The result is not a success, for this short poem is weighted down with apostrophes to "Thee" (spirit of Chaos) and a phrase such as "mind-wrought, mind-unimagining energies" which carries something in it of Blake's "mind-forged manacles", while lacking his precise condensing of meaning: and in fact Rosenberg's meaning is not made clear for us: are these energies wrought by the mind such as to destroy the mind, to render it incapable of imagining anything more brutal hereafter, or are the energies so indescribably evil that the mind cannot conceive of them? One element which does distinguish this melodramatic invocation is a blatant anti-German sentiment which was never to recur in the Trench Poems. In metrical form the poem resembles the classic dactylic model, but this resemblance is coincidental in the sense that Rosenberg was not (unlike Robert Bridges at this time) deliberately experimenting with quantitative metres; there seems to be nothing significant, either, in the frequency of

feminine endings in this poem.

"From France" is similarly marked by a failure in execution rather than in intention. Two views of life in France are held up for comparison, an ironic technique which Sassoon was to handle much more adroitly. To begin with, Rosenberg has balanced against the cruelty of wartime life in France, not an informed peace-time view, but a music-hall caricature of France which sees it on the level of a French farce or Toulouse-Lautrec theatre paintings and posters. So to balance harsh reality with a caricature destroys the tension and disarms the irony of the contrast: the former element in the poem is degraded in the comparison, and this feeling is not eased by the jingling sound of the third line:

. . . And heard men say to women gay . . .

Those familiar with Owen will detect several points of resemblance between the two poets here: there is the 'nation at home/nation at war' conflict which so embittered Owen; the conscious Keatsian echo of "and no birds sing" in line 11; and finally a vowel echo similar to the assonance which Owen developed into pararhyme in "soft tones", "men groan", "heaped stones". But despite the competence of verse-technique displayed here we cannot help feeling that the view of life in France which Rosenberg set out to ridicule was too trivial to merit such treatment.

"Home-thoughts from France" is related in theme to "From France", but there is no trace of irony in it. From the foregoing echoes of Owen and Keats we turn to a reminder of Browning ("Home-thoughts from Abroad") although the similarity ends with the title. The poem deals with the fragility of memories of earlier civilian joy, and the speaker appeals

to these softer recollections to release him from the trance-like insensitivity which he has adopted to insulate himself from the horrors of immediate trench experience. "Hands shut in pitiless trance" (line six) is the recurrence of an image first appearing in line 20 of "Significance" (1915), where it depicts the need to seize an opportunity when it presents itself. "First Fruit", published in the Moses pamphlet, links this to the gathering of fruit while it is in season; but in The Amulet (line 70) and here the image takes on another overtone, that the neglecting of chances to improve one's lot may be done involuntarily if an individual's will is subjected to some powerful external force which paralyzes spontaneity ("trance"). Peacetime memories survive in the soldier's mental eye merely to taunt him with their inaccessibility, to point up the disparity between two levels of existence. It conveys some poignancy, but is an unremarkable poem on a minor theme, as Johnston remarks (op. cit., page 226). The shut hands are one expression of an inability to communicate, which was a major preoccupation of Rosenberg's pre-war poetry; the point to be noticed about this isolation is that war does not produce it, but merely intensifies what already exists. In such circumstances, personal affection is a luxury that cannot be indulged; thus the 'ninetyish plain-tiveness of "yearn", "lure" and "sadden" is outweighed by the harshness of present experience. The seventh line echoes line 323 of Swinburne's "The Triumph of Time":

. . . In a land of sand and ruin and gold . . .

The death of an individual soldier which epitomizes the senselessness of war has been endowed with its greatest significance at the end of "Dead Man's Dump". In "The Dying

Soldier" this same subject is treated more briefly. The luckless soldier's perceptions are blunted, for what he thinks are comforting houses turn out to be British gun emplacements.

'Water--water--O water

For one of England's dying sons.'

(lines notable for their heaviness and lack of rhythm in an otherwise regular poem) create the kind of patriotic thrill often sought after by poets at home--such as Herbert Asquith's "The Volunteer" in which a humble office clerk "goes to join the men of Agincourt"--and the remainder of the poem demands that we balance this against the harsh actualities of the battlefield; once this is done the emptiness of this flourish is clearly visible and the conclusion of the poem leads us to recollect Edith Cavell's "Patriotism is not enough". The soldier's comrades cannot help (despite their stilted and highly artificial enunciation) regardless of whether they are motivated by love of their homeland or by common humanity, thus, as at the end of "Dead Man's Dump" we are obliged to admit that pity is irrelevant. Even though the treatment of this theme is here less detailed than in the other poem, the language of this one falls curiously on the ear. If Rosenberg's intention is to show up the inadequacy of traditional patriotism, "swooned to death" smacks of Romantic emotional excess and sets up a reaction in the reader counter to this aim: this lack of clarity in intention weakens the poem's effect, for there is no traceable pressure of emotion behind the words which display all the rigidity of a formal exercise.

The doggerel verse which Rosenberg produced to adorn the Divisional Christmas card in 1917 is included as Fragment II

in the Complete Works, but an earlier version was included in a letter sent to John Rodker some time between June and November 1916 (so Bottomley and Harding conjecture--(CW, pages 350-351). Rosenberg himself accurately called it "a patriotic gush a jingo spasm", and it does offer evidence that Rosenberg could write bad 'popular' verse as well as the next man. The birth of an Englishman is solemnly compared, for its ability to set the world to rights, with the birth of Christ. The earlier version to Rodker has been shortened and the figure of Time is replaced by the more seasonal ones of God and (later) Mary's Son. The 'overblown' way in which these pretentious sentiments are expressed seems crude now, but Rosenberg presumably knew how to fulfil his superiors' demands for something morale-boosting. It is easy to sneer at the officer who approvingly noted in pencil on the manuscript (in the British Museum), "original poetry" and then went on to correct the spelling of a French place-name on the scroll which the radiant angel in the accompanying design was holding. The usefulness of this verse to us, after more than half a century, is that it shows vividly the vast disparity between the poetry Rosenberg was writing on his own, and what the authorities (and presumably most of the British public as late as 1917) considered to be acceptable sentiments about war. Only one "original" turn of phrase catches the eye-- "This monstrous girth of glory"--for the mind tends to deceive the eye into reading the expected "birth": then we may remember an earlier appearance in "Soldier: Twentieth Century", where it suggested impressive moral as well as physical stature, but note that its meaning here is limited to the waist measurements of the pregnant matrons of Albion, closer

to "the whole girth of the world" found in Moses (III), line 139. At this point, all of Rosenberg's Trench Poems have been considered.

Other War Poets--Likenesses and Differences

It is illuminating to compare Rosenberg's Trench Poems with those of other soldiers writing at the time. The most relevant figures for this purpose are Brooke, Sorley, Sassoon, Graves, Blunden and Owen.

There are many differences between Rosenberg's and Brooke's poetry. To begin with, one minor divergence emerges in their attitude toward completed poems. Brooke wrote to Marsh in 1911:

I've an insistent queer feeling of having got rid of poems I've written and published--of having cut the umbilical cord--that they're now just slightly more anybody's concern than mine, and that everybody else has an equal right and a faintly greater opportunity of understanding them (Edward Marsh, A Number of People, pages 278-279).

Rosenberg published far fewer poems than Brooke in his lifetime, so it was easier for Brooke to feel that he had sent his poems on their independent way in the world. Even allowing for this, Rosenberg thought of his poems as much more continuously part of himself, and though Brooke was a meticulous craftsman there is no evidence of the painstaking reworking which is characteristic of Rosenberg and has been amply illustrated in these pages (see particularly his remarks to Marsh (CW, page 319) on "Daughters of War").

A more significant difference between the two, one obvious to the most casual reader of poems, is their divergent attitudes to war. To begin with, an observation of Bergonzi in his Heroes' Twilight (page 42) is illuminating because it

affords an explanation of Brooke's rejection of civilian life in favour of assured military glory:

One very pressing difficulty in reading these sonnets is that elements that can be called representative, expressing currents of popular feeling, are closely interwoven with others which are purely personal to Brooke himself.

Persuasive though this is, it does not explain wholly Brooke's rejection of the civilian world as sordid and unreal; it alludes to Brooke's sudden recoil from sexual passion which, in spite of his physical attractiveness, was always mixed up with feelings of guilt. Such a rejection also finds foundation in a comment made by Marsh on the importance to Brooke of "goodness":

. . . he had discovered that goodness was the most important thing in life . . . and if he had been asked to define goodness he would probably have said that it meant having true opinions about ethics. . . . Henceforward the only thing that he cared for--or rather felt he ought to care for--in a man, was the possession of goodness; its absence, the one thing that he hated, sometimes with fierceness (Memoir to The Collected Poems of Rupert Brooke, page lxxv).

Thus "goodness" was an idealized view, maybe derived from G. E. Moore, a Platonist for whom goodness was an object of knowledge. The fusion of these two powerful personal feelings produces in his "1914" sequence a degree of obtrusion upon the reader which has no place in Rosenberg's Trench Poems. "Marching" or "August 1914" equally consider war's intrusion into peace as much as Brooke does in his sonnets; yet Rosenberg's poems have none of Brooke's rather dramatic and rhetorical posturings.

The prospect of war produces a different response in the two men (as has been already noted). Rosenberg foresees the suffering and bitterness whereas Brooke's visions are of the vague heroic kind. Thus we find in Rosenberg acknowledgment

of the violence and ugliness of war (though nothing of Owen's attempts at photographic 'realism') and it is occasionally described in these terms--but never, one feels, for its own sake. When ugliness appears in Brooke's poetry it is still somehow refined and almost 'nice'. The applied nastiness of "Channel Passage" has already been referred to (page 414 above) and Brooke later wrote in defence of it:

. . . the point of it was (or should have been!)
'serious'. There are common and sordid things--
situations or details--that may suddenly bring all
tragedy, or at least the brutality of actual emotions,
to you. I rather grasp relievedly at them, after I've
beaten vain hands in the rosy mists of poets' experi-
ences (ibid., page lxvii).

The same unreality is evident in the supposedly fervent "Oh, damn!" and "God!" of "Grantchester" (1912). The unpleasant side of life is not an organic part of his poetry; the opening lines of "Dead Man's Dump" illustrate the contrast between the two men's apprehension of experience.

Of course Brooke did not live to witness the grotesque ravaging of the trenches, yet he seems to have had no sense of the real evil which war could (and did) call forth. Hence the pallid optimism of Sonnet I ("Peace"):

. . . Nothing to shake the laughing heart's long peace there

But only agony, and that has ending;

And the worst friend and enemy is but Death.

(Lines 12-14)

--or the naïve sentimentality of the Fragment written in the month of his death 1915:

. . . Pride in their strength and in the weight and firmness

And link'd beauty of bodies, and pity that

This gay machine of splendour'd soon be broken,

Thought little of, pashed, scattered . . . (lines 8-11)

Owen and Rosenberg at this stage were no more familiar with front-line details than Brooke was, but their imaginative resources were more fully developed, hence what now appears to us as their greater maturity of response.

Rosenberg, it will be recalled, has been accused of treating war almost as an aesthetic experience. How, consequently, can we exempt Brooke from such an ascription when we read the cloudy generalizations he uses to describe his own generation?

We have built a house that is not for Time's throwing.

We have gained a peace unshaken by pain for ever.

War knows no power. . . . (Sonnet II, "Safety", lines 9-11)
Or God?

And think, this heart, all evil shed away,

A pulse in the eternal mind, no less . . .

(Sonnet V, "The Soldier", lines 9-10)

Beauty and harmony of expression take precedence over truth to human feeling, over compassion:

These laid the world away; poured out the red

Sweet wine of youth: gave up the years to be

Of work and joy, and that unhopèd serene,

That men call age; and those who would have been,

Their sons, they gave, their immortality.

(Sonnet III, "The Dead", lines 4-8)

Speculation about what Brooke and Rosenberg might have gone on to write is idle, but on the basis of the work they left behind Brooke seems to have had less room for development. His verse is, nevertheless, accomplished and to us now it seems rather complacent, for we view it (as Johnston reminds us)¹³ through spectacles tinged by the smarting

¹³ op. cit., page 28.

social consciousness of Eliot and the poets of the 1930s. Geoffrey Matthews¹⁴ expresses a mid-century view bluntly: "What was there for his poetry to change into?" Rosenberg, by contrast, was more progressive in form--his free verse was too free for Marsh, who in a letter to Michael Sadleir spelt out his own rather timid liberalism toward form:

I rejoice particularly in any bold and new use of language if I am satisfied that it really means what it is meant to mean, and also any novelty of form if I find that it has and obeys a law of its own (Hassall, op. cit., page 209).

Reference has already been made to the rigid criticism that Rosenberg's verse received at his hands. Rosenberg's choice of content is more varied and less traditional (especially after 1912) than Brooke's. A glance at the contents of Brooke's Poems 1911-1915 and Rosenberg's poems of 1913-1915 will illustrate this adequately. In the latter's verse there is a sense of exploration into thought and feeling and expression which may be artistically flawed, but it at least displays more potential than the bland, limpid content and form of Brooke.

All this notwithstanding, Brooke felt himself at the time to be in the forefront of a new development which, however timid its beginnings, was to culminate in the impersonality of Eliot: for in his Memoir introducing Brooke's Collected Poems, Marsh quotes from a letter of 1910 about Brooke's attitude and that of his art toward what is valuable in life:

It consists in just looking at people and things as themselves--neither as useful nor moral nor ugly nor anything else; but just as being (page liii).

Professor C. K. Stead (The New Poetic, pages 84-85) points

¹⁴ "Brooke and Owen": Stand, Vol. 4, No. 3, page 31.

out that this credo was to be echoed by such a seemingly disparate group as the Imagists, whose spokesman in The Egoist of 1st June, 1914--Richard Aldington--explained the impersonality of Imagism:

. . . we present that woman, we make an Image of her, we make the scene convey the emotion . . . A hardness of cut stone. No slop, no sentimentality.

Brooke is characteristic of the Georgians in that he too abandoned the large-scale themes and the rhetorical flourishes which closed the nineteenth century and moved in the direction of treating immediate experience in appropriate language.

In another respect also Brooke deserves to be considered as an innovator for, as Maurice Hussey¹⁵ suggests, Brooke's "1914" Sonnets may well have won a public audience from the outset for war poetry which might otherwise "not have become the dominant wartime art form for the young."

Charles Sorley comes closest to Rosenberg's disillusioned acceptance of war, although his protests are more direct than Rosenberg's; his language is more austere, less rich and ambiguous, as in:

When you see millions of the mouthless dead
Across your dreams in pale battalions go,
Say not soft things as other men have said,
That you'll remember. For you need not so.
Give them not praise. For, deaf, how should they know
It is not curses heaped on each gashed head?
Nor tears. Their blind eyes see not your tears flow.
Nor honour. It is easy to be dead.

¹⁵ Introduction to his Poetry of the First World War, page 22.

Johnston picks out one similarity between the two poets when he writes that Sorley

was constantly suspicious of subjectivism and emotionalism because they seemed to him personal imperfections as well as major artistic faults and were often closely allied with affectation or insincerity (op. cit., pages 56-57).

The first half of this statement comes closer to Rosenberg's apparent intentions than the second: Rosenberg's self-effacing technique evolved from a determination to immerse himself fully in his new circumstances, as should by now be apparent:

I will not leave a corner of my consciousness covered up . . . (CW, page 373)

--thus to him emotionalism and subjectivism were merely obstacles to communication and not (as to Sorley) indications of aesthetic fragility.

Such partial relevance of statements about Sorley to Rosenberg's work is also evident in what Johnston says ten pages later:

. . . Sorley's vocabulary tends to be denotative rather than connotative; unlike Brooke, he is usually more intent on the definition of an attitude than on the manipulation of a feeling or an emotion (op. cit., pages 67-68).

On this occasion the second part of the quotation is that which applies to Rosenberg--as should be clear from the preceding paragraph. Rosenberg's vocabulary is much more often connotative rather than denotative, hence the diffusion of any separate emotion which individual words may possess, and also the frequent necessity to paraphrase his verse if the prime intention is to extract meaning from it.

It may be helpful to the reader to clarify briefly the way in which the terms 'denotative' and 'connotative' are being used. Their use, in fact, conforms to the definition

offered by John Stuart Mill's classic work on logic.¹⁶

There he defines these terms as follows:

The word white, denotes all white things, as snow,
paper, the foam of the sea, etc., and implies, or
. . . connotes, the attribute whiteness.

The denotation of a term, therefore, is the name of a "class of objects to which the term applies", while "the connotation of a term is what we mean to say of the thing or things to which we apply it". Thus, a word like 'red' denotes all red things and simultaneously connotes the redness of all things: this demonstrates very clearly that "all ordinary language has to be both denotative and connotative at once".¹⁷

Clearly, then, Rosenberg's poetic language functions on both levels, but the preceding paragraph emphasised that the majority of his poems employ words so that their connotative value is uppermost. This conclusion is reinforced, though in very different terminology, by D. W. Harding, who wrote that Rosenberg's words

emerge from the pressure of a very wide context of feeling and only a very general direction of thought (op. cit., page 366).

This comment is valuable because it quite correctly stresses the point that--despite the use of these terms 'denotative' and 'connotative' to describe it--the impulse underlying Rosenberg's expressions is not reasoned and logical, but intuitive.

To return to Sorley, this parallelism between him and

¹⁶ John Stuart Mill: A System of Logic, Ratiocinative and Inductive, Vol. II, pages 37-42.

¹⁷ The present writer is indebted to Professor John Kemp of Leicester University for his helpful explanation of these terms, and the quotations in this paragraph are taken from a letter of December, 1973.

Rosenberg is no more than accidental: the two minds were operating along similar lines, yet both are sufficiently independent in their views to stand out from the ruck of their contemporaries. The closeness of their critical responses toward Brooke is noteworthy, for their comments were made at a time when their opinions were not only in a minority but unacceptable to the British reading public.

Sorley wrote to his mother of Brooke on 28th April, 1915:

He is far too obsessed with his own sacrifice, regarding the going to war of himself (and others) as a highly intense, remarkable and sacrificial exploit, whereas it is merely the conduct demanded of him (and others) by the turn of circumstances, where non-compliance with this demand would have made life intolerable. It was not that 'they' gave up anything of that list he gives in one sonnet: but that the essence of these things had been endangered by circumstances over which he had no control, and he must fight to recapture them. He has clothed his attitude in fine words: but he has taken the sentimental attitude (Letters of Charles Sorley, page 263)

--whereas it was not until a year later that Rosenberg wrote home from France to Mrs. Cohen of his reaction to the

Poetry Review:

The poems by the soldier are vigorous but, I feel a bit commonplace. I did not like Rupert Brooke's begloried sonnets for the same reason. What I mean is second hand phrases 'lambent fires etc takes from its reality and strength (CW, page 348).

Sorley, by contrast, had been much more dismissive in his reaction to Georgian Poetry I, expressed in a letter to his parents of 24th March, 1913:

There is a little in it that is bad, and the vast majority is quite inconsequent (Letters, page 45).

With the startling exception of Ezra Pound, the consensus of literary opinion of the time about Brooke supported the views of Henry James or Winston Churchill:

A voice had become audible, a note had been struck, more true, more thrilling, more able to do justice to

the nobility of our youth in arms engaged in this present war, than any other--more able to express their thoughts of self-surrender, and with a power to carry comfort to those who watched them so intently from afar (Letter to The Times of 26th April, 1915, quoted in Marsh's Memoir to Brooke's Collected Poems, page clviii).

If we regard this as a funerary eulogy, this assessment of Brooke is confirmed by Edmund Gosse's review (in the Times Literary Supplement of 11th March, 1915) of the fourth and last edition of New Numbers which marked the first appearance of the "Soldier Sonnets":

These sonnets are personal--never were sonnets more personal since Sidney died--and yet the very blood and youth of England seem to find expression in them.

(Yet Sorley had not been alone in detecting a hollowness in Brooke's pose, for in this September A. R. Orage challenged the sincerity of "The Soldier" on purely linguistic grounds:

No great critical ability is needed to discover that the thought of the sonnet comes to an end in the third line. All the rest is verbiage (The New Age, 23rd September, 1915).

In defence of Brooke, however, it should be remembered that the Elizabethan device of 'amplificatio' is being employed here: this is when an initial idea is expanded into sonnet-length in musical words).

Clearsightedness about what war would involve from the outset is one characteristic shared by Sorley and Rosenberg; another is the detached, unemotional record they leave of it. Neither of them asserts indignantly that such things ought not to be and in this respect they both resemble the novelist Frederic Manning who (in his Author's Note to Her Privates We) wrote that

War is waged by men; not by beasts, or by gods. It is a peculiarly human activity. To call it a crime against mankind is to miss at least half its significance; it is also the punishment of a crime . . .

This point is picked up in the body of the book when

Manning comments:

A man might rave against war; but war, from among its myriad faces, could always turn towards him one, which was his own (page 201).

Obviously Manning, writing this in 1929, was privileged to reach a degree of articulate and tranquil objectivity about his experiences which was denied the other two younger men.

Siegfried Sassoon is one war poet who has little in common with Rosenberg. The bulk of Sassoon's war poems are--as D. J. Enright remarks--"clearly written out of honest rage and decent indignation"¹⁸ and while this affords him a highly moralistic standpoint it does not invariably result in compelling poetry. Moreover, Sassoon's poetic technique does not develop. What indignation there is, by contrast, in Rosenberg is masked by his oblique approach and is all the more effective for this indirectness--consider "The Immortals" or "Louse Hunting". As an expression of a predominantly emotional response Sassoon's poems are efficient and their satire fluctuates in its keenness: but the poetry displays no growth, it leaves no room for itself or its ideas to develop. Rosenberg's poetry keeps emotion on a tight leash, it very seldom uses the satirical approach but it leaves the impression (which Sassoon's does not) of being poetry in motion or transition. Sassoon presents no argument, but simply gives a series of brilliant sketches of the physical and mental sufferings of some individuals; thus its ability to persuade the reader is strictly limited: "You will",

¹⁸ "The Literature of the First World War" in The Modern Age (Guide to English Literature), ed. Boris Ford, page 160.

says Enright, "only agree with what is said if you are already tending towards the same opinion" (ibid., page 162).

Thus, as anti-war propaganda, Sassoon's poetry lacks the force of Owen's best work--though comparison with Owen suggests that Sassoon may well be the better propagandist while Owen is assuredly the more gifted poet of the two. Rosenberg, of course, never considered himself as a propagandist at all--for him Poetry comes before Pity: but he projects a profounder view of the evils of war than either Owen or Sassoon. Sassoon's poems have a vivid immediacy, though they lack somewhat in subtlety and control--a weakness picked upon by Middleton Murry in The Evolution of an Intellectual, pages 73-74:

An inhuman experience can only be rightly rendered by rendering also its relation to the harmony of the soul it shatters. . . . But in Mr. Sassoon's verses it is we who are left to create for ourselves the harmony of which he gives us only the moment of its annihilation ("Mr. Sassoon's War Verses").

Sassoon continued his satirical protest throughout the war, but never achieved the detachment necessary (Murry calls it "intellectual remoteness") to appreciate the deeper significance of its tragedy, as he himself was to acknowledge:

I was developing a more controlled and objective attitude towards the war. To remind people of its realities was still my main purpose, but I now preferred to depict it impersonally, and to be as much 'above the battle' as I could. Unconsciously, I was getting nearer to Wilfred Owen's method of approach. (For it was not until two years later, when I edited his poems, that I clearly apprehended the essentially compassionate significance of what he had been in the process of communicating) (Siegfried's Journey, pages 106-107).

Professor V. de S. Pinto, in his Crisis in English Poetry, places the emphasis slightly differently: for him, Sassoon's poetry

performed the great service of debunking the old romantic myth of the glory of war, but it created no

new myth to express the inner meaning of the conflict and the crisis of which it was a symptom (page 164).

While this is certainly true (true, that is, in the sense that Sassoon's poetry "debunks" war, but belied by his behaviour as "Madcap Jack"), we have evidence that by the end of hostilities he was moving toward some kind of objective standpoint, away from his 1916 technique of "impersonal description of front-line conditions, [which] could at least claim to be the first things of their kind." In Siegfried's Journey he explains:

No longer feeling any impulse to write bitterly, I imagined myself describing it [war] in a comprehensive way, seeing it like a painter and imbuing my poetry with Whitmanesque humanity and amplitude (page 105).

It is interesting that Sassoon values Whitman for the same qualities that Rosenberg admired in him, though it is difficult to envisage Sassoon's poetry thus generalised and so literally 'de-fused'. What did, in fact, happen, was that his poetry never received another stimulus as powerful as that of 1914-1918; twenty-five years later the next war called out an almost Georgian response, criticized rather forthrightly by Enright as "no more than a dash of Winston Churchill in an ocean of water" (op. cit., page 161), and exemplified by "Silent Service" or "The English Spirit":

Apollyon having decided to employ
His anger of blind armaments for this--
That every valued virtue and guarded joy
Might grieve bewildered by a bombed abyss--

The ghosts of those who have wrought our English Past
Stand near us now in unimpassioned ranks
Till we have braved and broken and overcast
The cultural crusade of Teuton tanks.

May 19th 1940

But despite this, it needs to be said that though Sassoon's later (mainly Christian) poems were not very good as poetry, they were at least the sincere poems of a good and diffident man.

On an earlier page (419) it was noted that Rosenberg's Christmas Card verse was produced to meet the mood of the regimental command as well as of the general public, although it was by this time much out of tune with his own thought about war. The fate of one of Sassoon's publications, The Old Huntsman (among whose contents were the uncompromising "They", "The One-legged Man", "Blighters", "The Redeemer" and "A Working Party") reflects public taste of the time, for Johnston has discovered (op. cit., page 94) that this book, on its appearance in May 1917 was--even at this late date--far outsold by Robert Nichols' romantic Ardours and Endurances which provided such poems as "The Assault", "The Day's March", or the theatrical pathos of "Comrades: an Episode":

. . . His eyes roamed round, and none replied.

'I see it was alone I should have died.'

They shook their heads. Then, 'Is the doctor here?'

'He's coming, sir; he's hurryin', no fear.'

'No good . . .

Lift me.' They lifted him.

He smiled and held his arms out to the dim,

And in a moment passed beyond their ken,

Hearing him whisper, 'O my men, my men!'

This glance at Sassoon's war poems indicates how little he has in common with Rosenberg, apart from subject-matter. In respect of metre, vocabulary and imagery they are worlds apart. Sassoon's prime achievement is to have so successfully incorporated the language and rhythms of colloquial

speech into his verse, as can be seen in "Base Details", "The General", and "Trench Duty":

'What? Stretcher-bearers wanted? Some one killed?'

Five minutes ago I heard a sniper fire:

Why did he do it? . . . Starlight overhead--

Blank stars. I'm wide-awake; and some chap's dead.

In comparison with Sassoon, Rosenberg is a technical explorer, a less directly appealing but more profound thinker, a more difficult and sometimes obscure poet.

When Robert Graves is the war poet under consideration, he appears (as Rosenberg himself does to some) to be far removed from the feelings of those whose predicament he deals with. In those war poems of his which he has not suppressed we are given the horror of death and the unreasoning futility of war (even if presented in a mythological setting like that of "Goliath and David"). To present suffering as he does displays a slight degree of sympathy, but at a deeper level he is wholly detached from the whole business of war, to a degree which Rosenberg certainly is not. No trace of compassion or serious concern for ideals or matters of conscience emerges from his somewhat self-regarding verses of the period, of which "Dead Boche" is a fair example:

. . . Where, propped against a shattered trunk,

In a great mess of things unclean,

Sat a dead Boche; he scowled and stunk

With clothes and face a sodden green,

Big-bellied, spectacled, crop-haired,

Dribbling black blood from nose and beard.

The description is powerful but Graves "is unable to do anything with the experience itself" (Bergonzi, op. cit.,

page 67), beyond destroying his readers' romantic notions about the chivalry of dying for one's country. Similarly, in "The Leveller", suffering and death is a source of sardonic curiosity, nothing more:

Yet in his death this cut-throat wild
Groaned 'Mother! Mother!' like a child,
While that poor innocent in man's clothes
Died cursing God with brutal oaths.

This dwelling on the 'nasty' is, of course, a defensive technique which makes horrors bearable by presenting them as worse than they actually were.

Two exceptions to this aloofness deserve a mention. His "Two Fusiliers":

Show me the two so closely bound
As we, by the wet bond of blood,
By friendship, blossoming from mud,
By Death

--displays an awareness of comradeship in terms very similar to those employed by Owen in his "Apologia pro Poemate Meo":

. . . But wound with war's hard wire whose stakes are strong;

Bound with the bandage of the arm that drips;

Knit in the webbing of the rifle-thong (lines 22-24).

Fellowship among the fighting men was a constant element in Owen's poetry, and it emerges with equal force among writers on both sides, from prose works as from poetry, as can be seen in Erich Maria Remarque's All Quiet on the Western Front:

We sit opposite one another, Kat and I, two soldiers in shabby coats, cooking a goose in the middle of the night. We don't talk much, but I believe we have a more complete communion with one another than even lovers have.

We are two men, two minute sparks of life; outside is the night and the circle of death. We sit on the

edge of it crouching in danger, the grease drips from our hands, in our hearts we are close to one another, and the hour is like the room: flecked over with the lights and shadows of our feelings cast by a quiet fire. What does he know of me or I of him? formerly we should not have had a single thought in common-- now we sit with a goose between us and feel in unison, are so intimate that we do not even speak (page 85).

Yet this is an element of the total experience which is wholly missing from Rosenberg's verse, presumably because his sense of isolation accompanied him even to the trenches. His letters contain very few references to his companions in arms.

The second exception to Graves's characteristic understatement and debonair toughness is offered by "Big Words", a poem which paints vividly the terror of actuality which he so often prefers to gloss over, even though the ending owes something to Sassoon's technique of "a knockout blow in the last line":

' . . . oh! my cup of praise
Brims over, and I know I'll feel small sorrow,
Confess no sins and make no weak delays
If death ends all and I must die tomorrow.'

But on the firestep, waiting to attack
He cursed, prayed, sweated, wished the proud words back.

Edmund Blunden, on the other hand, is in some respects akin to Rosenberg in that he raised no poetic outcry against the situation he found himself in, but at the same time his deep love for the countryside sharply divides him from Rosenberg. Blunden never openly admits, as does Rosenberg in his "On Receiving News of the War", that war is an unqualified catastrophe, whatever its cause. This does not mean that Blunden seeks escape from his experience through

pastoral idyll; instead, he shares Rosenberg's preference for commenting on it obliquely. "Third Ypres" is generally acknowledged to be most direct confrontation of war experience, and as such it invites comparison with Rosenberg's "Dead Man's Dump"--or, more accurately, with "Break of Day". More accurately, because Blunden, like Rosenberg in the latter poem, finds the continuing existence of animal life in the battle area has a therapeutic value, what Bergonzi refers to in another context as a "sanative norm" (op. cit., page 113):

And while I squeak and gibber over you,
Look, from the wreck a score of field-mice nimble,
And tame and curious look about them; (these
Calmed me, on these depended my salvation).

Bergonzi is right to praise the poem's "impressive strength and starkness" (op. cit., page 71), yet much of this strength comes from his awareness of the defilement caused by war:

The hour is come; come, move to the relief!
Dizzy we pass the mule-strewn tracks where once
The ploughman whistled as he loosed his team;
And where he turned home-hungry on the road,
The leaning pollard marks us hungrier turning.

This elegiac awareness of peacetime activities, of the natural order of things, runs through many of his poems. His sense of loss, destruction and disharmony is portrayed, unlike Rosenberg's sense of this, wholly in terms of the order of nature and never in those of human life or values. One such example of this is his "A House in Festubert":

With blind eyes meeting the mist and moon
And yet with blossoming trees robed round,
With gashes black, itself one wound,

Surprising still it stands its ground. . . .

.

A hermit might have built a cell
Among these evergreens, beside
That mellow wall: they serve as well
For four lean guns.

This poem provides an ear-catching sound-sequence, which is typical of Blunden's musical technique--note the assonance of "cell"/"wall"/"well" and of "evergreens" and "lean", which leads to the strong monosyllabic finality of "four lean guns".

Even though he writes about incidents that must have deeply shocked him at the time, such poems do not convey the reality of the experience to the reader:

Yet Hoad was scratched by a splinter, the blood came,
And burst out terrors that he'd striven to tame.

A good man, Hoad, for weeks ("Pillbox").

The bizarre effect of a shell dropping close to a hitherto sturdy soldier is thus presented in a laconic manner, but the effect of the poem is weakened by Blunden's slightly archaic metaphors:

. . . Then war brought down his fist, and missed the pair!

--and:

. . . The ship of Charon over channel bore him.

Such decorative metaphors spoil the naturalness of his speech.

Unlike Rosenberg, Blunden presents war primarily as a violation of the natural tranquillity of a rural scene, though this suggests that he was sentimental, a follower of the Georgian 'weekend-pastoral' school. The pastoral quality of Blunden's verse is clearly not of that type, but is in the genuine eighteenth-century pastoral tradition of John Clare. The nostalgia so evident in his prose memoir Undertones of

War is in his poems muted.

Blunden avoided Sassoon's obsession with the crude details of war, and might seem to merit David Daiches' verdict on him:

. . . his verse lacks vitality; it solves no problems, achieves none of that quick cutting to the heart sometimes achieved by some of his younger contemporaries (Poetry and the Modern World, pages 64-65)

Such a generalization is tempered by our observing that the criticism here is wholly negative and that Daiches is limiting himself to Blunden's war poems. Even so, he ignores the strength of Blunden's level-headedness which permeates them, the vision of "a harmless young shepherd in a soldier's coat" (Undertones of War, page 266), based in turn on a richness of sensory detail which itself helped the writer to "salvation".

Wilfred Owen invites the closest comparison with Rosenberg because of the breadth and intensity of his vision. Yet, unlike Rosenberg, he was brought to an amazingly rapid poetic maturity by his experience of war. His poems span a wide range, from the sentimental impressionism of the early "All Sounds have been as Music" (which has echoes of Brooke's "The Great Lover"):

All sounds have been as music to my listening:

Pacific lamentations of slow bells,

The crunch of boots on blue snow rosy-glistening,

Shuffle of autumn leaves; and all farewells . . .

--to the haunting vision of "Strange Meeting" which shows (in places) that his poetic technique has not fully coped with the demands his vision made on it:

Now men will go content with what we spoiled,

Or, discontent, boil bloody, and be spilled.

They will be swift with swiftness of the tigress.

None will break ranks, though nations trek from progress.

The emotional response toward the suffering of war which so vividly informs "Dulce et Decorum Est" has no counterpart in Rosenberg. Nothing in the latter's Trench Poems has the same white-hot, searing intensity which is wholly its own justification and fulfilment: "Dead Man's Dump" contains a similar element of eyewitness reporting on horror, but this is only one strand of that poem's total impact.

Of course, this single poem of Owen's is not truly representative of the complete picture he gives of his war experience. His letters and later poems trace the development of the larger perspectives through which he came to view war--his compassion, his concern for the events seen in the context of the experience and the future of humanity as a whole. His view could hardly be called objective, as Rosenberg's often is, yet it does represent some standing-back from the gruesome particulars. This concern with initial shock and revulsion has given way, by the time he was working on "Insensibility"--about March, 1918--to the realization that the only way an active soldier can retain his sanity is to grow a shell over his sensitivity:

And terror's first constriction over,
Their hearts remain small-drawn,
Their senses in some scorching cautery of battle
Now long since ironed,
Can laugh among the dying, unconcerned.

What he is advocating is the standpoint which Rosenberg had already achieved for himself, although stanza V of this poem:

We wise, who with a thought besmirch
Blood over all our soul

.

He cannot tell

Old men's placidity from his . . .

indicates that Owen was motivated by a sense of responsibility toward his men which distinguishes his attitude from Rosenberg's.

Dr. D. S. R. Welland in his book on Owen¹⁹ supports this contention by quoting the last stanza from "The Calls" (1918):

For leaning out last midnight on my sill
I heard the sighs of men, that have no skill
To speak of their distress, no, nor the will!

A voice I know. And this time I must go. . . .

--and juxtaposing his well-known declaration of poetic intent which was contained in a letter to his mother of 4th October, 1918:

I came out in order to help these boys--directly by leading them as well as an officer can; indirectly, by watching their sufferings that I may speak of them as well as a pleader can (Collected Letters, page 580).

Rosenberg had no such ambitions for his poetry, and he wrote nothing comparable to those lines of Owen's "Apologia" already quoted above (page 435). In Owen's letters the feeling for his men is even more predominant than in his verse, and his letter of 22nd September, 1918 to Sassoon contained one of his last references to this kinship:

. . . I don't want to write anything to which a soldier would say No compris! (Collected Poems, page 53, where he is thinking of "Spring Offensive").

The division between Rosenberg and Owen as personalities rather than as poets could not be better illustrated than by subjoining Rosenberg's only comment about the relevance of his writing to his fellow-soldiers (and already cited

¹⁹ Wilfred Owen: A Critical Study, page 56.

on page 403):

I have been forbidden to send poems home, as the censor won't be bothered with going through such rubbish (CW, page 312).

It was during the last year of his life that Owen found a wholly subjective point of view too restricting a one for the larger truth he felt impelled to preach; passages in his letters illustrate how the progress to objectivity was a development in his personal attitude and not merely an aesthetic change:

. . . I cannot say I suffered anything, having let my brain grow dull. That is to say, my nerves are in perfect order. . . . I shall feel again as soon as I dare, but now I must not. I don't take the cigarette out of my mouth when I write Deceased over their letters (Collected Letters, page 581).

However, this was a development which brought him closer to Rosenberg.

The exclusivity of the soldier's experience which is typified by "Apologia pro Poemate Meo" is alien to Rosenberg's pattern of thought, and in fact it is a transient phase in Owen himself. The exclusion of the reader from the heart of the experience, evident in lines 17, 21 and 25 of "Dulce et Decorum Est" (August, 1917):

If in some smothering dreams you too could pace . . .

If you could hear, at every jolt . . .

My friend, you would not tell . . .

culminates in "You are not worth their merriment" of "Apologia" (November, 1917). During the last year of his life, however, that hint of universality in the earlier "Greater Love" (1916):

. . . And though your hand be pale,

Paler are all which trail

Your cross through flame and hail:

Weep, you may weep, for you may touch them not . . .
--is more directly presented in "Insensibility" (March 1918),
"Futility" (June 1918), "Spring Offensive" (September 1918)
and of course in "Strange Meeting". From this universalizing
of the soldier's plight develops Owen's theme of the suffer-
ings of humanity and of the compassion for which he is so
justly praised. But this very concern for human misery is,
in itself, ultimately a restriction of the poet's sensibility
which Owen never overcame.. Johnston sees this concentration
on suffering in a different way:

The very intensity of the author's compassion tends to
exhaust both the emotion and the force of its stimulus
(op. cit., page 206)

--which seems an overstatement of the simpler fact that to
arouse pity in the reader is to produce only a passive res-
ponse. This is now almost indistinguishable from Yeats's
point in his celebrated omission of Owen from his edition of
The Oxford Book of Modern Verse (1936).

What seems plainer is that, as indicated earlier, the
compassionate response toward war is narrow in the sense that
it restricts the range of reactions to emotional ones and so
the reader is unable to appreciate the larger perspective.
It is true to say that Owen extends the breadth of his reac-
tions by moving from subjective to generalised compassion,
but Rosenberg's war poems--on the other hand--go beyond mere
Pity in that they show us the Great War as part of a cycli-
cal process; they do not attempt to apportion blame between
politicians and militarists, but accept belligerence as an
ineradicable aspect of human behaviour. The tenor of
twentieth-century psychological investigations into human
behaviour makes us feel more at home with Rosenberg's response
to war than with Owen's.

Like Sassoon, Owen showed up the inadequacy of, then destroyed, the romantic notion of war, but he advanced on Sassoon in that he did offer "The Poetry is the Pity" as a substitute for it; although Owen's pity is demonstrably not a "myth" (to use Pinto's word for it)²⁰, it is clearly a more 'structured' way of looking at the war than Rosenberg or Sassoon employed. For Rosenberg, war was to speak for itself:

I will saturate myself with the strange and extraordinary new conditions of this life, and it will all refine itself into poetry later on (CW, page 373).

As argued above, Owen has limited his response to war by limiting himself only to pity and bitterness as his reactions, since these are only part of the spectrum of possible reactions to such a cataclysm. It is easier to see with hindsight that if war is to be made comprehensible at all it has to be responded to on a historic or universal scale, for only when it is viewed from this height can we see beyond the internecine strivings of national or political factions. Once more Frederic Manning's remark (quoted on page 429 above) comes to mind, for it displays succinctly a breadth of comprehension about the whole subject which was beyond Owen's grasp; in this respect Owen's humanitarian virtues of sympathy and empathy weaken the lasting effect of his poetry.

Johnston remarks that Owen was unlike Sorley insofar as he was not blessed with a self-critical awareness; he contends that it was Sassoon who stimulated into life a power which had largely lain dormant until Craiglockhart (op. cit., page 162). The contrast here with Rosenberg is extreme for though he was not lacking in independence and confidence in

²⁰ op. cit., page 164.

himself, he was very diffident about his own efforts, as occasional remarks to Marsh and others show:

People are always telling me my work is promising--incomprehensible, but promising, and all that sort of thing, and my meekness subsides before the patronizing knowingness (Letter postmarked 12th June, 1916, CW, page 370).

Rosenberg was, by comparison with Owen, a sharp self-critic, and as references in his pre-war letters demonstrate, his own reading and acquaintance with literary people and enthusiasts had provided him with a practical set of critical attitudes. Despite his straitened circumstances his reading had included Donne, Milton, Crashaw, Marvell, Jonson, Burns, Byron, Rossetti, Keats, Shelley, Coleridge, Flaubert, Francis Thompson, Emerson, Whitman, Maeterlinck, Verhaeren and H. G. Wells. His correspondence with Miss Seaton, Miss Wright, Mrs. Cohen and Edward Marsh shows that he discussed such writers and thus was much less of a literary provincial than Owen was. Thus his reaction to Brooke's "begloried sonnets" and his preference for Whitman's treatment of war is a less untutored response than Owen's:

[War] should be approached in a colder way, more abstract, with less of the million feelings everybody feels; or all these should be concentrated in one distinguished emotion. Walt Whitman in 'Beat, drums, beat, has said the noblest thing on war (CW, page 348).

Johnston concludes (op. cit., page 162) from Owen's reference to himself as a "dark star" in a letter to Sassoon of 5th November, 1917 (Collected Letters, page 505) that Owen saw his poetic destiny as being independent of Georgian developments. While this is one possible view of Owen's attitude toward the future during the last twelve months of his life, Owen may really have meant no more than a complimentary reference to Sassoon's already established reputation

as a poet.

We may recall the understandable pride Owen expressed in a letter to his mother at the end of this year (1917):

I go out of this year a Poet, my dear Mother, as which I did not enter it. I am held peer by the Georgians; I am a poet's poet (Collected Letters, page 521).

In this the emphasis is--in opposition to Johnston's view--very much on his natural delight at having 'arrived', at being admitted to an established circle of known writers. Such group-identification was never available to Rosenberg, nor does he seem to have felt the lack of it. Maybe when seen in relation to a lifetime of solitariness which derived from his race as well as from his proving an articulate but unreliable private soldier, the thought of exclusion from any established literary coterie was, by comparison, of little concern to him. If his attempts to write poetry needed sustaining and encouraging--and it is hard to believe in trench conditions that they did not--he seems to have derived what he needed in this respect from his correspondents and literary acquaintances from civilian years. Certainly, he never expresses in his letters the need to belong to any group, though isolation is a traceable theme that runs through his early poems (see Chapter II); and, equally certainly, he was a non-conformist (like D. H. Lawrence) in Georgian eyes.

One other significant contrast between the two men emerges from a remark in Welland's book (pages 143-145) where he makes a point that has already emerged in another guise. It has been argued earlier that Owen was an anti-war propagandist in a way that Rosenberg never intended to be: Welland indicates that Rosenberg's remark about the symbolism behind

The Unicorn:

. . . I mean to put all my innermost experiences into

the 'Unicorn'. I want it to symbolize the war and all the devastating forces let loose by an ambitious and unscrupulous will (CW, page 379)

--would have been alien to Owen. Owen's preoccupation in his poetry is social rather than aesthetic, and conversely Rosenberg would not have accepted Owen's "All a poet can do today is warn". Welland is quite correct to conclude that the two men were both equally dedicated poets, but devoted to different ends: the relatively impersonal technique of Rosenberg differs from Owen's intensity of feeling as a matter of kind, not of degree.

Despite the many differences between Rosenberg and Owen they obviously share certain attitudes. The treatment of God, for example, is markedly similar in both writers. Rosenberg regards God as a hostile, malevolent being who is to be cheated, or resisted if possible. In "God" (published in his Moses pamphlet) the deity is equated with the evils of society; hence the poem's emphasis on the revolting, bestial quality of God:

In his malodorous brain what slugs and mire . . (line 1)

He lay, a bullying hulk, to crush them more . . (line 7)

. . . God's mean flattery . . . (line 11)

. . . this miasma of a rotting God! (line 29)

This last line gives a clue to the intense bitterness of this poem, for it is a line straight out of Moses. The rancour of the speaker toward God may not then be Rosenberg's so much as Moses'--who, it will be recalled, credited God with responsibility for all the decadence and injustice of the Egyptian social order, which he had pledged himself to destroy. As a Jew Rosenberg was probably conditioned to regard God primarily as the wrathful avenger of the Old Testament.

Owen, on the other hand, was moved by his war experience to exchange his earlier conventional acceptance of God as a loving father for a view of Him as a heartless dictator. Thus in his "Greater Love" we read that--

. . . God seems not to care . . .

--a variation on

. . . For love of God seems dying ("Exposure").

A lesser poem, "Soldier's Dream", establishes a Blakean dichotomy between a bloodthirsty God and "kind Jesus". Thus we might reasonably conclude that what Owen and Rosenberg experienced of the war turned them away from any trust in a beneficent deity. However, Rosenberg's earlier attitude toward God is broadly similar to that found in the wartime "God": "Spiritual Isolation" (1912) begins--"My Maker shunneth me . . ." and in "God made Blind" (1915) we find the same antagonistic tyrant to be resisted, even though in both these poems the resistance is that of the romantic hero rather than that of a despairing soldier. In Stand, Vol. 6, No. 4, page 33, Silkin traces explicitly the development of both "God made Blind" and "God" from "Spiritual Isolation".

In the same article (page 40) Silkin credits Leavis with suggesting another element common to the two writers; they are both economical, he says, in the use they make of recurrent themes and moods. The repetition of words and phrases in Rosenberg's poetry has already been examined, but he can also be seen to carry certain themes through several Trench Poems. Old Testament Hebrew history, for example, appears as a norm by which to judge twentieth-century European depravity; war is accepted as a necessary evil in "On Receiving News of the War", yet it can call forth new strengths as well as weaknesses (in The Amulet and The Unicorn,

"Girl to Soldier on Leave", "Soldier: Twentieth Century"); war is a depersonalizing force as in "Marching", "Break of Day" or "Louse Hunting", but it can produce moments of strange beauty as in "Returning, We Hear". The greatest unifying force these poems have is their refusal to regard war sentimentally and their dismissal of comfortable patriotic or pitying attitudes--well-exemplified by "The Dying Soldier" and "Dead Man's Dump" respectively. They display a stoic brand of despair, as opposed to Owen's more emotional treatment.

Owen, as Silkin indicates, also returns to familiar themes and moods. In Stand, Vol. 6, No. 4 (pages 30-34) he notes that Man's relationship to Nature is treated in "Exposure", "Spring Offensive" and "Futility"; the emptiness of romantic attitudes is the motif of "Greater Love"; the inefficacy of formal religion to offer any consolation in the face of war and therefore man's alienation from it in "At a Calvary" and "Le Christianisme". In all this Silkin is accurate enough, but on a more comprehensive view, the most pervasive mood of his poems is one of despair, such as is found in "Exposure" and "Futility", though it is often tinged with elements of horror ("The Show"), rage ("Dulce et Decorum Est"), or bitter compassion for the sufferings of others ("Mental Cases"). Owen is always more involved with the sufferings of individuals than is Rosenberg, for though Rosenberg acknowledges the inescapable horrors his poems always seem to look beyond them for some way of trying to make sense of them; for Owen the pathos is its own justification and end. This relative detachment of Rosenberg from his surroundings is explained by the fact that for him the war was to be merely one more stage in his artistic education

(although in no way enjoyable), a suggestion reinforced by his own much-quoted comment that:

I am determined that this war, with all its powers for devastation, shall not master my poeting; that is, if I am lucky enough to come through all right (CW, page 373)

--as also by the range and quantity of his poems which are not related to the war. Owen, by comparison, could only rank as a gifted minor poet on the basis of that 'post-Romantic' verse of his which remains outside the war canon.

CHAPTER V

THE UNITY OF ROSENBERG'S ACHIEVEMENT

A reader, like a writer of a study of this length, may become weighed down with detail, but the purpose of giving such close attention to individual poems and groups of related poems has been to make a thorough study of Rosenberg's poetic gift and of his poetic growth. It is time now to make a brief attempt to judge just where Rosenberg stands in the history of twentieth-century English poetry.

Rosenberg has been undeservedly neglected. The reasons for this are not far to seek, and they illustrate how large a part fortune plays in the gaining of a literary reputation. Not that Rosenberg was anxious for fame in the everyday sense, for he was clearly more concerned with satisfying himself than with pleasing others. The kind of fame he would have relished is that which he was beginning to acquire for himself after 1916--what Owen defined in a letter of 25th May, 1918 to his mother as "Fame is the recognition of one's peers" (Collected Letters, page 553). Yet Rosenberg knew no equals in respect of either age or talent. His advisers on poetry (Marsh, Bottomley, Abercrombie, Trevelyan, Binyon) were all of an earlier generation, and of less ability as poets. Edward Marsh never 'pushed' Rosenberg's reputation as the Sitwells in the last year of his life did Owen's.

Bottomley's edition of Poems (1922) was not strong enough in its claim for Rosenberg: the older man clearly recognized Rosenberg's quality, but not his stature.

There were, perhaps, other factors in Rosenberg's life which may have worked against his achieving wider recognition. Of these, his straitened family finances and the ending of his formal schooling at fourteen (then the normal age) were recorded by Laurence Binyon in his Introductory Memoir to the 1922 Poems:

Adverse circumstances, imperfect education, want of opportunity, impeded and obscured his genius . . .
(page 1).

Although Binyon's point is that Rosenberg overcame these disadvantages, the note of deprivation has been sounded and its reverberations can be felt in succeeding references to Rosenberg, till it culminates in the almost Hugo-esque figure that Herbert Palmer in 1938 took for Rosenberg: he saw in the Complete Works

an apocalyptic, if somewhat hunchback imagination striving in the net of an insufficient education. Tortured, only half-articulate, intellectually violent, but often beautiful and powerful . . . (Post-Victorian Poetry, page 228).

What Palmer has overlooked is the fact that the end of formal schooling merely marked for Rosenberg the beginning of a continuous self-education. This is particularly true of his knowledge of poetry where the letters in Complete Works declare his awareness of the gaps in his knowledge and his earnest pursuit of poetical experience. His natural interest in verse had been thwarted by the price of books, but as he grew into friendship with Marsh and Bottomley they suggested writers for him to read (as Bottomley did with Wells's Joseph and his Brethren) or actually sent him the

books (as Marsh did with Georgian Poetry and Bottomley's own anthology, while R. C. Trevelyan sent him a volume of his own poems). Thus, to regard the material Rosenberg was working on during the last two or three years of his life as suffering from a deficiency in formal education is really to miss the point. Bottomley and D. W. Harding point out, in their Introduction to Complete Works and Collected Poems that Rosenberg's punctuation was irregular but, as with spelling or numeracy, the lack of this basic skill does not invalidate his poetic utterance.

If he did not have easy access to past and contemporary literature he similarly found it difficult to reach a wider public. As has been noted earlier, his aim in publishing was not self-glorification but merely a desire to preserve what he thought worthy (CW, page 293). The circulation of Night and Day and Youth cannot have been very wide but he bore the cost of printing his first pamphlet and had very little return save that of having something to show to those whose support and influence he was seeking. Despite his three published pamphlets we should not have much evidence of Rosenberg's allegiance to poetry without the care and devotion of his sister Annie (the late Mrs. Wynnich), who diligently preserved every scrap of his writing that came her way and compiled a book of press-cuttings about her brother from references in newspapers and magazines.

Though Marsh brought him to public notice by publishing a speech from Moses in his Georgian Poetry III Rosenberg was not especially enthusiastic about his work appearing in the company of Graves, Sassoon, Squire, Masfield, Turner and a dozen others. Responses to his "Koelue" speech from Marsh's

friends were mixed. Harold Monro commented that he discerned a certain kind of power under the surface in Rosenberg--but I can't believe you would have included him on your standard of two years ago (Hassall: Edward Marsh--a Biography, page 421)

but this was counteracted by Bottomley's characteristically generous enthusiasm:

. . . if little Rosenberg can ever write twelve consecutive pages as fine as this one page, he will swamp us all except Lascelles [Abercrombie] (ibid., page 436).

Yet this remark of Bottomley's brings out another element in the senior Georgians' treatment of Rosenberg. Physically he was small--Lady Gollancz remembered him as being about five feet four inches in height--and he was too short to enlist in any other brigade than the Bantams. However, the way in which Bottomley, Marsh and even Marsh's biographer Christopher Hassall refer to him as "little Rosenberg" produces an implication of possibly unconscious patronising which is not easy to escape. Such an inference is wholly unfair to Rosenberg who, though he had respect for Marsh's literary knowledge and range of influence, was not the sort to accept patronage and was not in awe of Marsh to the extent that he dared not disagree with him. It is ironic that Rosenberg's early comment to Marsh that "in literature I have no judgment--at least for style" (CW, page 294) was so soon proved untrue, and in part at least this change was due to Marsh himself. Yet Marsh seems not to have noticed that Rosenberg became less impressionable as time passed and this blinded him to the real merit of what Rosenberg had achieved by the time he was killed. Apparently Marsh never regarded Rosenberg more constructively than as

poor little Isaac Rosenberg, who never came into his kingdom--surely one of the most futile of all the futile sacrifices of the War, for except courage he had

no quality of the soldier, and if he had lived he must have done great things (A Number of People, page 326).

This is the estimation of Rosenberg which was bequeathed to the next generation of critics.

Whether or not his racial heritage counted against him it is impossible to say, but in his writing at least there is very little reference to anti-Semitism. A more probable cause of his neglect by literary commentators is his battlefield experience and the general inimicality of army life to one of his nature; for it should be apparent by now that Rosenberg was unsuited for the army both physically and temperamentally. His letters testify to the frequency with which he was punished for breaches of a discipline which he described as "brutal militaristic bullying meanness" (CW, page 304). His mind was on unmilitary matters so often that he was clearly not trying to be subversive; but in the light of this it seems likely that his chances of promotion were never more than slender, and he may well have felt that accepting a stripe would imply some approval of the brutalizing force he had joined.

Rosenberg's insignificance in the army machine contributes to his critical neglect. In an interview (May, 1974) Mrs. Ray Lyons recalls that her brother hoped that by joining the army he might become better-known. Although his fortitude was of heroic proportions he achieved nothing dramatic in army terms, and as a private he had much less leave than his contemporaries who held commissions. Coming as he did from a more circumscribed background than Brooke and Owen, Graves or Sassoon, he had fewer contacts with people who could bring him into public notice. We are left to speculate whether Marsh would have succeeded in 'bringing him out' any

more than he had done by including him in Georgian Poetry III: had he survived 1918 to produce a collection of his own poems its striking difference from other contemporary work would at once have marked him out as a writer of considerable power and detachment who had already achieved much in poetry.

As it is, however, the critical attention Rosenberg has received has not adequately reflected the quality of his poetry. The earliest traceable public notice of Rosenberg seems to have been written by T. S. Eliot in a Poetry Bookshop Chapbook of March 1920:

Let the public, however, ask itself why it has never heard of the poems of T. E. Hulme or of Isaac Rosenberg, and why it has heard of the poems of Lady Precocia Pondeuf and has seen a photograph of the nursery in which she wrote them. Let it trace out the writers who are not spoken of because it is to no one's interest to speak of them, and the writers who are spoken well of because it is to no one's interest to take the trouble to disparage them; and let the public also notice, in every case, who was the publisher. It will see, in the end, that the disease of contemporary reviewing is only a form of the radical malady of journalism. Criticism is a very different thing (page 2).

Contemporary newspaper reviews of Bottomley's 1922 edition of Poems found Rosenberg difficult and unpalatable: in general they seized on the earlier poems as more beautiful because more traditional. A representative view is that of Charles Powell writing in the Manchester Guardian of 1st July, 1922:

In his earlier poems there is more of tradition, even of derivation, for Francis Thompson was clearly an influence, and certainly more of beauty (page 5).

But this seed apparently fell upon stony ground and apart from some asides in Riding's and Graves's A Survey of Modernist Poetry (1927) no other writer felt the need in that decade to consider Rosenberg's qualities--although in fairness we should add that the circumstances of his death would lead the public to suppose (if they had heard of Rosenberg's

name) that his poems were war poems and so to ignore them as part of the general reaction against war which prevailed then. Riding and Graves, however, treat him in terms of a 'might-have-been', seeing him as

one of the few poets who might have served as a fair challenge to sham modernism . . .

and adding that the reason for his neglect was that

he was not classifiable as a member of a group, or yet, because of his quietness, as a sensational individual type (page 220).

Payment of lip-service to Rosenberg's poetic potential continued, but it was not until after the publication of D. W. Harding's seminal essay, "Aspects of the Poetry of Isaac Rosenberg" in Scrutiny (March 1935) that Rosenberg's poems began to appear in anthologies, of which Michael Roberts' Faber Book of Modern Verse (1936) seems to have been the first: Roberts prints four Trench Poems and a speech from Moses.

Apart from this the next major event was the publication of Complete Works, edited by Harding and Bottomley, which appeared in 1937. On its publication it was widely reviewed and its existence should have helped Rosenberg to become better-known. But by an ironic accident, 900 of the 1500 copies printed in June 1937 were destroyed in the blitz of 1941.¹ Thus at the time of writing a copy of this edition is rare. The critical response to Complete Works was diverse, but the overall tendency of it is to allow Rosenberg some measure of achievement. Two other eminent poets, Herbert Read (in The Criterion, October 1937) and C. Day Lewis (in The London Mercury, August 1937) praise his success in

¹ Information provided by Mr. Ian Parsons, in a letter of August 1974 to the present writer.

universalizing his emotion (Read) as well as ranking him as Owen's only peer (Lewis).

Thus Rosenberg was able to command some serious critical attention, yet it is regrettable to see such an influential critic as F. R. Leavis writing thus about Rosenberg's surprising failure to establish a secure reputation:

The history is the more significant in that Mr. T. S. Eliot (it was the occasion of my noting Rosenberg's name as one to remember) mentioned him in a Poetry Bookshop Chapbook as a poet who would have received notice if criticism had been performing its function (Scrutiny, September, 1937, pages 229-230).

Regrettable, because having charged Eliot with neglecting Rosenberg after a passing mention, Leavis does the self-same thing. But in fairness to Leavis, his perceptive and generous comments later in the same review must be acknowledged and these are referred to at the close of this chapter.

Presumably because of the destruction of the bulk of Complete Works the poems alone were published in 1949. Once again a thawing of the earlier critical attitude is discernible--most easily if we compare the faint praise of the Times Literary Supplement of 3rd July, 1937:

His shaping spirit is involved with too many symbols at once . . . There is magnificence in this kind of kaleidoscope, but it is imperfect poetry . . .
(page 492)

--with the issue of 28th July, 1950 in which Rosenberg is given "a place of honour among the young poets of genius of rather more than thirty years ago" (page 470). Where formerly reviewers had been content to charge Rosenberg with obscurity, there is now talk of his "highly individual intensity" (The Listener, 21st September, 1950, page 391). Yet at the same time John Heath-Stubbs re-utters the doubts of earlier years about Rosenberg's unrealized potential and

claims to find him lacking in maturity (Time and Tide, 27th May, 1950, page 537), while Kenneth Allott's remark in his Penguin Book of Contemporary Verse (1950):

Rosenberg's poems show a talent for conceiving an idea in poetic terms and rendering it rhythmically, but they are spoilt for me by his appetite for the extravagant and his rebarbative poetic diction (page 95)

--harks back to Edwin Muir's comments of 1939:

He gives above all a feeling of power which is not yet certain of itself, which is sometimes tripped up by its own force (The Present Age, page 96).

By this he means Rosenberg's inability to 'realize' many of his poems completely--a charge which the reader will have seen to be applicable to much of what Rosenberg wrote. The reader will recall that such a qualification could be made of nearly all the earlier poems and it is only in the Trench Poems that Rosenberg's sureness of touch is incontrovertible.

"They are", wrote Charles Eglinton in 1948,

almost curiously calm . . . they do not grope and the language is handled with much more control (Jewish Affairs, May 1948, page 17)

--than in those earlier poems.

Has the picture of Rosenberg changed substantially over the last twenty years? Almost certainly it has, and whether commentators have found him inspiring or exasperating they have at least paused over him. And not only critics, but other poets too.

Looking back to 1932 we can detect something of Rosenberg's use of language in a poem addressed to Isaac Rosenberg by a little-known writer A. Abrahams:

The dark that listens in blind man's ears
Stares through a deaf man's eyes. Man peers
With all his fingers for a touch
Of heaven . . .

(Poems, 1932, page 4).

One of Rosenberg's lasting preoccupations was with what constituted the quality of poetry, and his attempts to define the essence of it as something "understandable and still ungraspable" in his letter to Bottomley postmarked 23rd July, 1916 (CW, page 371), and again in writing to Marsh a year later:

. . . I don't think there should be any vagueness at all; but a sense of something hidden and felt to be there . . . (CW, page 319)

are foreshadowed in notes entitled "The Slade and Modern Culture" which were presumably written during his period at the Slade. Though he is writing about art in general rather than about literature in particular, two passages deserve noting: the first relates to what appears above:

Art to be great must be unforgettable. Leaving the picture or poem, the impression remains, the quintessence, epitome. Suggestiveness, mystery, vagueness, something underlying what is actually put down, a hauntingness of . . . (CW, page 267).

(This in turn calls to mind another remark displaying a profound sense of the mystery of his craft, his comment in an early letter to Marsh (CW, page 289):

You can talk about life, but you can only talk round literature . . .)

The second looks forward to his celebrated remark of 1916 to Laurence Binyon--already quoted--which refers to a total exposure of himself to the conditions of war:

[When looking at nature, he says, we must] assimilate the multifarious and widened vision of masters to widen our outlook to the natural, to attain to a completeness of vision, which simply means a total sinking of all conscious personality, a complete absorption and forgetfulness in nature, to bring out one's personality (CW, pages 264-265).

(For "nature" here read 'experience' and you have the tone of the Trench Poems exactly). Taken together these two early statements suggest that Rosenberg will have difficulty in

finding the language to do the job he wants--and so it proves. Hence the observations of Sassoon and Harding about Rosenberg "modelling" in words, a quality which Eliot had seen as requisite for the contemporary poet in his essay on the Meta-physical poets:

Our civilization comprehends great variety and complexity, and this variety and complexity, playing upon a refined sensibility, must produce various and complex results. The poet must become more and more comprehensive, more allusive, more indirect, in order to force, to dislocate if necessary, language into his meaning (Selected Essays, page 289).

This could almost have been written with Rosenberg in mind.

It is this quality, however, which gives Rosenberg an affinity with two younger poets, Keith Douglas and Ted Hughes. Douglas, a selection of whose poetry was edited by Ted Hughes in 1964, makes Hughes comment on his style as being "comprehensive" in Eliot's sense²: his use of language is like Rosenberg's in that though it deals with man's degradation, his reduction to mere animal, the words themselves are never horrified or even obviously sympathetic. This quality of literary 'tact' is well brought out by G. S. Fraser in his comparison of Graves's "Dead Boche" with Douglas's "Vergissmeinicht".

As in Rosenberg, so Douglas's dead man is here realized as a person, while Graves's 'dead Boche' is merely an object. Douglas, for the reasons which Fraser adduces, is able to achieve a greater detachment from his subject, thus to set the death of a single person against in a wider context-- "The horrid foreground does not block all background" (Vision and Rhetoric, page 142).

² Introduction to Selected Poems: Keith Douglas, page 14.

Douglas has also another affinity with the World War I poets which Fraser notes elsewhere, and his comments on this occasion only emphasis the claim that has been made for Rosenberg: Douglas was

the only one who wrote poems, as the poets of the First World War did, dealing with the actual experience of combat . . . the external, objective approach, which he needed in order to steady his nerves, might give a careless reader a false impression of emotional, not merely technical, hardness (Sphere History of Literature in the English Language, Vol. 7, pages 293-294).

Douglas developed what Ted Hughes describes as "a style that seems able to deal poetically with whatever it comes up against" (ibid., page 14); this suggests an affinity with Rosenberg's much-quoted "I will not leave a corner of my consciousness covered up" (CW, page 373) which is only emphasised by the opening lines of Douglas's "Desert Flowers":

Living in a wide landscape are the flowers--
Rosenberg I only repeat what you were saying--
the shell and the hawk every hour
are slaying men and jerboas, slaying

the mind: but the body can fill
the hungry flowers and the dogs who cry words
at nights, the most hostile things of all. . . .

As well as the obvious kinship of Rosenberg and Douglas in both being painters as well as poets (Edmund Blunden quotes a comment of Douglas Grant that Keith Douglas "might have excelled eventually as the artist rather than as the poet"³ and adds his own observation that "still the singular touch of his pictorial sense signs the poems"⁴), the two men

³ Introduction to Keith Douglas: Collected Poems, ed. J. Waller, G. S. Fraser and J. C. Hall, page 18.

⁴ ibid., page 19.

are linked by a similarity in technique.

It has been demonstrated how Rosenberg re-used words and images from earlier poems in later ones, and how he also wrote more than one version of the same poem. This is not a unique habit, for many poets must do this, but poets generally live long enough to suppress earlier or variant readings. Like Rosenberg, Douglas was killed before he could collect his poems into a volume for publication and so he has left us a pair of poems which well illustrate his technique of re-modelling or re-using images--"Adams" and "The Sea Bird". In "Adams"--which may be the ^{later} ~~earlier~~ variant--there are some fine lines about Adams' appearance:

. . . in appearance he is bird-eyed
the bones of his face are
Like the hollow bones of a bird. . .
(lines 19-21)

and this image recurs in "Words" which he wrote the following year (1943):

For instance this stooping man, the bones of whose ^{face} are
like the hollow birds' bones, is a trap for words
(lines 9-10).

This external similarity between the two poets, however, does not disguise the gulf between them: Rosenberg was an unenthusiastic Jewish private from London's East End while Douglas was an officer, educated at Christ's Hospital and Merton College Oxford, who occasionally caught the infectious enthusiasm for the spirit of mechanised war:

To see these tanks crossing country at speed was a
thrill which seemed inexhaustible . . . (Alamein to
Zem Zem, page 13).

Douglas's poetic voice, moreover, has cultured middle-class modulations which are never found in Rosenberg:

The plains were their cricket pitch
and in the mountains the tremendous drop fences
brought down some of the runners. Here then
under the stones and earth they dispose themselves,
I think with their famous unconcern.
It is not gunfire I hear but a hunting horn

("Aristocrats", lines 15-20).

This does not imply a superiority of the one over the other
but is another way of indicating each one's distinction and
distinctiveness.

Eliot's comment about the dislocation of language into
meaning finds another exponent in Ted Hughes who, despite his
skill in capturing animals and natural forces in his verse,
still needs at moments of intensity to make his words carry
a heavier weight of connotation than they easily can--the
words are being used, not as equivalents for an experience,
but as inadequate reverberations of it:

. . . To regard this photograph might well dement,
Such contradictory permanent horrors here
Smile from the single exposure and shoulder out
One's own body from its instant and heat

("Six Young Men", lines 42-45).

There is a more precise echoing of Rosenberg to be found
in another of Hughes's poems about war, a subject to which he
often returns. In "Scapegoats^{and} Rabies" Hughes begins by re-
calling the ghosts of the soldiers who marched down the lane,
and the imagery is inescapably in the mould of Rosenberg's
"Marching", for it sees the men reduced to automata (compare
page 387 above):

. . . And their hopelessness
From the millions of the future

Marching in their boots, blindfolded and riddled,
Rotten heads on their singing shoulders,
The blown-off right hand swinging to the stride
Of the stump-scorched and blown-off legs
Helpless in the terrible engine of the boots (lines 27-33).

Apparent similarity in technique between Hughes and Rosenberg has led G. S. Fraser in his essay to describe the former as

a poet of fierce, one-sided, driving emotion, not at all a poet of rationality and balance; the most obvious influences behind his work were D. H. Lawrence and poets of the First World War like Rosenberg and Owen (Sphere History, page 305).

Yet this particular association of the two forces one to define the essential difference between them. What should have emerged from earlier discussion is that Rosenberg's poetry is emotional in this sense but also tensed in an equipoise as Rosenberg balances it against control: the emotional pressure in Rosenberg's verse is sensed by his choice of words, his variations of rhythm, but it hardly ever bursts forth as the verbal violence of Hughes's "Thistles":

Every one a revengeful burst
Of resurrection, a grasped fistful
Of splintered weapons and Icelandic frost thrust up

From the underground stain of a decayed Viking . . .
(lines 4-7).

Rosenberg's Trench Poems, which have the violence of war underlying them, are balanced and restrained in tone. Where Rosenberg's language is at its most vigorous is in his two verse-plays and it is interesting to speculate, in passing whether this form may not be the ultimate development for Ted Hughes's poetry.

There is a sense, moreover, in which Rosenberg's

"sculptural" technique has found an echo in a very different quarter. Laura Riding, who allowed Selected Poems to be published in 1970, wrote a difficult but rewarding preface to her own selection in which she attacks the idea that the rough-hewn appearance of a poem is a guarantee of the poet's integrity: just before this moment she has brought to light "a discrepancy, deep-reaching, between what I call the creed and the craft of poetry--which I might otherwise describe as its religious and its ritualistic aspects." Miss Riding then continues:

In this [i.e. poetic] procedure there is always a straining of effort, but the challenge to honour is never answered in this straining: all effort is expended in problems of craft. Such straining can be highly intense, and simulate, in its intensity, straining of the kind aimed at keeping a moral proportion between poetic craft and the sacred poetic motive; and it can seem to be blessed with success because the results appear to be 'good' poems, the actual tinkering being concealed under carefully mixed and applied literary polish. Further, a sanctimony of seriousness about poetry always accompanies craft-straining, and, functioning as a guarantee of good quality, excites a predisposition to confidence: though the procedure does not rise above poetic journalism, the steady-handedness with which it is conducted has the noble appearance of moral care (Preface to Selected Poems: In Five Sets, pages 12-13).

This suggests that a poet who is primarily concerned with technique is, albeit unconsciously, reneging on his obligation as an artist to set truth above artifice. From the frequency of his references in letters (principally to Edward Marsh) to problems of technique we might erroneously conclude that this was Rosenberg's main concern in his verse. It would be more true--though perhaps a trifle unjust--to claim that technique was Edward Marsh's main concern in Rosenberg's writing. Hence Marsh's remarks about architectonics (already quoted on page 412), his desire to see Rosenberg conforming to his criteria in externals, ~~do not~~

do not approach the moral centre of either Rosenberg's poems or Miss Riding's belief. Yet Rosenberg had no pretensions to write about 'Truth' as such: he was intensely concerned with truthfulness to experience, for him the experience (or idea) is the spark to be transmitted (however dulled) in words. There are moments when he felt what he was saying was difficult to communicate (such as Tel's emotions in The Unicorn), and yet his belief that the correct word will solve all of Marsh's difficulty in understanding his lines--the charge of obscurity again--is a little naïve:

Now when my things fail to be clear I am sure it is because of the luckless choice of a word or the failure to introduce a word that would flash my idea plain as it is to my own mind (Letter postmarked 30th July, 1917: CW, page 319).

Rosenberg did not explicitly view his poetry as being torn between the demands of 'creed' and 'craft' but his poetry nonetheless illustrates this duality, and it is now possible to see his response to Binyon's criticism that in "Dead Man's Dump" he was working on two principles at once in a new ^hlight_k. Since it caused Rosenberg to remark that

Mr. Binyon has often sermonised lengthily over my working on two different principles in the same thing and I know how it spoils the unity of a poem. But if I couldn't before, I can now, I am sure plead the absolute necessity of fixing an idea before it is lost . . . (Letter postmarked 27th May, 1917: CW, pages 316-317)

it is worth pausing over this or over "Daughters of War" to note how the intensity of the original idea or central experience overcomes the occasional lapses in expression: the power of the poem derives more from the originality of concept than from the happily apt choice of words. In "Daughters of War" in particular his problem was especially difficult as he was trying to present an unfamiliar view of

war. And from what has been seen of Rosenberg's methods of working over a poem it is reasonable to suppose that--as on previous occasions--his effort is expended not on 'improving' the idea but on rendering it more directly:

And I absolutely disagree that it [ie. faultiness] is blindness or carelessness; it is the brain succumbing to the herculean attempt to enrich the world of ideas (Letter of 1916, CW, page 373)

--while the emphasis is similar to that in a letter to Marsh in August of the same year (and previously quoted on page 411):

If you are not free, you can only, when the ideas come hot, sieze them with the skin in tatters raw, crude, in some parts beautiful in others monstrous. Why print it then? Because these rare parts must not be lost (CW, pages 310-311).

In other words, the subject of the poem remains unchanged and only its utterance is altered to shed a different light on it. Yet this cannot be classed as "poetic journalism" for Rosenberg did not seek public acclaim and wrote to his own standards more frequently than to those of Marsh. (It is interesting, in passing, to note the similarity of Rosenberg's comment above about the artist's task being "to enrich the world of ideas" to what T. E. Hulme had written in "The Philosophy of Intensive Manifolds" (Speculations, page 211):

The effort to express that idea in verse, the struggle with language, forces the idea as it were back on itself and brings out the original idea in a clearer shape. Before it was only confused. The idea has grown and developed because of the obstacles it had to meet).

Since the 1950s (Chatto and Windus printed Collected Poems in 1949 and again in 1962 and 1974) critical reaction to Rosenberg has increased in frequency and in sympathy. This may have a historical cause, such that as the public's experience of war recedes into the past, a more objective view of war is not only possible but becomes popular: the

inner fire of the partisan dies down and cooler counsels prevail. Rosenberg has by now served as the subject of a chapter in three books on World War I poetry and he also figures in essays in several literary journals; a list of these essays will be found in the bibliography.

John H. Johnston's English Poetry of the First World War was the earliest of these three books to appear (1964) and in it the author takes a long and basically sympathetic look at Rosenberg's Trench Poems. The main weakness of his study is that Johnston has announced his view of the whole body of World War I poetry, before he looks at individual writers, in the following terms: it is, he says,

a body of verse limited to a rather narrow range of personal experience, subjective and impressionistic in mode, marked by emotional excess, and motivated by disillusionment, anger, or pity (page 9).

Having committed himself to this view Johnston finds it difficult to assess such a poem as "Daughters of War" and confines his remarks on it to comments about the deficiencies of Rosenberg's poetic vision and the "tenuous relationship between the conception and the reality" (page 232). He is unable to appreciate the artistic detachment of this or of a poem like "Marching"; unable, too, to distinguish Rosenberg from the rest of those poets for whom he claimed that a

lack of historical perspective in World War I poetry resulted in a lack of both temporal and moral depth . . . (page 14).

But he does admit that Rosenberg sought "a colder way, more abstract" of rendering war and notes with approval what he sees as Rosenberg's

own independent effort to free his work from the limitations of the lyric as a medium of war poetry (page 248).

The main objection to this as a view of Rosenberg is that

neither by profession nor by practice was he necessarily a lyric poet: some of his verse is lyrical in form and content, but Rosenberg was too restless to restrict himself to this one mode of artistic response. One of two of his Trench Poems could be called lyrics (such as "Returning, we Hear the Larks", "The Destruction of Jerusalem" or possibly "Break of Day") but this is certainly not the favoured form of his mature stage, thus to praise him for escaping from it is rather a hollow recommendation. Consequently Johnston's approval of David Jones--who wrote In Parenthesis long after the event (1937)--is more apparent than real since it is based on this sweeping inaccuracy:

. . . despite the fact that he was dealing with the same levels of sensuous experience explored by the earlier writers, he produced the only poetry of the war that is not distorted by ephemeral emotions or limited by subjective attitudes (page 335).

Bernard Bergonzi, whose Heroes' Twilight was published a year after the American book, approaches Rosenberg in a much more constructive way because he is not trying to fit him into a preconceived structure. He acknowledges Rosenberg's stature as "undoubtedly one of the finest poets that the Great War produced" (page 109) and he brings out clearly the differences of background and war experience which isolate him from contemporary poets. Yet he has reservations about Rosenberg--as any fair-minded critic must have--which are not the ones explored in the preceding pages.

Firstly Bergonzi tends, naturally enough since they are not his main concern, to dismiss Rosenberg's early poems as mere testing-grounds for the undoubted achievement of the Trench Poems:

. . . a great deal--perhaps most--of Rosenberg's earlier

work is marred by a quality that could be called groping as much as exploration (page 111).

What earlier comment on these poems should have shown is that Rosenberg had a very clear sense of purpose which "groping" belittles. This dismissal of the Earlier Poems is too easy and too wholesale, even though Bergonzi qualifies it thus-- "this is no more than to say that it was the apprentice work of a dedicated and potentially powerful talent" (page 111).

Bergonzi includes Moses and The Unicorn in this category by remarking:

. . . their language seems to me obscure and clotted, typical of the groping effect that Rosenberg's poetry manifested when he was in less than perfect control of his medium (page 120).

Thus he cannot have sufficiently considered them. It is obvious that without the Earlier Poems there could have been no Moses nor The Unicorn and without these dramas Rosenberg could not have produced the sustained achievement of his Trench Poems, but there is more real achievement here than Bergonzi allows.

Bergonzi's second criticism:

. . . there was always an element of aestheticism in Rosenberg's vision . . . (page 113)

can be interpreted as a sign of disapproval, but in the context of Bergonzi's general attitude "aestheticism" seems here to mean 'artistic detachment', in much the same way that later on the same page the comment that:

At the same time his detachment was unimpaired by the appalling sense of responsibility for others that they [ie. officers] had to bear . . .

suggests that Rosenberg's detachment is rather more of a distinction than a heartless incapacity for human feelings. This is what John Bayley means when he writes, in defence of Auden:

Artifice need not mean coldness of heart (The Romantic

Survival, page 169).

Nonetheless, if the word "aestheticism" still suggests an almost decadent literariness, it is helpful to remember the variety of it described by T. S. Eliot in that passage about the chemical catalyst from "Tradition and the Individual Talent":

The mind of the poet is the shred of platinum. It may partly or exclusively operate upon the experience of the man himself; but, the more perfect the artist, the more completely separate in him will be the man who suffers and the mind which creates . . .
(Selected Essays, page 18).

From this it is a short step to realizing that Rosenberg at moments in his major poems gives us the pure "objective correlative"--"a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion" (ibid., page 145)--rather than the direct expression of emotion which the younger Eliot had deprecated: this, for example, is what gives a poem like "Break of Day" its peculiar intensity, for the objective correlatives here are rat, poppy, and maybe dust.

By quoting two sentences from Rosenberg's pre-war essay on Modern Art (CW, page 263), Bergonzi suggests that Rosenberg's adherence to symbolism is the cause of his defective poetic vision, but a closer look at Rosenberg's Trench Poems reveals that Rosenberg was no consistent symbolist for it was merely a device that he found effective on occasions. When Bergonzi remarks that:

. . . whereas Owen aimed at fusing the poetry and the pity, Rosenberg kept them separate (page 113)

he has, however, set the balance exactly right. To those nurtured on the belief that war poetry must express compassion and anger, Rosenberg must seem deficient: but it is

inaccurate to conclude that Owen is a better poet than Rosenberg, for they are wholly different in aim and temperament. Rosenberg's Trench Poems, as Bergonzi observes, possess:

a degree of transcendence that takes him far away from his starting point in the realities of front-line activity (page 118).

Jon Silkin's Out of Battle (1972) is the most recent full-length study of Great War poetry to appear and his treatment of Rosenberg is the lengthiest of the three: it is also the most perceptive of the three in the sense that Silkin responds to Rosenberg's poetry as a poet, although this perceptiveness is coloured by Silkin's left-wing sympathies. There are moments when, in fact, his Marxist interpretations--especially of Moses and The Unicorn--almost persuade the reader that Rosenberg was a social revolutionary, but the bulk of Rosenberg's work typifies him as more intellectual than practical in his dissidence.

Silkin's treatment of Rosenberg is based on the two elements of Jewishness and poverty in the poet's life, and as a result Rosenberg appears as a much more Judaistic writer than a non-Jew would infer from reading the poems; there are also social implications drawn which again would not be readily noticeable:

Rosenberg's struggle with the image of God (a jealous Old Testament and Christian Neoplatonic one) is to be associated, emblematically, with his social struggle as projected in his Moses wrestling with the Egyptians. Moses' flirtations with the luxuries and benefits obtainable through co-operation with the Egyptians may, to some extent, have paralleled Rosenberg's flirtation (it was little more than this) with the richer English literati, of whom Marsh was the principal example (page 272).

Silkin's attitude is a very compassionate one and he provides many insights, often going into detail over the wording of a line of verse or critical comment: this meticulous approach

exemplifies Silkin's concern to present Rosenberg as a writer highly relevant for our generation; for he discusses many poems at considerable length and works his way carefully through their implications. An example of his concern for detail is found in connection with Harding's remark about "Daughters of War" which Silkin questions on page 290:

The value of what was destroyed seemed to him to have been brought into sight only by the destruction . . .

Silkin's comment on this is characteristic:

Fine though this is, I would quibble with 'only'-- 'only by the destruction'--since I believe that it was not a case of the value being then brought into sight so much as of it then being emphasized, and in a particular way. To say that the value was only then brought into sight is, I think, to simplify and over-stress the evaluative ever-present moment in which the life was destroyed. Death may force the living to reassess the value of the person they had been in relation with, but such valuation then does imply that valuation of a more continuous and responsive kind must constantly have been made in the flux of the relationship itself .

He makes many inevitable comparisons between Rosenberg and Owen, but one of the most valuable occurs when he is examining "Dead Man's Dump":

. . . I would make a distinction between Rosenberg's and Owen's response to war's brutalities. Owen's compassion may be unhesitating in its generosity, as I am certain it is, but it moves over war's victims as they are recollected. The pity is universal. . . . He represents all men. The whole stands for each part assembled together. With Rosenberg it is otherwise, and the difference lies between Owen's compassion and Rosenberg's tenderness. Compassion is sacred, and distanced. Rosenberg's tenderness is that of a man intimately speaking of one death. It does not try to include the others. This specific tenderness for a particular man makes the man representative without losing his specificity (page 287).

In his lengthy chapter on Rosenberg (the longest chapter in the book) Silkin considers not only those of Rosenberg's poems which are included in the Trench Poem section of Complete Works, but he also relates them, quite correctly and helpfully, to Moses and The Unicorn as documentaries of

revolution and as attempts to achieve social harmony which is, theoretically, one of the objectives of war. He also spends some time discussing Rosenberg's use of the 'root'-image as well as his handling of the idea of God, and it is his discussion of the importance of the 'idea' to Rosenberg's poetry that produces his most perceptive evaluation of Rosenberg's technique:

The fumbling in his early work seems not that of a searching for a theme, but the attempt to find that language for his ideas which had not before him existed. It is his struggle (which becomes a present but never obtrusive part of the made thing)--a refusal to simplify a complex set of powerful active ideas--which makes his work rich and responsive. . . . The experience of the idea is the poem. To extract the idea would be to destroy it, because that would mean destroying its profound sensuous connections with the society that nourishes it (page 260).

There is much of substance in his study of Rosenberg's poems and the whole is written with such precision and reasonableness that it is hard to resist the force of Silkin's conclusions, if one makes allowances for the special emotional pull on him of Judaism and Marxism. Unlike the writers of several postwar essays on Rosenberg he does not attempt to categorize him as a writer belonging to or giving rise to any particular school.

The same cannot be said of the authors of some critical essays on Rosenberg which have appeared during the last twenty-five years. It is Joseph Cohen who, near the beginning of his persuasive essay "Isaac Rosenberg: from Romantic to Classic"⁴ lists the attempts to classify Rosenberg's poetry, prefacing his remarks with the observation that critics:

. . . credit him with some achievement but claim that

⁴ Tulane Studies in English, 1960, pages 129-142.

his performance was uneven and static, its limits carefully marked (page 129).

This implies that all of Rosenberg's mature output is of a piece, hence the misguided attempts to see it as a homogeneous body of verse.

Consequently Horace Gregory entitled his essay "The Isolation of Isaac Rosenberg"⁵ and argued that Rosenberg sought a poetry that dismissed immediate influence and that though he was known to Marsh, Bottomley and Professor Henry Tonks his personal isolation produced 'isolationist' poetry: Gregory does not himself use this epithet to describe Rosenberg's poetry but the suggestion is made by his comments on Rosenberg's "isolated imagination". Maybe what Gregory was trying to identify was the originality of Rosenberg's mind and his independence of thought, but it has been shown that his earlier work represents a thorough 'working-through' of traditional forms of diction. Though there is a theme of alienation running through some of Rosenberg's poetry, the tone of his Trench Poems at least is one of universalizing his thought rather than one of self-isolation. In his English Poetry, 1900-1950, C. H. Sisson singles out for approval precisely this quality:

Nothing so convinces one that a major poet was lost in Rosenberg as this drive towards universality of expression. That the drive is powered by his own suffering merely assures the reality of what he depicts (page 93).

Cohen, in his turn, traces with great care and with supporting references to Hulme's "Romanticism and Classicism" how Rosenberg's poetry developed from a romantic into a classical vein, and indeed there is some substance in this description insofar as his pre-war poetry is lush and 'romantic' in the sense of it being concerned with the individual

⁵ Poetry, (Chicago), Vol. LXVIII, 1946, pages 30-39.

in relation to society and to God, while his Trench Poems and The Unicorn are much more sparse in language and controlled in imagery. Another suggestion which Cohen proposes is less easy to substantiate:

. . . there is reason to believe that Rosenberg rejected Judaism's fundamental tenet, the belief in a patriarchal deity, in favour of a pre-Hebraic matriarchal mythology. In any case, he was not orthodox and could not have been a Jewish poet in any traditionally acceptable frame of reference (op. cit., 130-131)

--for his evidence apparently consists of "Spiritual Isolation", "God" and "The Female God" (also, one would suppose, "Daughters of War"). Yet we have only to set Moses, "Break of Day" and "Chagrin" beside Cohen's selection to see that his view is an oversimplification. This is not the place to examine Rosenberg's Jewish orthodoxy but it may be that merely the Jewishness of his poetry is not the correct criterion for judging the quality of the poetry. Dennis Silk's essay on Rosenberg in Judaism (Vol. 14, No. 4, Fall 1965, pages 462-474) offers the view that it is not the content so much as the manner of Rosenberg's thought which is essentially Judaic and he cites the words of Thorlief Boman already quoted on page 197 earlier. A contemporary reader can at least verify the dynamism of Rosenberg's writing for himself.

In his comments about Rosenberg's unorthodoxy Cohen has seemingly overlooked the force of a much earlier essay, Edouard Roditi's "Judaism and Poetry", which was published in The Jewish Review of September-December 1932, pages 39-50.

Roditi begins by agreeing with Cohen's later findings:

On its surface, the poetry of Rosenberg does not seem essentially Jewish . . . The whole liturgic paraphernalia seems to leave Rosenberg indifferent (page 40)

--but after references to Hebrew legends in the plays he

concludes:

Therefore, being concerned with purely poetic, that is to say human, values--as opposed to the literary, theological or metaphysical--his poetry was more in touch with the purely human and contemporary, in fact eternal, aspects of Judaism, and therefore more purely Jewish (page 46).

This may strike at first as being too generalised to be helpful, but after consideration (and we must surely accept Judaism's concern with not only the historical past, but also with contemporary valuations of life) these comments seem to strike exactly the right balance. What makes them even more remarkable is that they were written before the publication of Rosenberg's Complete Works had made the full evidence of his humanitarianism generally available.

The purpose of looking at some of the critical attitudes which writers on Rosenberg have adopted is not to apportion praise or blame, but it is intended to illustrate the desire which critics have displayed to 'place' Rosenberg in some appropriately-labelled drawer. In Cohen's case, such attempts lead to an over-rigid definition of the earlier poems which overlooks the complexity of Rosenberg's pre-war artistic and personal struggle and so it undermines the quality of Rosenberg's final achievement.

Not all the essays published so far fall under this judgement. F. R. Leavis, for example, in reviewing Complete Works for Scrutiny (Vol. VI, No. 2, September 1937, pages 229-234) attempts to assess Rosenberg's importance in the tradition of English poetry and he is free from any partisan judgements. He claims that in several poems Rosenberg achieved a unity of expression and idea, while reminding us that

perhaps it is still worth while to insist on Rosenberg's

astonishing force of originality (page 230).

Toward the end of the review he defends The Amulet and The Unicorn fragments:

They show a richly promising ability to develop into more inclusive organizations the achievements of his verbal technique as exhibited in his best poems (page 234).

Marius Bewley in his "The Poetry of Isaac Rosenberg"⁶ is another critic who avoids the pitfall of over-hasty classification. His study of Rosenberg is confined to a consideration of Moses and only six Trench Poems but he still achieves some useful insights, such as this:

Thus it was that the first impact of the war on Rosenberg conferred a universal significance on what had been merely private struggle before, and gave new scope and depth to his writing (page 39).

Although he considers briefly Rosenberg's use of Judaic traditions Bewley places his emphasis on (and sees the importance of Rosenberg's poetry as expressing) Rosenberg's human concern. The search which Moses and Tel are involved in is, he implies, merely a reflection of Rosenberg's quest for an

authority to reject the sterility of modern life, of which war was only the most hideous expression (page 44).

Probably the most comprehensive essay on Rosenberg to date is that written by Dennis Silk ("Isaac Rosenberg: 1890-1918"). He emphasises the richness of Rosenberg's ethnic and social heritage in these terms:

Whitechapel Jewry around the turn of the century was a poor but energetic community, with many of its members conversant with Hebrew, Yiddish and Russian culture, and possessing a rich folk-background, passionate, voluble and argumentative. At that time it was a sawn-off branch of the Russian-Jewish society which produced Yalag, Peretz, Bialik, Chagall, Isaac Babel . . .

--one might also add Osip Mandelstam--

⁶ Commentary, Vol. VII, No. 1, January 1949, pages 34-44.

. . . and the powerful body of early Zionist doctrine. The richness of Rosenberg's background must have reinforced his own naturally independent and vigorous nature, empowering him to meet the impact of English culture without demoralization, and to encounter his English contemporaries without selling his birthright (page 473).

He makes this point, however, without insisting on an exclusively Jewish quality in Rosenberg's writing, thus tacitly acknowledging that a writer is larger than his background.

Having said this, it is clear that Silk does not regard Rosenberg as an isolationist figure. He comments that the rootlessness of Tel is probably a reflection of the isolating experience of the trenches--which is very likely--but surmises that Rosenberg's colleagues soon treated him with a degree of acceptance after their common suffering of hardships--a hope which remains unsubstantiated, and certainly Rosenberg's letters provide very little evidence of the camaraderie which poets like Owen, Sassoon and Graves enjoyed. Silk is nearer to the truth when he observes that the experience of war "enlarged his understanding" (page 474), by which he presumably means that it enabled him finally to slough off the shreds of romanticism and that it gave his purpose in poetry a fresh impetus. To speculate on what Rosenberg might have done is little more helpful than to view him as only a poet of promise, but Silk has suggested that Rosenberg had reached a point, both personally and artistically, from which he might have given a decadent England standards to judge itself by, and led a generation between two wars (page 474).

The comment is aptly phrased, for if Rosenberg was ever to have had such grandiose ambitions, he would have led through example rather than by precept, since he was an exceptionally modest man.

Silk makes several valuable observations, particularly

where he is tracing the relationship between the poems and verse-plays. He makes explicit what the reader may only half-realize:

Just as an earlier series of poems about God culminates in the explosion of "Moses", in the same way a series of earlier poems preceding and leading directly to "Dead Man's Dump" and "Daughters of War" are tentative attempts to cope with the visionary experience of the two later poems (page 467).

Helpful though this is, Silk leaves us to decide what are the poems he considers to lead up to "Dead Man's Dump" and "Daughters of War". An Amazonian presence is detectable in such earlier work as "Night", while the only likely precursors to "Dead Man's Dump" must be the remaining Trench Poems. The Amazonian figure receives different treatment in The Amulet:

. . . he attempted to humanize the Amazonian figure of the earlier poems, but with only partial success (page 469).

Certainly the figure of Lilith does not immediately resemble a Daughter of War and it is hardly likely that if Rosenberg had intended the Lilith of either of the plays to have Amazonian qualities he would have allowed her to be as passive as Saul and so completely dominated by the masculinity of the Nubian or Tel; in The Unicorn, at least, even the traditionally female rôle of creativity has passed to the male figure of the Chief.

Silk's summing-up of Rosenberg's poetic quality is both accurate and just:

Its conflicting characteristics, of fragmentariness and cragginess, repel the lazy-minded. Rosenberg has a capacity to startle and disappoint at once, an awkward combination of delicacy and clumsiness, the relationship to language of a great poet combined with an archaism of language never fully discarded (page 473).

This survey of critical reaction to Rosenberg should demonstrate that informed opinion is coming to see more and more of value in his poetry. The signs that the long period of neglect or of unsympathetic dismissal is ending are hopeful. It is, however, true that, as Silk comments above, Rosenberg is never likely to be popular because of the surface difficulty of much of his work. Nevertheless, Chatto and Windus are soon to publish a new edition of the Complete Works which will incorporate much recently-discovered material, and a biographical study of Rosenberg by Miss Jean Liddiard is due to appear in 1975. This activity can only serve to enhance Rosenberg's reputation as more readers are encouraged to try reading for themselves beyond the handful of poems now readily accessible in many anthologies.

Having now examined everything of significance which Rosenberg wrote in poetry the reader can evaluate for himself the worth and achievement of Rosenberg's verse, though his reactions may at the outset be coloured by the occasional critical reference which is even now quite likely to be mildly dismissive or at least superficial. Thus in his British Council monograph entitled War Poets 1914-1918 Edmund Blunden finds the space to say only that

. . . many still bless the remembrance and feel the passionate idea of Isaac Rosenberg (page 39)

--while in The Modern Age, the final volume of A Guide to English Literature, D. J. Enright's essay on Great War poets considers Rosenberg to be "the other indubitable poetic loss incurred in the World War"--the comparison is with Owen.

Enright adds:

Though his work is undigested, it is still impressive: isolated lines blaze with energy and colour (page 168)

--and he appends illustrations from "Midsummer Frost" and "Day" in support. Why, in an essay with this title ("The Literature of the First World War") did he not, one wonders, take examples from the Trench Poems? "Break of Day in the Trenches" is mentioned with the curious observation that it is

. . . a more mature and integrated work, yet less individual, perhaps a little too 'white with the dust' of the trenches (page 168).

When this is added to previous indications of critical neglect, some readers may feel that Rosenberg is, after all, only an interesting minor poet who showed signs of greatness. One of the main reasons for the detailed treatment which Rosenberg has received in the preceding pages has been to examine his work at length and in toto on its own merits. Any one who takes the trouble to read through no more than the Trench Poems with a sympathetic but balanced outlook will come to one of two broad conclusions: Rosenberg will emerge as a poet with isolated successes, a writer whose work is generally tortured, complex and at times unintelligible; the other possibility is that Rosenberg will be seen for what he is, a poet of startling originality and force as well as an artist who is sensibly and sincerely committed to his craft, and whose poems frequently have an air of what might be called 'pregnant obscurity'. There is no doubt that he is not successful all the time, but the work he left behind shows much more than promise. He has made a unique contribution to English poetry of the early twentieth century, but because he is so much of an individualist this contribution has been either ignored or assessed only with difficulty. The present chapter has set out the main evidence for evaluating his influence on subsequent poetic practice, but his

impact on writers like Keith Douglas and Ted Hughes emerges more as an affinity in language and technique rather than as an easily-imitable pattern.

As well as his very considerable poetic achievement, the accidents of his life and experience help to present Rosenberg to us as a man to whom the gods were less than just; yet his adversities enabled him to display his major qualities of artistic integrity and stoical acceptance. He emerges finally as a man of great dignity--though this adjective might have surprised him--and Leavis's remark (in Scrutiny) on the spirit evident in the Complete Works sums this up succinctly:

. . . this volume, the classical status of which, as a rare document of invincible human strength, courage and fineness, should not have to wait long for general recognition (page 234).

If this study of Rosenberg, following nearly forty years after Leavis's hope, seems to re-echo this sentiment and helps in any way to increase Rosenberg's "general recognition", it will then have fulfilled its purpose.

APPENDIX

Moses

Reproduced below are the texts of two early versions of Moses, both of which are in The British Library (Add. MS. 48210). Line numbers have been added to aid reference. Deletions (indicated by a line through a word) and emendations (enclosed in brackets) are transcribed from those made in Rosenberg's writing on the manuscripts.

MOSES (I)

Moses - an Egyptian Prince
Abinoah An Overseer
Two Hebrews.

Scene before Thebes. A pyramid is being built. Priests and Taskmasters. Hebrews bearing burdens. Two Hebrews are seen whispering

1st Hebrew. But he, the father of this venture
Against our masters, is their foster child.
His flesh is wild, and we will suffer for it.(shall)

2nd Hebrew I have seen men hugely and large proportioned
In spirit, of such noble indignation,
Accoutred to no credence of the times;
Lodgings of swift barbaric tenderings,
Wherein the towers of Babel found a top,
Whose ears were pressed against Jehova's mouth,
10 But all were cripples to this mettled speed
Constrained to the stables of proud flesh.
The streaming vigours of his fire -- new blood,
Tempered by high august philosophies,
From his halt tongue is like an anger thrust,
Out of a madman's piteous craving for
A monstrous baulked perfection.

1st Hebrew He is a prince, pampered in palaces,
And such divisions in his splendid sphere
Rolls that from ours; what can he know of ours?

2nd Hebrew 20 Nine months he drew the dreaming years to him
As dark in antenatal womb he lay
Papped with the life of Abram's prophecy.
We trodden careless under
The riding pomp of heavy handed years,
Have pierced him with our pain a tunneled way

- Back to the springs of being, his blood's old source.
He has the deep schools drained of their brain ore,
And his desires are fleets of sunbright treasure
Sailing mistrust to find the frank eyed ports.
- 30 He fears our fear and tampers for our assent
To lift the temperate level of our hopes,
So politic, his tense brows search our toil,
As purposing some loose machinic laws
To perfect, or some builded base to touch,
With prophecy and wisdom bettering it.
Sleek ambush mild! for covert under council
Peer muffled meanings, double tongued words,
Like doubtful sounds scarce heard; terror in you
Forces your eyes into his covertly
- 40 To search his searching. Startled into life
The dead desires seek for some shape of trust

2nd Heb.

- But others watch that shape to read distrust,
Here's Abinoah follows him about.
And if his slit-like eyes could tear right out
The pleasure Moses on his daughter had
She'd be as virgin as ere she came nestling
Into that fierce unmanageable blood
Flying from her loathed father. O that slave
Has hammered from the anvil of her beauty
- 50 A steel to break his manacles; Hard for us
Moses has made him overseer. O his slits
Pry--pry

(Abinoah is seen approaching)

'Sh! the thin lipped abomination!
It were delightful labour making bricks
And know they would kiss friendly with his head.

Abinoah.
(who has been
taking
haschich and
feels 60
lively)

Dirt draggled mongrels, circumcised slaves!
You puddle with your lousy gibberish
The holy air, Pharoahs own tributary.
Filthy manure for Pharoahs flourishing,
I'll circumcise and holy make your tongues,
And stop one outlet to your profanation.
I've never seen one beg so for a blow.
Too soft am I to resist entreaty /so beats him/
Your howling holds the earnest energies
You cheat from Pharoah when you make his bricks.

/Moses is heard from a distance singing/

- A naked African
Walked in the sun
Singing singing
Of his wild love
- 70 I slew the tiger
With your young strength
/My tawny panther/
Rolled round my life.
- Three sheep, your breasts,
And my head between,
Grazing together
On a smooth slope.

(Taunt is the air and ties the trees
The leaves lie as on a hand
Gods unthinkable imagination
Invents new tortures for nature
And when the air feels soft and the trees leaves
Feel free and push and tremble
Will they not remember and say
How wonderful to have lived
Now is life wonderful.)

HEBREW Here comes one will ask you a question

ABINOAH 80 I'll beat|you more|and he'll ques|tion (rhythm)
The scratchiness of your whining, or may be,
Thence might be born some learned argument
Riched with deep reasons from philosophy,
That this was one or two blows, or you felt
This like the other.

MOSES You labour hard to give pain.

ABINOAH My pain is not to labour so.

MOSES But he is grey and all his dried up blood
Is crumbling in your hands to dust.

ABINOAH 90 We buy their labour with a lease of life,
And they would haggle, want ease.
What do the locusts with their stinking ease?
The mud, the lice, are busy breeding plagues
In ease.

MOSES You drunken rascal.

ABINOAH A drunken rascal is your father then.
Give back his daughter to the drunken rascal.

MOSES 100 Remember that your rod is in your hands
But what you are in mine. Because your dung
Out of which grew a lovely rose for me,
Because you're like some blind deaf messenger
That bore a shining message for my ear,
I put the rod in your hands for that service.
Now you are impudent and scratch at me.
What wrong by these oer rides obsequiosness
To sting you to forget--or subtly meanst
This flattery - - - more than prince I'am man,
And worth to listen to all braggart breath

ABINOAH 110 You thought my breath worth fouling with your lust,
I am a man also, a father, prince.
Or was mere man until you honoured me (of)
And mixed your princely blood and made|me (rhythm?)
The father of a prince's concubine.
I was a father till you stole my daughter.

Moses. A boy at college flattered by a girl
Will give her what she asks for.

Abinoah (A) (No love|but hate of Egypt made|you steal)
No love but hatred of Egypt made you (rhythm)
[Steal] love that should be Egypt's. I know
A story of a bark by rushes placed
Cunningly to attract where naked girls
120 Sang to a barren princess and the Nile
Flowed by, as clean as Egypts royal blood.
You hate the Egyptians and would ruin Pharoah
As my poor girl. This slave you hate me beat
Is more my father than is Pharoah yours.
I beat all with that thought.

(O you ambiguous and unnecessary stench)
(you stench of man)

Moses ~~I'll smudge your life out like a bug's.~~
(Your existence is not so necessary)
(You mud bank of the Nile you stink
Your life is not very necessary)

Abinoah Why should I fear? If you were Pharaoh's son,
You have in mind should make you fear, not me.
Your frequent hooded whispers amongst these,
130 And loose words dropt, and quick looks backward cast;
The strained aspect and dissimulation, (is this the
These are your own accusers. rhythm?)
(grammar?) Your fearful wrong to me making me mad
To shadow you, to drain in some strange way
The smirch you made, the good you drew in me;
I have found you plotting your own dreadful ruin.

Moses You have marvelous skill to me.

Abinoah She was my child.

Moses Your dog you mean. You beater of girls and old men.
140 Why do I vindicate myself to you?
You blind rod in the throned hands of king.
Can I give to the blind eyes of your brain
Clear light? Your pigmy spirit denies
Stature above it, in its narrow mould
Pens the infinite, and in its denseness muds
All sunlike actions and original.
(obscure) Your private anger would turn to my hurt,
Neath justices colour my unusual means.
150 I would be skilled in arts of government,
And shape one impulse thro' the contraries
Of vain ambitious men, selfish and callous,
And frail, life-drifting natures reticent.
(obscure) Likeness thro' bulk-nation's grand harmony.
Here are the springs ---- primeval elements;
The roots hid secrecy, old source of race.
Unreasoned reason of the savage instinct.
(I have a lust in me, a hunger to mast-)
~~And can all Thebes deepest teach me more?~~
(I have a trouble in my mind for largeness
A purity in thorough hearted manner)
So, doctor -- like I'd force from these wild herbs
Virtues more potent than we know on earth.
160 Barbaric love to bring forth tenderness.
Cunning, to nurture wisdom, wise desires.
Meanness enlarged to prudence, timely brave.
And hugeness be a driving wedge to truth.
Thus rude elements I would grandly fashion
Into some newer nature, a consciousness
Like naked light seizing the all eyed soul.
Oppressing with its gorgeous tyranny
Until they take it thus ----- or die.

ile
aking) Places his hand on the unsuspecting Egyptian's head and
gently pulls his hair back until his chin is above his fore-
head and holds him so till he is suffocated.

MOSES (II)

Moses - an Egyptian Prince
Abinoah - an overseer.
Two Hebrews.
Koelue - Abinoahs daughter.

Scene 1. Outside a college in Thebes. Egyptian students pass by. Moses alone in meditation.

Moses Upon my lips, like a cloud
 To burst on the peaks of light
 Sit cowed lost impossible things
 ~~noon's~~
 To tie my hands at their prime and height.
 Power! break through their shroud
 Pierce them so thoroughly
 Thoroughly enter me
 Know me for one dead
 Break the shadowy thread
10 The cowering spirits bond
 Writ by illusions gay and blonde.

 Ah! let the morning pale
 Throb with a wilder pulse
 No delicate flame shall quail
 With terror at your convulse
 Thin branches whiten the skies
 To lips and spaces of song
 That chant a mood to my eyes--
 Ah! sleep can be overlong.

20 Voices thunder, voices of deeds not done,
 Lo! on the air is scrawled in abysmal light
 Old myths never known and yet already forgone,
 And songs more lost, more secret than desert light.
 Martyrdoms of uncreated things,
 Virgin silences waiting a breaking voice--
 As in a womb they cry, in a cage beat vain wings
 Under life, over life--is their unbeing my choice?

 Dull wine of torpor--the unsoldered spirit lies limp.
 Ah! if she would run into a mould
30 Some new idea unvalled
 To human byways, an apocalyptic camp
 Of utterest and ulterior dreaming
 Understood only in its gleaming
 To flash stark naked the whole girth of the world

 I am sick of priests and forms
 This rigid dry boned refinement (civilization)
 ~~priestlife~~

 What priest can master me in the schools,
 the deep brain-hearted philosopher,
 The old humanity cries for a saviour.

40 There shall not be a void or calm

(riot in)

But a fury fill the veins of Time
Whose limbs had begun to rot.
Who had flattered my stupid torpor
With an easy and mimic energy
And drained my veins with a paltry marvel
More monstrous than battle
For the soul ached and went out dead in pleasure.

Is not this song still sung in the streets of me?

50 A naked African
Walked in the sun
Singing--singing
Of his wild love.

I slew the tiger
With your young strength
(My tawny panther)
Rolled round my life.

Three sheep, your breasts
And my head between
Grazing together
60 On a smooth slope.

Can I rest in you who grow less and less.
I who enlarge and wax suiting an inward mould--
A pent infinity driving my natures force
To gird the rim of all power, to draw the rib from
man

~~create~~ And ~~breathe to~~ a shapelier doom and more princely
hope,
These arms must rim the world, these arms where you
have lain.

Scene 2. Evening before Thebes.

The pyramids are being built. Swarms of Hebrews labouring.
Priests and taskmasters Two Hebrews whispering.

Kolue passes by singing.

The vague viols of evening
Call all the flower clans
To some abysmal swinging
70 And tumult of deep trance,
He may hear, flower of my singing
And come hither winging

~~4st~~ Old Heb. Abinoah's daughter. No reason have we to love her.
This is all Moses has done for us.
First he ruins her, then makes her spiteful father
Our overseer.

Young Heb. The night must grow to make the morning possible
We must wait.

~~st~~ Old Heb. Wait!
All day some slow dark quadruped beats
80 To pulp our springiness

All day some hoofed animal treads our veins
 Leisurely--leisurely our energies flow out.
 All agonies created from the first day
 Have wandered hungry searching the world for us
 Or they would perish like disused Behemoth.
 Is our Messiah one to unleash these agonies
 As Moses does, who gives us an Abinoah,
 Is he not their foster child weaned with their tiger
 milk.

2nd Young Heb. ^{labour} Yesterday as I lay nigh dead with toil
 90 ~~Thinking to end all and let the crane crush me~~
 Underneath that hurtling crane oiled with our blood
 Thinking to end all and let the crane crush me
 He came by and bore me into the shade,
 O what a furnace roaring in his blood
 Thawed my congealed sinews and fired my own
 Raging through me like a strong cordial

He spoke, O since yesterday
 Am I not larger grown
 O! I have seen men hugely shapen in soul
 Of such unhuman shaggy turbulence
 100 Out of all measure that we see them not,
 Lodgings of towered barbaric tenderness

But all were cripples to this ~~mettled~~ ^{rushing} speed
 Constrained to the stables of flesh
 I say there is a famine in ripe harvest
 When hungry giants come as guests.
~~what food~~ Come knead the hills and oceans into food.
 There is none for him
 The streaming vigours of his blood
 110 Erupting
 From his halt tongue is like an angry thrust
 Out of a madmans piteous craving for
 A monstrous baulked perfection.

1st Heb. He is a prince pampered in palaces
 And such division in his splendid sphere
 Rolls that from ours, what can he know of ours?

2nd Heb. Is not Miriam his sister, Jochabed his mother.
 In the womb he looked round and saw
 From furthestmost stretches our wrong,
 120 From the palaces and schools
 Our pain has pierced hid tunneled ways
 Back to his bloods old source
 As we lie chained by Egyptian men
 So has he lain chained by their women,
 And now rejoice, he has broken their chains,
 O his desires are fleets of treasure
 He has squandered in treacherous seas
 Sailing mistrust to find the frank ports
 He fears our fear and tampers mildly
 130 For our assent to let him save us.
 When he walks amid our toil
 With some master mason

And tense brows critical
As purposing some loose machinic laws
To perfect or builded base to touch
With wisdom bettering it.
Sleek ambush! for covert under such council
Peer muffled meanings, inner mirrored words.
Like doubtful sounds scarce heard; terror in you
140 Forces your eyes into his covertly
To search his searching Startled to life
And Still incredible dead hopes slink out

~~some~~
Old Heb. (His youth is flattered at Moses kind speech to him
And he looms grand to his enthusiasm) aside
(leave 10 It may be as you say. But I who am gray
lines space) Have seen so often conscious imposters
Or such who have imposed upon themselves
Have seen many heroic rebels--lost.
~~Moses is inexperienced and will fail~~
~~Because his flesh is wild and we will suffer for it~~
~~Why does~~

150 Here's that beast Abinoah follow him about.
And if his slit like eyes could tear right out
The pleasure Moses on his daughter had
She'd be as virgin as ere she came nestling
Into that fierce unmanageable blood
Flying from her loathed father (O that slave
Has hammered from the anvil of her beauty
A steel to break his manacles. Hard for us
Moses has made him overseer. O his slits
Pry--pry

Abinoah is seen approaching

160 'Sh! the thin lipped abomination
Drunk as usual
It were delightful labour making bricks
And know they would kiss friendly with his head.

Abinoah who has been taking haschish and has one obsession
hatred of Jews

Dirt draggled mongrels, circumcised slaves
You puddle with your lousy gibberish
The holy air Pharoahs own tributary.
Filthy manure for Pharoahs flourishing
Ill circumcise and holy make your tongues
And stop one outlet to your profanation....

To the Old Heb

170 Ive never seen one beg so for a blow.
Too soft am I to resist such entreaty. (beats him)
Your howling holds the earnest energies
You cheat from Pharoah when you make his bricks

Moses is heard from a distance singing

Taunt is the air and tied the trees,
The leaves lie as on a hand.
Gods unthinkable imagination

Invents new tortures for nature

And when the air is soft and the leaves
Feel free and push and tremble
180 Will they not remember and say
~~Now is life wonderful~~
How wonderful to have lived

Heb. Here comes one will ask you a question.

Ab. Ill beat you more and he'll question
The scratchiness of your whining or maybe
Thence might be born some brainy argument
Riched with deep reasons from philosophy
That this blow ... being longer yet was but one
Or perhaps two, or that you felt this one . . .
Arguing from the difference in your whine
190 Exactly or not like the other--

Moses You labour hard to give pain

Ab. My pain . is . . not . . to labour so
still beating

Mos. Motion him to desist but not in time to prevent him
fainting into the arms of the second Hebrew moaning

~~But~~
What is this greybeard worth to you now,
All his dried up blood crumbled to dust.

Ab. We buy their labour with a lease of life
And they would haggle want ease
What do the locusts with their stinking ease
The mud the lice are busy breeding plagues
In ease

Mose. 200 You drunken rascal.

Ab. A drunken rascal! Isis! hear the Prince,
Drunken with duty and he calls me rascal.

M. You may think it your duty to get drunk
~~But you must behave more properly my man~~
But get yourself bronze claws before
you would be impudent.

Ab When a mans drunk he'll kiss a horse or king,
~~He'll kiss a horse or king~~
He's so affectionate. Under your words
There is strong wine to make me drunk: you think,
The lines of all your face say, her father, Kolues
father.

Mose. 210 Remember that your rod is in your hands
~~Dull~~ ~~fool~~
But what you are in mine. Because crabbed tree
~~gave~~ ~~pink delicious~~
You grew a ruddy juiced apple for me

Because youre like some blind deaf messenger
That bore a shining message for my ear
I put the rod in your hands for that service
Now you are impudent and scratch at me.
Perhaps you merely mean to flatter me
You subtle knave--that more than prince I'm man
And worth to listen to all braggart breath

Ab. 220 Yet my breath was worth fouling with your lust
~~Am I not father of prince's concubine~~
~~Why should I not get drunk~~

Moses A boy at college flattered by a girl
Will give her what she asks for

Ab Osirous burning Osirous
My girl my Kulue to be a plaything thus.

Looks inanely at Moses saying to himself

(Prince Imra wished her for 1000 shekels
Isis!--To let a Jew have her for nothing)

His vindictiveness is getting the better of himself helped by the
haschich.

I know
A story of a tiny ark by rushes placed
Cunningly to attract where naked girls
230 Sang to a barren princess and the Nile
Flowed by as clean as Egypts royal blood.
~~trembling~~ ~~watched~~ ~~laughed~~
A quick wit Jewish girl stood by and laughing
While each accused the other of the bastard.
~~to you whom~~
My girl is Egypt on whose body for jest you practiced
The part your alien hate would play in earnest
On Egypts spirit and foul
See as I strike from this slave music music
~~And~~
That mixes with the pure darkness which it fouls.

M. 240 O you ambiguous and unnessesary stench
You'll be more interesting as a mummy
I have no doubt.

A I am not afraid, Even were you Pharoahs son
Princes walk on slippery paths
And all suspect your brooding quiet since
Your boisterous college triumphs,
All know your lust to domineer and this strange lull
As in some hallucination I have shadowed you
Without wish or will
Doubtless the old instinct to bully my girl
250 Making a gap in my hachich dreams
Or perhaps the wish to drain in some strange way
Pride urging--
The smirch you made the good you drew in you
I found you plotting your own dreadful ruin.

Mos. You have marvellous skill to move me.

Ab She was my child

Moses. Your dog you mean. You beater of girls and old men,
Why do I vindicate myself to you?
You blind rod in the throned hands of Kings,
260 Can I give to the blind eyes of your brain
Clear light? Your pigmy spirit denies
Stature above it, in its narrow mould
Pens the infinite, and in its denseness muds
All sunlike actions and original.
Your private anger would turn to my hurt
Neath justice colour my unusual means,
 ~~flesh~~
Training on sense to knead the world of spirit.
I would be skilled in arts of government,
And shape one impulse thro' the contraries
270 Of vain ambitious men selfish and callous,
And frail life-drifting natures, reticent,
Litheness thro bulk, nation's grand harmony.
Here are the springs, primeval elements;
The roots hid secrecy, old source of race
Unreasoned reason of the savage instinct.
I have a trouble in my mind for largeness.
A purity in the roughhearted manner
 ~~then~~ ~~the~~ ~~who~~
~~And~~ Which the grave ardours, this Egyptian wants.
My brainful fingers will charm these wild herbs
280 Unto a rich deliverence brave juices.
Barbaric love to bring forth tenderness
Cunning, to nurture wisdom, wise desires
Meanness enlarged to prudence
And hugeness be a driving wedge to truth.
Thus these rude elements would I grandly fashion
Into some newer nature, a consciousness
Like naked light siezing the all eyed soul
Oppressing with its gorgeous tyranny
Until the take it thus--or die

While speaking he places his hand on the unsuspecting Egyptians head and gently pulls his hair back until his chin is above his forehead and holds him so till he is suffocated.

Two Recent Discoveries

There are very few letters surviving which Rosenberg wrote to his family. One was sent from South Africa in 1914 (CW, page 342); another was written to his mother from France in June 1917 (CW, page 355); two went to his brother Dave from France in March 1918; two to his mother and one to his father are printed in LC, page 20. Therefore it is of particular interest to discover one other letter, written to

his father and hitherto unpublished: this letter is in the possession of Mrs. Ray Lyons, who has kindly allowed it to be copied.

Although it belongs chronologically in Chapter IV (since it was written in the indelible pencil invariably used by Rosenberg when writing in the trenches, and is marked "rec. 1th [sic] Aug. 17"), it is reproduced here in company with other unpublished material. The bulk of it is concerned with a book of Jewish writings, but it also contains some endearing human touches, as well as Rosenberg's characteristic spelling and lack of punctuation.

Dear Father

Ray wrote me card of the air raid, also your letter Your miracle amused me very much and the story of the honey delighted me, I hope to be home before the new year but leaves are going very slowly in our division so its no use building on it. Mrs Herbert Cohen sent me a little book compiled by the Chief Rabbi of Jewish interest. There are good bits from the Talmud and from some old writers. A very little bit by Heine nothing by Disraeli and a lot by Mr Hertz and a few ~~others~~ more rash people; I admire their daring, if not their judgement. Mrs Cohen has paid all the expenses and a fuller anthology is coming out shortly; I hope some restraint and caution will be used this time. I think you will find Heines poems among my books, there is a beautiful poem called 'Princess Sabbath' among them, where the Jew who is a dog all the week, Sabbath night when the candles are lit, is transformed into a gorgeous prince ~~ready~~ to meet his bride the Sabbath. I mention this because there is a feeble imitation of this in the ~~pen~~ anthology. If I am lucky and get home this side of the year you might keep Dave's breeches for me.

Love to all

Isaac

There is also among papers in the possession of Mrs. Lyons a copy of Blake's Poems, with a preface by Joseph Skipsey: it is a small blue volume and on the fly-leaf it bears the following inscription:

Isaac Rosenberg. With all good wishes from L and A Wright.

13:X:1912

Clearly this book was a gift, like the copy of Shelley which Rosenberg mentioned in a letter to Miss Wright earlier in the same year (CW, page 330).

On the inside of the front cover Rosenberg has drafted some lines in pencil--now very faint in places--of verse which reads like a partial echo of a Blake lyric, for it imitates his lyrical style and tone. Below is a transcription of these lines, so far as they can be deciphered, with conjectural readings in brackets:

The shadows flicker like
in the shaking (?light?leaves)
which
In fire God (?had ?clad) my heart
My thoughts (?had ?hid ?laid) in snow
Love was the warm part
Till thought hath bid him go
Spring kissed ^{my} ~~the~~ heart of youth
And (?pressed ?played) into my mouth

On the flyleaf opposite, above the Misses Wright's inscription, Rosenberg has pencilled:

~~One always saw~~
All people say what they think
few say what they mean.

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A Works

(i) The British Library (British Museum, Add. MS 48210)

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New York Public Library: The Berg Collection

Fifty letters and one postcard to Edward Marsh, five of which are unpublished: Lecture on Art: "Sleep": "Spring 1916": "The Female God": "Marching": "The Troop Ship": "A Worm fed on the Heart of Corinth": "Through these Pale Cold Days".

Miss Livia Gollancz

Five unpublished letters to Ruth Lowy: transcript of "The Destruction of Jerusalem": "The Garden of Joy": Prose paragraph, "Joy": Prose passage, "Uncle's Impressions in the Woods at Night":

Mrs. Ray Lyons

One unpublished letter to his father: Unpublished verse fragment.

Leeds Exhibition Catalogue

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(ii) Night and Day by Isaac Rosenberg, 1912

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