Impersonality and the Extinction of Self:
a Comparative Analysis of the Poetry of Alun Lewis and Keith Douglas

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the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Summary

This thesis, comparative in method, examines a wide range of the poetry of Keith Douglas and Alun Lewis, and some of their prose writings. As Second World War poets, both sought a poetic register that voiced their testimony to changed realities, both internal and external. Degrees of commonality are traced between Douglas's dominant impulse for 'impersonality' and Lewis's increasing stylistic objectivity, alongside investigation of their shared underlying sense of loss, and of complicity as agents of war, even when their poetic voice is at its most impersonal. Diverse critical viewpoints are addressed, along with several psychoanalytical theories and relevant biographical commentary.

Following an Introduction and Review of the Critical Field, each chapter is structured as a bipartite comparison, focusing first on Douglas, then on Lewis. Chapter 1 investigates Douglas's impersonality as a controlled, ambivalently detached poetic register which, in its undertow and perceptual shifts, reveals the speaker's submersed engagement and ethical complicity. Lewis's poetry is seen to reveal a related impulse for increasingly subordinating the subjective voice in evocations of the painfully harsh realities he encountered.

Chapter 2 explores the writers' dialectical struggles to resolve or extinguish self-division, focusing particularly upon Douglas's 'bête noire' and Lewis's 'enmity within', configurations analysed as paradoxically creative/destructive ingredients of the poetic impulse. Chapter 3 then examines the poets' epistemological and ontological preoccupations with death, 'darkness' and 'being', and their relevance to what is here termed 'the extinction of Self'.

Chapter 4 extends this enquiry to examine the poets' representations of wartime separation and geographical dislocation as manifestations of 'the exilic self' and a mutual desire to extinguish internal crises. The conclusion drawn is that their shared, dual axis of

poetic engagement and detachment reveals a deeply embedded, common impulse to voice and escape their burdens, both inherently personal, and as complicit agents of war.

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Contents

Introduction

> The activity of a poet is the opposite of persuasion. His steps are very much those of a man under sentence of death. I do not mean that a poet should lose interest in the affairs of the world, or that, through being a poet, he loses access to the deepest joy accessible to man. Quite the contrary, I mean that, whatever his activity, a poet is never free, released from a bond. [...] A poet's words should, I think, compel the attention of those who do not share his belief. [...] Yet even then the quarrel should be his own quarrel; [...] but he remains a man caught up in a dialogue which may then, or a century later, be heard by the rest of the world.[1]

Vernon Watkins's words resonate with the rationale for this thesis. The decision to undertake a comparison of the poetry of Keith Douglas and Alun Lewis formed itself partly from the fact that there has been no sustained, book-length comparative examination of their writings, though separate, shorter studies of their work, and two authoritative biographies exist.[2] This fact, coupled with an interest in the generic commonality of Douglas and Lewis as Second World War poets, might be considered justification enough to undertake this thesis. But there are also elements of Watkins's statement that draw one to consider very specific connections in the personal and creative trajectories of these men, connections that are sufficiently significant to warrant comparison, framed within the overarching and interlinking themes of poetic impersonality and what I term 'the extinction of Self'.[3]

The notion of poetic activity as being 'opposite to persuasion' yet still implicated in 'the affairs of the world', and of the poet, however bound in his own internal 'quarrel', as having an inescapable bond with humanity, seems to bear significantly on core concerns of this thesis. Neither Lewis nor Douglas is given to didactic 'persuasion', while each

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[1] Vernon Watkins, 'For Whom Does a Poet Write', in *Vernon Watkins on Dylan Thomas and Other Poets & Poetry*, selected and edited by Gwen Watkins and Jeff Towns (Cardigan: Parthian, 2013), pp. 136-140 (pp. 136-137).

[2] See Desmond Graham, *Keith Douglas 1920-1944* (London: Oxford University Press, 1974), and John Pikoulis, *Alun Lewis: A Life* (Bridgend: Seren Press, 1991).

[3] The term, as quoted, derives from the title of this thesis, and is therefore shown here within quotation marks. However, throughout the thesis, the concepts of Self and of Otherness are key elements. Wherever Self, Other or Otherness are capitalized, this is to indicate my use of these terms in their more generalized and often pluralistic context. In those instances where these words are presented in lower case, they relate to a specific self, other or otherness identifiable as a specific persona or point of focus within the text under consideration.

articulates his 'own quarrel', deeply inflected with complex inner contestation and self-division. In this personal complexity they are similar, and in their creative impulse to give voice to disruptions felt within. They share, too, certain preoccupations, such as: a struggle to understand the correlation and ontological border between life and death; the conflict between notions of Self and Otherness; and the dislocations of estrangement and exile, all elements that will be addressed in the following chapters. As I propose to show, each demonstrated an avowed commitment to express artistic 'Truth', while also responding to the need to find a unique and new poetic register. However, in the context of Watkins's remarks, these comparable preoccupations arise, not only from innate predispositions, but from tensions between the poets' respective roles and complicity in 'affairs of the world', as agents of war and/or imperialist discourse.

This thesis will therefore argue that the overarching concepts of 'impersonality' and 'extinction of self' that frame my study do not preclude the 'bond' that ties the poets to a wider vision of humanity. Accordingly, primarily through close analysis of their poetry, I will explore what I regard as certain parallels in their predilections and stylistic trajectories. I will argue that Douglas's apparent detachment, and his commitment to what he called his 'extrospective' stance,[4] mask, but do not negate the poetic persona's understanding of and complicity in the human loss and ethical cost of war. Alongside this, I will trace a growth of poetic objectivity and movement outwards from the purely subjective in Lewis's work, a development of his negative capability to combine engagement and detachment while revealing, within this paradox, an enlargement of his cosmic understanding and compassion. My contention, therefore, is that there are shared stylistic and ethical impulses in the poetry of Lewis and Douglas, and that close critical analysis of their work uncovers a significant

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[4] In his letter to J.C. Hall dated 10 June 1943, Douglas wrote that the obligation of the poet as witness to war required a new register. He stated, "reportage and extrospective (if the word exists) poetry [...] seems to me the sort that has to be written just now". See Keith Douglas, *The Letters*, ed. Desmond Graham (Manchester: Carcanet, 2000), p. 287.

commonality in their dialectical struggles, internal contestations that paradoxically constitute the core of their disruptive and creative energies. It shows, too, that despite such contestations, each poet strove to speak –as Ronald Blythe states – 'as wholly and truthfully as he could from out of the one inviolate spot of an otherwise violated order, his own identity'.[5]

I will place my study in the context of extant critical readings which, though largely not comparative in method, raise pertinent observations that warrant further expansion in a sustained, comparative examination. Certain readings signal apparently marked differences between the two poets, but may also bring to light shared poetic resonances and a common focus. Adam Piette, for instance, regards Lewis's work as

> caught between twin responsibilities: to graph the small components of the scene – his individual emotional experience as he travelled towards India and Burma and the Japanese enemy – and to interpret those experiences on a world scale. [...] At times, in his letters, he attempts to disengage his poetry from the international politics of warfare, yet the entanglement of the personal and the superpolitical forms part of the creative/self-destructive energy of his war work, a systolic fluctuation between morbidly absorbed inwardness and charged collective significance.[6]

By contrast, he identifies Douglas as more 'cold hearted and chillingly gifted', displaying a fascination with 'long-range killing' that is expressed with 'William-like boisterousness, as well as an anaesthetizing cynical energy that disinvests the infliction of death of any of the normal range of human responses'.[7] He thus observes a stylistic correspondence between the Second World War's 'key vectors of modernity and mobility' and Douglas's 'cold-blooded and symptomatic writing',[8] recognizing a more defined preoccupation with the 'new killing technologies of warfare' and their poetic expression in 'the astringent idiom of reportage [...]

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[5] Ronald Blythe, in 'Introduction' to *Components of the Scene: Stories, Poems, and Essays of the Second World War*, ed. Ronald Blythe (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966), pp. 13-24 (p. 15).
[6] Adam Piette, 'War Poetry in Britain', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Literature of World War II*, ed. by Marina Mackay (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 13-25 (p. 18).
[7] Piette, *Cambridge Companion*, p. 18.
[8] *Ibid.*, p. 19.

colluding in the technologizing impersonality of death'.[9] This, like other critical readings to which I will refer, provides inarguably astute insight into qualities that separate the two poets. However, in the context of my intended argument, Piette's comments illuminate similarity as much as difference. I will contend that Keith Douglas's poetry, like Lewis's, also looks beyond the 'small components of the scene'. So often he subverts his speaker's apparent ethical distance from the details of desert carnage to implicate the reader as witness, both to 'the infliction of death', and, in the undertow of language, to a coded but engaged human and ethically conscious response. In this respect, I seek to challenge a range of critical readings, including Piette's, that – to adapt the latter's expression – suggest Douglas's 'disinvestment' of normal human responsiveness. I shall illustrate that, just as Lewis felt the 'systolic' fluctuation between his 'otherness' and his compassion for the arid, indifferent harshness of India, for instance, so Douglas reveals an interplay of impersonal disengagement and personal complicity in the human waste and painful loss that constitutes war. As I will show, it is in such interplay that the 'creative/self-destructive energy' of the work of both Douglas and Lewis can be found.

Within the comparative rationale of this thesis, operating a bipartite structure to each chapter which alternates between Douglas and Lewis in paired sections, the central aim is to examine the extent to which their poetry reveals the shared tensions of impersonal detachment and an inalienable engagement with the experiences they seek to articulate, thus exposing a number of competing impulses and perspectives within the texts considered. I will argue that this constitutes a foundational ambivalence that imbues the work of both poets, though in different degrees. The aim is to show that what has frequently been read, particularly in Douglas's desert poetry, as a callous detachment of the speaking voice, does not constitute a complete disengagement or 'extinction' of 'self'. Rather, his work enacts a

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[9]*Ibid.*, p. 23.

skilfully coded testament to inner contestations. While seeming to express the dispassionate efficiency of the soldier-killer, it carries an undertone of perpetrator guilt, expressed through subtly controlled perceptual shifts and competing voices audible in the interstices of language.

By comparison, the aim is to demonstrate the presence of related tensions in the poetry of Alun Lewis, not to suggest clear stylistic parallels, but to uncover competing elements in his work that betray impulses shared with those of Keith Douglas, including a central struggle between the tug of engagement with, and the traction of detachment from, the object of his focus. Lewis's poetry, particularly but not solely in his work produced in transit to and within India, reveals a growth in the objectivity of his focus, in its capacity to articulate and objectify the 'components of the scene'[10] without intrusive mediation of the subjective voice, yet still making the latter heard. I maintain that it is audible, either in the 'spaces between' words, or in juxtaposed shifts of perspective. Accordingly, I contend that this constitutes grounds for comparison with Douglas's stylistic mode in that, for both poets, detachment becomes a seemingly impersonalizing device that ultimately betrays rather than extinguishes the presence of a divided self.

The concept of self-division becomes pivotal in tracing this development. Focusing primarily upon the poetry, I will explore the contiguity between textual inscriptions of fractured identity in the writing of Lewis and Douglas, and uncover the relationship of similar manifestations of inner fragmentation to a shared need, both to unify and concurrently unburden the poetic self of its dialectical struggle. Moreover, this shared need is reflected in discernibly oppositional voices in their work. Both poets, though in differing degrees, manifest a predilection for ambivalent detachment: each submits to the need to give poetic

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[10] The expression is taken from a poem by Donald Bain, himself a poet of the Second World War. The opening line reads, 'We in our haste can only see the small components of the scene'. See Donald Bain, 'War Poet', *Penguin New Writing 21* (1944), p. 150, l. 1. Adam Piette's use of the term appears to be a conscious reference to this line.

testimony as an objective re-imagining of wartime experience. However, I will show that any seemingly distanced stance is increasingly subverted by a contradictory, compassionate engagement with the human suffering confronted by the poetic persona, thereby exposing the speaker's vestigial sense of moral responsibility for, and complicity in, wrongdoing.

Linked to this argument, the thesis will examine these manifestations as expressions of a pluralistic Otherness, exploring their location in Lewis's and Douglas's work as textual tensions and often anguished configurations of existential un-fixity. It will analyse both poets' recursive configurations of Otherness in various forms, including their expressions of estrangement from the anchorage of 'home' or a 'beloved' as the exilic soldier's geographical and psychic displacement; as the ethical uncertainty and implicit self-interrogation of the perpetrator or survivor in war; as an ambivalent agent of imperialist hegemony; or – more significantly – as a composite of any or all of these. I will therefore seek to demonstrate the relationship that exists between such often warring shards of self-division and the stylistic trajectory evident in the creative output of both poets.

Through comparative analysis, the fraught nature of Douglas's and Lewis's increasingly fragile selfhood will be revealed as being inextricably bound up in their respective quests to discover a unique, personal poetic register which demonstrates a commitment to personal truth, rather than to expression of the prevailing political discourses of war. For Douglas, as for Lewis, personal truth is not extinguished by poetic modes of coded impersonality, framed in apparent indifference or self-distancing. Rather, for both poets, modes of detachment paradoxically act to illuminate a disturbingly personal involvement and complicity in acts of war, or to reveal the inefficacy of outmoded imperialism.

Within this framework, I trace evidence of these issues of identity, ambivalence, inner contestation and stylistic propensities in the earlier writings of both men, alongside their later,

mature work, bolstered by insights afforded by a selection of their prose writings and letters. Biographical details of the lives of Douglas and Lewis, predominantly derived from the respective studies of Graham and Pikoulis, will feature where they seem relevant to my argument, though circumscribed with caution.[11] My focus is upon the body of poetic text as the primary object of analysis and comparison, not upon the life of the author. The text itself, however inflected with authorial pain, joy, turbulence, or moments of transcendent sublimation, remains, as Alan Vaughan Jones posits, 'a process of [...] mediation, of intervention'.[12]

The aforementioned aims themselves imply the questions from which they germinate, of course, ranging widely but interdependently. In what form and to what extent do the poetic impulses of Douglas and Lewis correspond with each other? What is the underlying nature, purpose and effect of Douglas's acknowledged stylistic impersonality? To what degree is his impersonality comparable with Lewis's growing impulse for poetic objectivity? With what justification can one attribute to these writers a seemingly paradoxical, mutual predilection for both poetic detachment and engagement? Does their work suggest parallel ontological and epistemological concerns with death, intertwined with a desire for self-extinction, either literal or as dissolution of fragmented identity, or both? What bearing do perceived dialectical tensions, ambivalence and competing impulses in their poetry have upon a comparative reading? How important are these tensions as signifiers of a shared need to discover an individual poetic voice? These core questions underpin my analysis, but they give rise to diverse and related issues, and demand a methodological framework which draws upon theories of trauma, poetic testimony, and exilic location. Within this framework, attention is also paid to psychoanalytical theories, and to postcolonial perspectives as they relate to Lewis's ambivalent experiences of the Indian sub-continent.

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[11] See Graham, *Keith Douglas*, and Pikoulis, *A Life.*
[12] See Alan Vaughan Jones, 'Modalities of Cultural Identity in the Writings of Idris Davies and Alun Lewis' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Aberystwyth University, 2010), p. 5.

Chapter 1 forms the foundational block of my study in which, by examination of primary sources, predominantly poetry, I investigate the nature of Keith Douglas's impersonality, followed by a discussion of a comparable stylistic development in the work of Alun Lewis. In Part 1, Keith Douglas's impersonal stance is revealed, not as a callous escape from emotion, but as his controlled, partial submergence of an underlying personal response, evident in skilful shifts of focus and subtle linguistic hints that mediate and subvert the speaker's ostensible detachment. This generates a creative ambivalence: it constitutes both Douglas's deep-rooted, 'organic' propensity for the management of personal sensitivities, including muted compassion or perpetrator guilt as poet-soldier-killer, and a poetic strategy by means of which a 'distanced voice' offers oblique but essential insight into the hinterland of humane feeling. The strategy is not simply a self-protective mechanism, but is evidence of Douglas's declared commitment to speak of 'true things' as poetic witness to his own agency in war.[13] In this argument, as with all the ensuing chapters, I relate my viewpoint to germane critical readings, including those I seek to challenge either wholly or in part.

Part 2 of the chapter, again primarily through close analysis of the poetry, seeks to establish evidence of impersonality in the work of Alun Lewis, not as an identical stylistic predilection, but as a comparable creative impulse to give primacy to the objective realities of re-imagined experience over the subjective 'self'. As with Douglas, this can be read as an aspect of 'the extinction of Self', whilst at the same time indicating Lewis's expanding negative capability, evident in his capacity to encompass both detachment from, and engagement in, the human condition that commands his focus.

In this chapter, I investigate the notion of Otherness as a constituent of the struggle that pervades the work of both writers, either to resolve a sense of divided identity, or, in Lewis's case, both to shed the burdened, known self, and to find its renewal in some kind of

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[13] In August, 1943, Douglas told his friend, J. C. Hall, that his intention as a poet was only to 'write true things'. See letter 283 [fragment], dated 10 August, 1943, in *Douglas: The Letters*, pp. 294-295 (p. 295).

liberating transcendence. Douglas's and Lewis's representations of Otherness are therefore seen as a further dimension of the concept of 'extinction of Self', often emerging as a dialogic voice. However, I conceive of Otherness pluralistically, not solely in terms of configurations of an alter ego as revealed in Douglas's work, but as a liminal or defamiliarizing response to place, as an aspect of estrangement from those one loves, or even as a desired state, removed from inner burden.

Chapter 1 also places the work of Lewis and Douglas in relation to the poetry of the First World War. I contend that, however conscious of past traditions or indebted to poets they deeply admired, Lewis and Douglas sought to express their experience in a new and personal poetic register. In Desmond Graham's words, this represents a desire to articulate '[n]ew potentialities of expressiveness', while maintaining the imperative for the reader to share in the act of witnessing.[14] Furthermore, the concepts of poetic testimony and of the poetic-witness form important strands in this chapter, not least in terms of the balance each poet is seen to give to artistic objectivity and subjective re-imaginings of his experience. Desmond Graham states:

> The Second World War and Auschwitz have often been said to have silenced the poet, to have gone beyond words, too big to encompass, too terrible to find expression for: the war could not, above all, be expressed in poetry. [...] Time has shown, or rather the poets have shown, quite the opposite to be the case. The need to break silence, to give witness, to relieve memory, to lament, cry out and question [...] has proved a positive aid to reaching towards the experience of war.[15]

As this thesis will show, the work of Lewis and Douglas reaches beyond a response to war alone, but Graham's words provide an apt introduction to what Chapter 1 seeks to explore. It examines impersonality, not as an expression of silence, nor as the subjugation of the poetic voice, but as a conduit for the exposure and, perhaps, relief or purgation of the 'quarrel' within the speaking 'self'.

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[14] See Desmond Graham, 'Introduction' [1997], in *Poetry of the Second World War: An International Anthology*, ed. by Desmond Graham (London: Pimlico, 1998), pp. 1-5 (p. 1).
[15] *Ibid*.

Chapter 2 takes up the nature of the internal struggle that emerges in the poetry of both Douglas and Lewis as a paradoxically disruptive and creative dialectical tension. It identifies the common concern of both poets to rid themselves of those competing elements of selfhood that constitute their unfixed identity. Beginning with an examination of Douglas's poetry, I analyse what he recognized as his vexatious inner 'beast', his 'bête noire',[16] which appears recursively in his poetry as a protean configuration of self-division. Using Douglas's own fragmented attempts to define this figure of shifting alterity, the chapter traces poetic evidence of what he identified as its pervasive 'tracks',[17] its presence in his writing as a subconscious, sometimes even conscious entity, that constitutes both an inescapable burden, and the source of his epistemological and ontological enquiry. Through close scrutiny of a selection of his poetry, this section therefore analyses the plurality of Douglas's configurations of Otherness, his 'beast', and the complex impulse underlying his writing: his need to articulate poetic testimony in response to his external war as a soldier-poet, and to resolve the internal battle to preserve and unify identity.

Theories of trauma are deployed in analysing the plurality of Douglas's 'beast', and the relationship between pain, poetic testimony, and the struggle to express the seemingly inexpressible is examined.[18] Part 2 of the chapter explores comparisons between Douglas's 'bête noire' and what Alun Lewis identifies as his 'enmity within'.[19] Both terms embody their authors' experiences of Otherness, the presence of which, in both Douglas's and Lewis's poetry, testifies to their shared need for self-unification, a need often overtly expressed, or otherwise discernible in the textual undertow. This section explores the nature

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[16] Douglas describes his 'black beast' and its disruptive impact as a constant poetic presence, elusive insofar as he cannot easily trap or expunge it, nor define it poetically, other than in fragments of 'the poem I can't write'. This admission is reproduced as 'Note on Drawing for the Jacket of *Bête Noire'*. See Douglas, *The Complete Poems*, p. 129.

[17] *Ibid*.

[18] Alongside a number of critical readings of the poetry studied, the chapter considers the relevance of a number of psychoanalytically based theories, including those of Cathy Caruth, Shoshana Felman and Ken Wilber.

[19] The expression is taken from a line in Alun Lewis's poem, 'The Jungle' (1944), in which he writes of 'The greater enmity within ourselves'. See Alun Lewis, *Collected Poems*, pp. 155-158 (p. 156, l. 56).

and presence of Lewis's 'enmity' as a poetic articulation of disturbed and divided identity, uncovering evidence of parallels between his expression of internal and external contestation, and the multifaceted Otherness identified in Douglas's work. This examination also identifies and explores ambivalences, instabilities and dialectical tensions within Lewis's writing which correlate with those suggested in Douglas's poetry.

As in my analysis of Douglas's work, this section draws upon biographical evidence relevant to Lewis's poetry. However, analysis of the texts themselves remains the primary focus. In their evocations of pain, or guilt, of the threat and apparent allure of death, or of the quest for meaning set against vexing uncertainties, Lewis's configurations of his 'enmity within' are seen to echo Douglas's paradoxically creative/destructive images of disturbance, thus prompting again the use of insights derived from trauma theory. Although Lewis's poetry is less concerned to confront or question the nature and act of killing than Douglas's, ontological enquiry into the border between life and death inflects the poetry of each of these writers, with apparently inescapable persistence.

Chapter 3 engages in more depth with this mutual epistemological concern with the balance between life and death. It investigates a common impulse in the writing of Douglas and Lewis for the expression of the coalescence of these existential modalities, and examines the relationship between this shared predilection and the notion of the 'shedding' or 'extinction' of the known self. Dealing with examples of Douglas's poetry, bolstered by attention to his prose fiction, and his wartime journal,[20] Part 1 analyses some of his early work and later 'desert' writings as indicative of such preoccupations, including evidence that suggests a fascination with pre-imaginings of his own death. It goes on to examine representations of Douglas's seemingly eschatological impulse to survey the dead with almost forensic precision, and to do so in terms that suggest the poet-speaker's callous,

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[20] See Keith Douglas, *Alamein to Zem Zem*, ed. and introduced by Desmond Graham, ([first published by Editions Poetry, 1946] London: Faber and Faber, 1992).

clinical detachment. As already indicated, Douglas's language and impersonalizing tones are frequently read as poetic evidence of a desire to explore death while seeming to suspend emotional or ethical engagement. However, my analysis examines such disengagement as a deception, as a strategy that testifies to the physical detritus and killing mechanisms of war, but which holds, in poetic counterpoise, an undercurrent of humane engagement. I therefore present a reading of Douglas's desert poetry as a coded and frequently dialogic expression of perpetrator guilt and complicity, as well as witness testimony, interwoven with the poet's stylistic and perhaps inherent predisposition to distance the self.

In Part 2, the chapter focuses upon Alun Lewis's comparable quest to probe the relationship between life and death, and to give voice to epistemological and ontological concerns that echo those of Keith Douglas. Like Douglas, though differently expressed and without a comparable focus on the act of wartime killing, Lewis reveals in his writing a fascination with death that at times borders on a desired consummation. This is set alongside a pervasive and intensifying preoccupation with a transcendent yet simple state of 'Being', perhaps attainable through death itself, or through an undefined yet alluringly mystical process of self-extinction. Close attention is given to Lewis's pluralistic, metonymically configured trope of 'darkness' which takes diverse forms: as the poet's articulations of a quest for existential meaning; as a self-annihilating alternative to estrangement and solitary suffering; as a recession of the textually placed, subjective self; as the desire to expose and shed a self that is increasingly burdened with its complicity in ethically suspect or outmoded imperialism; or, simply, as the final oblivion of death. However, combined with scrutiny of shifting significations within his representations of 'darkness', this section traces what I perceive as a growth in Lewis's poetic objectivity. Through an examination of the poems that he wrote during his time in India, a skilful stylistic paradox emerges, namely Lewis's expression of an enlargement in compassion for the poverty of a beautiful yet arid sub-

continent which, to him, 'is like acid in the brain',[21] and a simultaneous subordination of the subjective, poetic self.

Chapter 4 concludes this thesis by examining the significance of exile to Douglas and Lewis, both as an internal experience, and as physical estrangement in their experience of new territories and defamiliarizing space. In that much of the poetry of both writers is fundamentally located in the abnormal psychological landscape of War, my concern is to determine how their respective experiences of estrangement, exilic dislocation and displacement are registered, mainly but not exclusively in the poetry, and with what degree of commonality. The chapter attempts to show the relationship between the concept of the 'exilic self', and the arterial concern of this thesis with the impersonalizing trajectories of Lewis's and Douglas's poetic style, the dual axis of their detachment and engagement, and with the paradoxically creative efficacy of their perceived internal crises. The confluence of notions of exile, of Otherness, and of 'the extinction of Self', therefore remains apposite to the chapter's development and forms the core of its conclusion.

Fundamental to this chapter are theories of the exilic nature of writing, notably those of Edward Said, Theodor Adorno and Julia Kristeva. These theories are seen as pertinent both to the poets' respective experiences of wartime exile, and – as in Lewis's case – to earlier poetry such as 'The Mountain over Aberdare' (1941), in which he recalls, with an ambivalent sense of belonging and liminal detachment, the Amman Valley, his place of origin. Close attention is paid to analysis of the poetic voice across a range of work, as a medium of self-distancing, and for expression of the tensions of liminality and belonging. The configuration of exilic space in the work of both Keith Douglas and Alun Lewis is examined as a system of competing perspectives, and of negotiation between absence and

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[21] In an article published in the *New Statesman,* dated 1 May 1943, Alun Lewis wrote the following: 'Born and bred in South Wales, I thought I knew the face of poverty, but the poverty of India is like acid in the brain'. These words reappear within the full text under the article's original title, 'Stones for Bread', in Alun Lewis, *A Miscellany of his Writings,* ed. by John Pikoulis (Bridgend: Poetry Wales Press, 1982), pp. 159-162 (p.161).

presence, between distanced recollections of the familiar and the changed realities of the 'now'. Lewis's ambivalent relationship to Wales, and to India, exemplifies these complex perspectives: each of these places becomes, for him, the locus of a dual response, perhaps reflected in the words of Dannie Abse, who writes of a return to his hometown, Cardiff, thus:

> and still I love the place for what I wanted it to be
> as much as for what it unashamedly is
> now for me, a city of strangers, alien and bleak.[22]

Abse's duality echoes Lewis's divided responses both to India and the Welsh valley from which war demanded his absence. Once again, this raises issues of self-division as it is expressed through the poetic persona and, in Douglas's case particularly, as a confrontation with the surreal nature of desert war and exilic space.

Pivotally placed here is a reading of a selection of poems in which the trauma of separation fuses, either with an exilic longing for the beloved, or with expressions of residual guilt and pain arising from severance from past loves. In Part 2 of the chapter, Lewis's poetry is shown to reveal what I term an 'inter-flux of selves', a manifestation both of instability in the poetic 'identity', and of a concomitant need to seek existential unification with, or in, the absent beloved. Furthermore, in examining Lewis's Indian writings, Part 2 re-addresses examples of Lewis's work as an ambivalent and ethically disturbed response to the imperialist presence.

Chapter 4 thus shows a degree of parallelism in the way that Douglas and Lewis respond to exile as a condition of mind, as confrontation with defamiliarizing space, or as a destabilizing sense of Otherness, caught between oppositional cultures. In the writing of both poets, exilic space is also configured as a phenomenological site in which the present is recursively haunted by the ghosts of one's past. Confrontation with the topographies of place

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[22] Dannie Abse, 'Return to Cardiff' [1961], in *Dannie Abse: Collected Poems 1948-1976* (London: Hutchinson, 1977), pp. 51-52 (p. 51, ll. 17-19).

and mind in the present repeatedly appear to mobilize re-visitations of the past, thus investing the poetry with a dual perspective.

My 'Conclusion' draws together the thematic foci of these chapters, not to suggest that they reveal a total synergy in the work of Douglas and Lewis, but that they are indicative of deeply significant, shared concerns. This attempt to be the first thesis to compare their writings reveals commonalities that extend beyond the poets' mutual experience as soldiers of the Second World War. Close critical scrutiny inevitably highlights differences, but also confirms the marked interdependence of the internal division, existential vulnerabilities and dialectical conflict that freight their work, and their observably parallel stylistic impulses. Their common, root desire is to find a unique poetic voice that constitutes 'Truth', not as an engagement with contemporary politics, but as a personal, artistic response to the internal and external realities of wartime existence and the dislocations it demands, and as a simultaneously objective expression of the ethical cost or uncertainties war generates.

Douglas's poetic 'impersonality' emerges as a skilfully coded ambivalence and only partially concealed 'critique' of the complicity of the poetic voice in the experiences it articulates. A comparable impulse is evident in Lewis's work, similar in that close scrutiny confirms the presence of ambivalent responses in the subjective voice, and a parallel propensity for the interplay of engagement with and detachment from the 'world' to which he responds. In affirming this, the 'Conclusion' suggests that such a reading may be justification for further examination of poetry of the Second World War, and of poetic responses to subsequent conflicts, as articulations of what I call 'an aesthetic of complicity'.

Review of the Critical Field

The scope of this review is defined by the relevance of the critical perspectives discussed to the primary focus of my thesis. Accordingly, it concentrates on criticism that illuminates perceptions of the dominant impulses and stylistic development in the poetry of Keith Douglas and Alun Lewis, and their relation to the inner tensions and fragmentation of identity that posed a constant threat to them while paradoxically serving to source their creativity and shape the idiom of their expression. My approach is to indicate the core of my own argument as it relates to these critical standpoints.

Part 1: Keith Douglas: Poetic Impersonality and New Registers

In 1984, following a poll of its members, the Poetry Society found that Keith Douglas was held to be among its top ten most favoured poets. This was affirmation of a reputation that had taken years to emerge, not for reasons of slow poetic development but because, having been born in January 1920, Douglas was not immediately likely to come to the forefront of a literary generation in which the work of T.S. Eliot, W. H. Auden, and Dylan Thomas burgeoned and dominated the consciousness of the readership. Critical reception only exists in relation to the accessibility of the artist's output, and the fact that the first publication of the *Collected Poems* (1951) disappeared immediately from circulation and was not reprinted was an ominous beginning.[1] This was followed by a period of limited publication of handfuls of poems in American anthologies, but this generated some interest, enough to prompt Faber and Faber to publish a selection in 1964 with what is now regarded as a seminally insightful introduction by Ted Hughes, followed by a new *Collected Poems* in 1966.[2] The publication of Desmond Graham's definitive biography of Douglas in 1974 stimulated the former to edit a *Complete Poems* in 1978.[3] The 2000 edition of the latter, with an updated introduction by Ted Hughes, is that from which all quotations from Douglas's poetry cited in this thesis are drawn.[4] It is from this slowly developing exposure of his poetry to a responsive readership that a body of critical commentary evolves, arriving at Douglas's present reputation which, with little reservation, commonly places him amongst the finest poets to emerge from the Second World War.

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[1] Keith Douglas, *Collected Poems: Keith Douglas*, John Waller and G.S. Fraser, eds (London: Editions Poetry, London Ltd., 1951).

[2] Keith Douglas, *Selected Poems,* ed. with an 'Introduction' by Ted Hughes (London: Faber and Faber, 1964), pp. i-xiv). The later publication is Keith Douglas, *Collected Poems*, John Waller, G. S. Fraser and J. C. Hall, eds, with an 'Introduction' by Edmund Blunden (London: Faber and Faber, 1966).

[3] Desmond Graham, *Keith Douglas 1920-1944: A Biography* (London: Oxford University Press, 1974). The subsequent publication referred to is Keith Douglas, *Complete Poems,* 'Introduction' by Ted Hughes, (London: Oxford University press, 1978).

[4] See Keith Douglas, *The Complete Poems*, ed. by Desmond Graham, with an 'Introduction' by Ted Hughes, 2nd edn (London: Oxford University Press, 1987). The later edition referred to is *The Complete Poems,* with a revised 'Introduction' [1987] by Ted Hughes, 4th edn (London: Faber and Faber, 2000).

In June, 1944, Keith Douglas was killed in action near St. Pierre, Normandy, at the age of 24. Unsurprisingly, therefore, despite his poetic precocity and known output stemming from as early as 1934, his oeuvre is relatively small, however distinguished. The critical attention that his work has received is also disappointingly slight in quantity and comprises only two book length studies, one of which is the aforementioned biography which developed from Graham's PhD thesis at Leeds University.[5] Nevertheless, the criticism available, mainly as reviews, journal essays, or chapters dealing generically with war writing, sheds useful light in the context of my thesis, although I take issue with some of it. However, apart from relatively incidental points of comparison or collective appraisal of Douglas, Sidney Keyes (1922-1943) and Alun Lewis (1915-1944) as 'war poets', there is little in the way of detailed, lengthy comparative study that focuses specifically on the two writers who occupy my focus.

In Chapter 2 of this thesis I examine Keith Douglas's notion of his 'bête noire' as a figure of alterity and plurality that disrupts his sense of identity and which emerges as an invasive presence in much of his poetry. In his Chatterton Lecture of 1956, G. S. Fraser posited that one should read all Douglas's poems in the light of 'Bête Noire', the poetic fragments Douglas never unified into a completed poem but which articulate his enervating self-division and creative impulse to grasp and define selfhood.[6] Fraser's perception of what he sees as a 'deep obsession'[7] buttresses his conclusion that Douglas was constantly seeking a language and a poetic form that would make the intractable tractable, and would encompass his experience of inner and outer contestations without succumbing to overt emotionalism.

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[5] Desmond Graham, 'A Critical Study of the Writings of Keith Douglas, 1920-1944' (doctoral thesis, Leeds University, 1969).

[6] G. S. Fraser, 'Keith Douglas: A Poet of the Second World War', Chatterton Lecture on an English Poet for the British Academy, 1956, read on 14 March, 1956; from the *Proceedings of the British Academy*, XLII (London: Oxford University Press) in George Fraser, *Essays on Twentieth Century Poets* (Leicester University Press, 1977), pp. 215 -233 (p. 224). Fraser is referring to the eponymous term used in Douglas, 'The Bête Noire Fragments', *The Complete Poems*, pp. 126-127.

[7] Fraser, *British Academy Proceedings*, p. 224.

Fraser's analysis, though spanning only thirty-four pages, offers valuable early insight into Douglas's progression towards stylistic detachment, an objective precision of statement that amounts to a technique of aesthetic distancing and, speaking of '*Vergissmeinnicht*' (1943), an 'impression of icy pity'.[8] The paper, perhaps excusably in view of the brevity and scope of a lecture format, fails to go beyond this. It omits to explore Douglas's intimations of the human loss that lie submersed beneath his tone of calm detachment, his subtle subversion of the apparent impersonality on which the poem is constructed. However, the recognition of a quality that I see as central to the deflections and controlled deceptions of Douglas's style is there in well-formed embryo, clearly nourishing Fraser's belief in the poet's potential to have become a highly individualistic and 'dominating figure of his generation'.[9]

Fraser's appraisal of Keith Douglas represents an important response to a body of work that had been otherwise largely ignored, but, notwithstanding this critical contribution, it is commonly recognized that it was Ted Hughes, in his 1964 introduction to the *Selected Poems*, who truly rediscovered the worth of a largely forgotten poet, one in whose work he perceived a response to war and 'the ray cast by death' as its 'unifying generalization'.[10] He discerns the poetic voice of a man foresuffering his own death but, even more significantly, one who is a 'renovator of language', a poet 'infusing every word with a burning exploratory freshness of mind' that is evident even in early juvenilia but brought to maturity by his 'ideal subject', war.[11]

It is his focus on the trenchancy of Douglas's language that dominates Hughes's critical view, further developed to expand on the nature of the poet's stylistic impersonality in the later introduction to a second edition of *The Complete Poems* in 1987. Here, Hughes's insight extends to Douglas's 'spiritual or rather psychic exercise, a moral exercise', his

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[8] *Ibid.,* p. 230. Fraser refers to '*Vergissmeinicht*', reproduced in Douglas, *The Complete Poems*, p. 118.
[9] *Ibid*., p. 232.
[10] Hughes, 'Introduction' to *Selected Poems* (1964), pp. i-xiv (p. xiii).
[11] *Ibid*., p. x-xi.

unrelenting concern to confront reality as truth, unfettered by sentiment but, instead, sustaining a controlled stylistic detachment.[12] He praises Douglas's appetite for life, while acknowledging loneliness as the heart of his 'existential temper'.[13] In this there is clear penetration to Douglas's sense of separation and his tenuous inner balance which Hughes calls 'his frailty of equilibrium', traceable throughout his life, but he fails to probe further into this dialectical tension within the poetry itself.[14] Instead, perhaps too closely attentive to biographical factors, he simplifies the complexity to what I consider a reductive statement: he regards Douglas's 'inner drama' as 'germane to the poems' but 'shaped [...] around the conflict between one or two tortuous love affairs and the claims of Army life'.[15] Furthermore, although he acknowledges Douglas as revealing, from an early age, an awareness of 'having to manage inside himself some extra thing that was almost unmanageable',[16] he neglects to explore this beyond a presentiment of death to what I argue as a more complex 'beast', the 'black care' within, and which becomes for Douglas the core of 'the poem I can't write'.[17] He recognizes the experience of both killing and being killed as crucial to Douglas's psyche and to his 'stylized alienation' but emphasises this in the context of a determination to confront 'annihilation and meaninglessness'.[18] This is entirely valid, but its primacy in the argument is at the cost of ignoring what I perceive as the human loss and the understated but detectable compassion, or the intimation of personal guilt and complicity, that the poetic voice so often articulates beneath the apparent impersonality. Hughes argues that there is in Douglas no 'religious depth of compassion uniting him to all men'.[19] By implication, the denial of 'religious depth', taken at face value, may be

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[12] Hughes, 'Introduction' [1987] to Douglas, *The Complete Poems* (2000), pp. xvii-xxxiii (p. xix).

[13] *Ibid*., p. xxiii.

[14] *Ibid*., p. xxi.

[15] *Ibid*.

[16] *Ibid.*

[17] Douglas, 'Note on Drawing for the Jacket of *Bête Noire*' (original italics), in *The Complete Poems* [2000], pp. 129-130, (p. 129).

[18] Ted Hughes, 'Introduction' [1987] to, *The Complete Poems* (2000), pp. xxx and xxiii respectively.

[19] *Ibid*., p. xxiii.

defensible, but the suggestion of disconnection from humanity is not so. It is this that I explore as an ethical responsibility and consciousness detectable within Douglas's mediating lens of detachment.

In a 1964 journal article for *Stand*, Geoffrey Hill, while neglecting to pursue the crucial aspect of Douglas's inner fracture identified by Fraser, but clearly stimulated by Hughes's earlier 1964 commentary, continued to focus on the poet's quest for the best poetic idiom.[20] He identifies – though does not expand upon – the tensions of opposing meanings and the undertow of submersed guilt and even implicit compassion and sense of a soldier-poet's complicity as a killer/perpetrator that my own thesis explores. With rather reserved deference in response to Ted Hughes's understanding, he focuses primarily on Douglas's articulation of the soldier's 'alien existence' as being a faint gesture towards a 'unifying generalization' rather than the expression of a 'collective consciousness' in his core experience.[21] Like Hughes, in seeing war as a test of Douglas's negative capability he is fully justified, but this seems to be accompanied by a limiting inattention to the poet's controlled shifts and concealed humanity beneath the mask of impersonality and dispassion, a quality that I perceive as a dialogic voice within so much of the desert poetry. Furthermore, Fraser's earlier lead in identifying the 'beast' as an omnipresent Other receives no development, only barely touched upon in terms of the soldier as killer. In some ways, Hill offers an ambivalent view, on the one hand recognizing Douglas's recursive use of metaphors to express the alienating experience of war alongside a personal quest for its truth, yet on the other failing to see this as a possible 'unifying generalization'. Perhaps this aligns with his central belief that it is restrictive to see Douglas predominantly as a 'war poet', even though he seems to decentre this view in acknowledging the poet's strenuous efforts to find a language that

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[20] Geoffrey Hill, "'I in Another Place": Homage to Keith Douglas"', in *Stand,* 6.4 (1964/65), 6-13.
[21] Hill, *Stand* (1964/65), 6-7.

provides 'an absolute definition of experience' and an idiom 'capable of the most direct transmission of the experiences of that war'.[22]

Desmond Graham's invaluable and authoritative 1974 biography reflects what I pursue as a central argument, namely that there was '[no] need of war to make [Douglas] either a soldier or poet' as its attractions and repulsions were already the constituents of his inner dialectic.[23] Indeed, the author's use of 'Bête Noire Fragment D' as the book's epigraph seems a clear indication of the primacy he gives to the poet's intractable inner 'beast' which I examine in terms of its complexity and psychically invasive plurality. However, he explores this primarily in a biographical rather than a poetic context. His attention to Douglas's style and its development is framed within the context of the poet's early militaristic disposition, his fractured boyhood and its relationship both to fraught love affairs and their disappointments and to the fluctuations between action and inaction during army life.

My thesis draws on such observations when necessary but relates more closely to Graham's insights into what he calls a 'metaphysical exploratory style' in Douglas's response to war.[24] This is framed in relation to the keynote impersonality and 'disquieting detachment' of artistic distance that the biography treats as intrinsic to his poetic progress. Graham sees Douglas's impulse as an unstinting effort to 'close the gap [...] between the man and his work' but his own task as being 'to chart its proportions' with assiduous attention to biographical and epistolary evidence.[25] However, in achieving this and admirably delineating the poet's stylistic control, skilful irony and mastery of the impersonal stance, the breadth of the study omits to expand on what I perceive as a statement crucial to my own exploration. Graham comments that Douglas's 'reserve of feeling', which I take to be a reference to the reservoir of sensitivity within his impersonality, was something he 'expected no-one to

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[22] *Ibid*., p. 8.
[23] Graham, 'Preface' to *Keith Douglas*, p. ix.
[24] *Ibid*.
[25] *Ibid*., p. x.

understand, for he found difficulty in understanding it himself [...] what more there was to be seen could be found in what he wrote'.[26] This seems to be central to what I stress as Douglas's imperative for us to look with the speaker who observes the dead, who is the objective voice behind which there lie confessions of complicity or guilt as well as fascination. This is 'what can be seen', the 'more' beneath the surface. Graham's appreciation for Douglas's ability to 'dramatize himself and his experience, to impose on his own life his own symmetry' amounts to crystalline perception of an essential poetic quality.[27] However, other than a periodic discussion of what he regards as a 'not isolated' compassion and Douglas's propensity for 'reaching pity from the far side', he omits to explore this key observation further.[28] One cannot easily refute Graham's perceptions, only regret their immersion and relative understatement in the breadth of biography.

During the 1970s, there was a marked increase in critical interest in Douglas's work, largely characterized by a tendency to divine a psychological quest within the poetry. David Ormerod's 1978 article in *Ariel* reiterates Hill's emphasis on the poet's recursive attention to the same idea in terms of metaphor, though perceiving this as Douglas's apparent wish to seek a secure hold on identity whilst grappling with a projected other that exists both outside and within his persona.[29] Ormerod thus extends Fraser's attention to Douglas's 'beast' and his professed inability to write of it, other than in the fragments earlier described, so aiming to chart the evolution of a poetic sensibility in this context. His argument thereby becomes an essentialist examination of the writer's vexed Otherness that he terms a 'psychological impasse' in the 'speaking poet's' attempts to relate to 'external realities'.[30] This is clearly

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[26] *Ibid*., p. ix.
[27] *Ibid*., p. x.
[28] Graham, *Keith Douglas*, p. 198. Graham's observation is made within the context of a discussion of Douglas's poem, 'Enfidaville' (1943), which appears in Douglas, *The Complete Poems*, p. 116, and is expanded upon briefly in terms of a 'similar tenderness' that he discerns in a poem which appears in this volume, entitled 'Fragment' and annotated 'B', p. 115.
[29] David Ormerod, 'Keith Douglas and The Name of the Poem I Can't Write', *Ariel*: *A Review of International Literature*, 9.2 (April 1978), 3-22.
[30] Ormerod, *Ariel* (1978)*, p. 5.

relevant to my own focus on Douglas's inner disruption and its expression within the configurations of his haunting 'bête noire'. Ormerod develops this insight to illuminate the poet's stylistic impersonality and the manner of perceiving reality through metaphors that act as a mediating lens, distancing the objective reality of war and its human debris through gun-sights, a window, a reverse telescope or some other configuration. However, his revealing attention to the poetry's presentation of psychic barriers and Douglas's recurrent effort to 'transgress' them is accompanied by acknowledgement, rather than exploration, of a coolly implicit compassion but fails to examine the manner in which Douglas subverts his own detachment.[31] Furthermore, Ormerod's conclusion that the final poems reveal a poet moving from 'the certainty of his private self' is arguably misleading.[32] While Douglas eventually identified his fragmented self and its relationship to his inner 'beast', he ultimately decentres any certainties in the closing words of his last poem, 'On A Return From Egypt' (1944).[33] I believe this to be a reaffirmation of private uncertainty already residing within him.

In 1975, in his review of Graham's biography of Douglas, Roger Garfitt provides what I regard as an important expansion upon the nature of the poet's stylistic impulse and its expression.[34] While acknowledging Graham's biographical depth of insight, he is critical of what he perceives as an overemphasis on Douglas's impersonality as cerebral detachment: Garfitt alleges that Graham undervalues Douglas's irony by 'exaggerating its detachment and not perceiving the sometimes startling connections of feeling it makes possible', particularly in the early poems.[35] He adopts what may be termed a deconstructive approach and cites examples of Graham's apparent failure to excavate beneath the textual surface to the

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[31] *Ibid.*, p. 19

[32] *Ibid.*, p. 21.

[33] Douglas, 'On A Return From Egypt', in *The Complete Poems*. The poem appears on page 132, and in ll. 19-24, Douglas writes, 'The next month is a window / and with a crash I'll split the glass. / [...] I fear what I shall find'. A fuller discussion of this will appear later in Chapter 2 of this thesis.

[34] Roger Garfitt, 'Keith Douglas', a review of Desmond Graham, *Keith Douglas: A Biography*, in *Poetry Nation*, 4 (1975), <http://www.poetrymagazines.org.uk/magazine/record.asp?id=5959> [accessed 25 April 2012] pp. 1-4.

[35] Garfitt, 'Keith Douglas'.

poet's underlying sense of the indignity of death in war, and to see the poetic stance, seemingly detached, as a controlled device that can lead us into a muted but detectable pathos. In particular, he also censures Ian Hamilton's opinion developed in *A Poetry Chronicle* (1973), that Douglas's style owes much to the 'reticence' and apparent 'insensitivity' of public, military officer-class discourse.[36] Instead, he concurs with my own view, not of impersonality as a denial of feeling, but as a controlled strategy that subsumes the subjective voice in order to give primacy to objective testimony of human vulnerability in which, implicitly, the speaker shares. Garfitt's perspective is germane to my own trajectory, albeit confined to the limited scope of a brief though trenchant book review.

The spate of critical attention of the 1970s, though hardly consensual, tends towards continuation of the thread of arguments emanating from the responses of Hughes, Fraser and Hill. In 1974, while recognizing moral insights in some of Douglas's poems, Jon Glover's article, 'Person and Politics', focuses on Hill's view of the poet-soldier's alien existence as symptomatic of a somewhat romantic artistic isolationism, placed in the context of a historically stoical tradition.[37] However, in identifying in the poetry an unemotive, distinctively withdrawn voice, Glover rather sanitizes and underplays his excavation of ethical tension within such works as 'Landscape with Figures, 1, 2 and 3' (1943), in which he detects the 'roots of a personal guilt', or the 'moral complexity' he discerns in a somewhat passing reference to 'How to Kill' (1943).[38] He argues that war both enforced Douglas's alienation and drove his feelings about killing and being killed to the foreground of his imagination. However, he sees their presence in Douglas's work predominantly in terms of a conflict between personal, temporal involvement and a wider historical awareness of the

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[36] Ian Hamilton, 'The Forties' [1964], *A Poetry Chronicle*, *Essays and Reviews* (London: Faber and Faber, 1973), pp. 55-66 (p. 62).

[37] Jon Glover, 'Person and Politics: Commitment in the Forties', *Poetry Nation*, 3 (1974), <http://www.poetry magazines.org.uk/magazine/record.asp?id=4582> [accessed 22 June 2012], pp. 1-8.

[38] Glover, *Poetry Nation*, p. 4. 'Landscape with Figures, 1, 2 and 3' appears in Douglas, *The Complete Poems*, pp. 109-111; 'How to Kill' is reproduced in the same volume on p.119.

European predicament. In promoting this viewpoint, however illuminating in terms of historicity, Glover recognizes issues of fraught identity as significant but does not extend discussion to the more complex inner contestations that I seek to explore within the poetry: his attention to Douglas's alienation within the 'wider social madness', coupled with a deeply personal 'moral particularity',[39] emerges as generalized, historical inference rather than from analysis of the poetry itself. As Glover himself states, his judgements are founded on what he sees as 'growing awareness of political realities in the work of Douglas, Keyes and Lewis' rather than 'consistently developed literary theory'.[40]

Amitava Banerjee's 1976 study, *Spirit Above Wars*,[41] which also addresses Alun Lewis, represents a shift of focus, a wider critical lens that sees the voice of the First World War poets as stifled by the horrors of battle, and that of World War Two writers as more able to relate personal experience to the larger human context. He sees this as a poet's capacity to distance himself in subtle ironies and controlled detachment, seeking the immediacy of reality over romanticism, sentiment or polemic. It is this quality that, in Chapter 5 of his book, he attributes to Keith Douglas, as well as a constant affirmation of being alive in the midst of death, so infusing his poetry with this realization.[42] The critique sheds valuable light on Douglas's poetic journey, but also leaves unanswered, questions that are germane to this thesis. In tracing a growing sense of separation in Douglas (as he does in regard to Alun Lewis), he posits that the poetry reveals a preoccupation with the threat of decay and death to be the essence of his burden, his 'black beast', rather than a more inclusive psychic disruption or inner dialectical tension. I intend to examine the 'beast' as a more complex configuration than this. Banerjee's reading also places important emphasis on Douglas's 'uncanny suspicion that essential truths which could give significance to human life lay beyond man's

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[39] *Ibid*.

[40] *Ibid*., p. 1.

[41] A. Banerjee, *Spirit Above Wars: A Study of the English Poetry of the Two World Wars* (London and Basingstoke: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1976).

[42] A. Banerjee, *Spirit Above Wars*, pp. 105-135.

capacity for ordinary perception' and his poetic vision 'to project [...] the tragedy of the human situation'.[43] However, his argument seems to focus on Douglas's irony alone as the device through which this vision emerges: it falls short of analysing Douglas's impersonal style, the poetic shifts of focus, the deflections from the subjective voice and the submersions of feeling or perpetrator complicity that intimate the 'tragedy'. Similarly, in divining Douglas's appetite for life he omits to explore beyond the paradoxical fusion of love and death in isolated poems to a more consuming preoccupation with the inter-flux of death and life that emerges through Douglas's writing, and its relation to his recursive articulation of their indivisibility. This, and its connection to Douglas's fragile inner fixity, is an issue that I intend to explore in greater depth.

Vernon Scannell's *Not Without Glory: Poets of the Second World War* (1976) includes revealing, separate examinations of Keith Douglas and Alun Lewis.[44] His analysis provides a valuable connection with this thesis in its focus on what he terms 'detachment rather than ruthlessness',[45] a stylistic quality Douglas develops to *appear* to be suspending personal engagement of his feelings in order to transmute experience into art. He sees the actuality of war as that which demands from Douglas the ability to transcribe its reality, an ability that is sharpened in the desert poems. The analysis places illuminating emphasis on Douglas's stylistic development within a short chapter section of twenty-nine pages, and insightfully links biography to stylistic genesis with careful balance. Scannell makes connections between Douglas's fraught journey in love relationships and the presence of lacerating contradictions that feed his ambivalence, while he praises the total absence of self-pity that characterizes his poetic and personal growth. He counters Ian Hamilton's view of

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[43] *Ibid*., pp. 134-135.
[44] Vernon Scannell, *Not Without Glory: Poets of the Second World War* (London: Woburn Press, 1976), pp. 23-51.
[45] Scannell, *Not Without Glory*, p. 26.

Douglas's impersonality as conveying a frozen formality[46] with his own imperative for the reader to grasp Douglas's inner darkness as a perpetrator of death, one whose actions, as in 'How to Kill', can seemingly annihilate love.[47] Scannell's critical shortfall, however, despite his insightful analysis, is that he does not open up this discussion to the implications of his own denial of 'ruthlessness'. Within this remark is an opportunity only taken in generalized terms: the 'suspended involvement' belies the compassion and implicit confession that lies subliminally but which supplies the apparent stylistic detachment with its greater depth of purpose.

A rich vein of criticism appeared in the 1980s, including the only book-length examination of Douglas's work, William Scammell's *Keith Douglas: A Study* (1988).[48] Scammell's interlacing of biographical detail and its relationship to Douglas's expression of love and loss throughout his oeuvre sheds valuable light, particularly in its relation to the emphasis placed on the hurt that he believes pervades much of the poetry. This is expanded upon in a close scrutiny of Douglas's antinomianism and ambivalence and their presence as inner dialectic and contestation, fed also by the experience of war. He sees Douglas's journey as a hardening of the self against disappointments, insecurities and the realities of battle and, in its diverse forms, emphasises the image of the mediating lens that serves to objectify perceptions, removing the pain of experience to a distance. In stressing this quality, he highlights the stylistic impersonality in which he discerns Douglas expressing the self through 'simultaneous impulses towards detachment and involvement'.[49] It is a view that will become an important element of the key focus of this thesis. He also examines Douglas's configuration of death as a journey towards nothingness and an extinction of his

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[46]*Ibid.*, p. 46. See Hamilton, 'The Forties'. Hamilton's argument, to which Scannell reacts, is further developed on pages 61-62, culminating in his recognition of a more 'discovered personality' in the work of Alun Lewis.

[47] *Ibid.,* pp. 46-47. Scannell discusses this poem and its darkly inflected fusion of the killer and the theme of love in connection with '*Vergissmeinnicht*' which, in my view, he undervalues slightly, even though he astutely observes its expression of Douglas's ambivalence and duality.

[48] William Scammell, *Keith Douglas: A Study* (London: Faber and Faber, 1988).

[49] Scammell, *Keith Douglas: A Study,* p. 156.

inalienable pain, a trajectory closely related to tensions between interior and exterior realities that he believes inhabited Douglas from his poetic beginnings. His detailed scrutiny of Douglas's linguistic processes leads him to observe that these were 'dialectical apparatuses and preconceptions' that were a preparation for dealing with the test of war.[50] The only irksome flaw that I find in the study is that these salient observations tend to become lost in the density of critical analysis of so many poems and the overlapping inter-textual references that characterize Scammell's approach. However, the key issues on which he focuses are germane to the thrust of the argument I intend to develop.

In Chapter 5 of *British Poetry of the Second World* War (1985), Linda Shires probes beneath Douglas's alleged mistrust of war poetry that evoked what he termed 'useless pity'.[51] She emphasises his depth of concern with the damage war inflicts on the human condition, and his desire to achieve a more personal voice, one that sought a more truthful idiom for war poetry, free of the harness of public discourse and the implicit dictate to be a 'patriotic national spokesman'.[52] Shires sees this as integral to his impersonality, a poetic style in which he invites us to share his revulsions in the face of war's human detritus, yet giving primacy to objectivity while avoiding overt emotionalism. Equally significant in terms of my own thesis is her conviction that the poetry charts Douglas's attempt to integrate his own dualities, to weld two sides of himself as soldier and poet. This, as I seek to show, is perhaps a simplification of his recursive 'beast', a configuration which I regard as testament of an even more complex representation of pluralistic self-division. However, in drawing a parallel between the search for poetic idiom and for unification of Self, Shires advances a deeply significant argument. Her identification of Douglas's poetry expressing war's effects as 'a

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[50] *Ibid*., p. 153.

[51] Linda M. Shires, 'No Enemy But Death: The Poetry of Keith Douglas', in *British Poetry of the Second World War* (London and Basingstoke: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1985), pp. 114-139. Douglas's expression, 'useless pity', originates in his prose journal in which, recounting his experience of staring into the face of a dead German while surrounded by stark, physical reminders of the man's last mundane actions, he summarises his response to the scene: 'It filled me with useless pity'. See Douglas, *Alamein to Zem Zem*, p. 51.

[52] Shires, *British Poetry of the Second World War*, p. 129.

condition not only of the physical landscape but also of man himself' illuminates a paradox, namely that the dual landscapes of a fractured identity and hostile desert become a central locus of his fraught creativity.[53]   However, I believe her judgement that Douglas's final poem, 'On A Return from Egypt' (1944), reveals a mind ready for what lies ahead is only partially accurate. She perceives in the poem a courage that overrides any hint of fear in its 'calm acceptance and foreknowledge',[54] qualities that I find to be subverted in the underlying tones of uncertainty.

Edna Longley's '"Shit or Bust": The Importance of Keith Douglas' (1986), is a concise and sharply focused examination of many of those poetic attributes and preoccupations already highlighted above but with new emphasis on what she perceives as Douglas's obligation to give testimony to unsanitized realities.[55] It is a belief I consider of major importance in terms of the ethical concerns perceived, and of Douglas's professed credo, his commitment to 'write true things'.[56] Longley acknowledges the poet's interior drama as one in which 'Love as well as Life dices with death', observing in his impersonal stance the means by which Douglas's exploratory eye casts a subtly concealed light on his humane response.[57] She posits that, by contrast with Wilfred Owen, for example, Douglas's 'poetry concentrates less on compassion for death than on a Shakespearean passion for the life which war highlights and destroys'.[58] Her view reflects what this thesis explores as central to the interplay of stylistic objectivity, the withdrawal of the subjective 'I', and the poetic persona's underlying articulation of testimony, both as witness and complicit perpetrator. As I will examine further, these issues become inseparable from both Douglas's

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[53] *Ibid*., p. 136.
[54] *Ibid*. The poem to which she refers appears in Douglas, *The Complete Poems*, p. 132.
[55] Edna Longley, '"Shit or Bust": The Importance of Keith Douglas', *Poetry in the Wars* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe Books Ltd., 1986), pp. 94-112.
[56] As noted in the 'Introduction' to this thesis, the remark was made by Keith Douglas in a letter to J.C. Hall [annotated as *Fragment*], dated 10 August 1943. It appears in its full context in Douglas, *The Letters*, pp. 294-295 (p. 295).
[57] Longley, *Poetry in the Wars*, p. 101.
[58] *Ibid*., p. 102.

and Lewis's respective efforts to comprehend the self and his relation to the realities of wartime experience.

Richard Poole's 1986 essay, 'Impersonality and the soldier-poet: Alun Lewis and Keith Douglas', is the only comparative study that focuses specifically upon poetic impersonality in relation to these two poets.[59] Essentially, Poole is concerned to see impersonality as a 'complex psychic quality', rather than a device for self-preservation.[60] In terms of both Douglas and Lewis, he argues for poetic detachment and a soldier's expressions of impersonality as 'comparable qualities' that embody both the desire for emotional privacy and a negative capability for assimilating and transmuting experience into art. Poole sees this detachment as fraught with dangers that include potential accusations of nihilism or a mechanistic insensitivity that rejects interest in human life. He examines the nexus of these two forms of detachment and their human cost as conflicting demands that are voiced within the work and stylistic progress of both poets, though his view is not expressed in strict terms as dialogia. Furthermore, he places the image of 'the beast', as used by Douglas and Lewis, as a shared central configuration through which the poetic eye explores experience. My main reservations regarding Poole's conclusions are his limited exploration of the complexity of the dialectical tensions each poet reveals and, apart from some disagreement with the detail of his analysis of Lewis's work, his apparent failure to penetrate beneath Douglas's deliberately cultivated resilience to the vulnerability and ethical conscience my thesis will examine.[61]

During the 1990s and from 2000 onwards, a thread of criticism emerged that focuses on the historicity of Second World War poetry, on its expression of the exilic individual voice

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[59] Richard Poole, 'Impersonality and the soldier-poet: Alun Lewis and Keith Douglas', *The Welsh Connection: Essays by Past and Present Members of the Department of English Language and Literature University College of North Wales Bangor,* ed. by William Tydeman (Llandysul, Dyfed: Gomer Press, 1986), pp. 130-158.
[60] Poole, *The Welsh Connection*, p. 131.
[61] The 'disagreement' noted refers specifically to an aspect of Poole's analysis of Lewis's poem, 'Burma Casualty', as discussed later in Chapter 3 of the thesis.

and of the struggle between private conscience and public discourse. The latter is observed as a restrictive discourse, a public demand for heroic patriotism in collision with the poet's need to express an alien experience in intensely individualistic terms. Bernard Bergonzi's *War Poets and Other Subjects* (1999),[62] using the poetry of the desert war as its canvas, explores the relevance of empty space to the pervasive sense of displacement it conveys, a facet I will examine in the final chapter of this thesis. Bergonzi argues that, within this alienating desert context, the focus of Douglas's poetry is more on killing than on death, and that it is this that drives his method of apprehending war in a developing stylistic instinct for obliquely repressed emotion.[63] This resonates with my focus on impersonality and self-distancing, but his argument hints at Hamilton's influence: Bergonzi fails to penetrate the 'oblique' voice to sense the underlying awareness of loss and self-referential complicity in the substrata of language, even though he detects Douglas's use of aporia and perceptual discontinuities as an enactment of ambivalent experience.[64] Nor does he develop Douglas's attention to death as an exploration of life and indivisible modes of being such as I will address as crucial to the poet's epistemological and ontological enquiry. Nevertheless, these shortcomings do not negate the work's critical value in its consideration of inner and outer landscape and the evolution of Douglas's stylistic impulse to avoid repetition of the generic traditions and prevailing public discourse of the First World War.[65]

Mark Rawlinson's *British Writing of the Second World War* (2000) discusses poetry of this period in relation to the dilemma of representation, of how the redescription of battle experience is caught up in opposing discourses that demand the exposure of realities and

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[62] Bernard Bergonzi, 'Poetry of the Desert War', *War Poets and Other Subjects* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 1999), pp. 29-49.

[63] Bergonzi, *War Poets*, p. 42.

[64] *Ibid.*, p. 39.

[65] Bergonzi traces this development in his earlier study that occupies a seminal place within the critical overview of literature emanating from the 1939-45 war, namely *Wartime and Aftermath: English Literature and its Background 1939-60* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993). He includes brief consideration of both Douglas and Alun Lewis, amongst other poets of the period, in Chapter 3, 'Poets at Home and Abroad', pp. 54-80 (pp. 70-77).

personal truths enmeshed in a public need to uphold morale.[66] He argues that this dilemma underlies the ambivalence of poetry, producing a fusion of engagement and detachment. From this, he posits, emerges a paradoxical impersonality in which acts of injury and killing are 'always yoked with perspectives that transvalue that destruction' which enables accusations of callous indifference.[67] Moreover, he juxtaposes this with his belief that the reader's response can thus be impaired, circumscribed by conventions of Great War memorialization. His argument leads him to see this apparent dilemma as the root of Douglas's need, and that of other soldier poets, to restructure language, to find an idiom that provides deeper reflection on the significations of combat and how slaughter is construed by the poetic sensibility. Rawlinson posits that Douglas's human subject, the speaking voice, is not a hero but a witness whose testimony is 'an exposure of illusions' and its own injury.[68] His view thus echoes mine, that the impersonal poetic method, through shifts of perspective and tone, deflections of our vision and subtly intimated undertows of feeling, exposes its own dispassionate detachment as an illusion. In this way, as Rawlinson avers, the 'meticulous witness' seeks not to transcribe and interpret experience according to any preferential public discourse but 'simply to tell what is'.[69] In essence, his concern is with poetry that represents the intersection between testimony to the brute facts of war and the writer's individual resistance to validation of war as a glorious, politically justifiable act. This viewpoint is congruent with my intention to identify the dialogic voice, the ambivalences and the inner contestations that are heard in the poetry of Douglas, and Lewis, and their relationship to stylistic growth.

Other critical writings of the last two decades focus similarly on the impulse of poets such as Keith Douglas to deal with a sense of estrangement and fractured identity. Samuel

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[66] Mark Rawlinson, *British Writing of the Second World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).
[67] Rawlinson, *British Writing*, p. 6.
[68] *Ibid*., p. 11.
[69] *Ibid.* Rawlinson quotes here from Samuel Hynes, *A War Imagined: The First World War and English Culture* ([1990] London: Pimlico Edition, 1992), p.95.

Hynes posits in *A War Imagined* (1992) that landscape for Douglas and Lewis becomes 'derationalized and defamiliarized' space in which the 'Romantic landscape' is annihilated and in which the distortions of the dead expose the lie in any sense of glory.[70] Simon Featherstone, in *War Poetry: An Introductory Reader* (1995) treats this in relation to the exilic condition of poets writing in India and Egypt during the war, a discussion further advanced by Jonathan Bolton in *Personal Landscapes* (1997) in which he also sees Douglas's desert poetry as testimony to his quest for alternative modes of expression to those of the World War I poets.[71] Bolton argues for the language as a coded expression of truth, divorced from the discourse of propaganda and protest, a means of exploring significant realities while codifying the personal and wider ethical impact in apparent impersonality, beneath which lies a sense of Otherness and personal fragmentation. He detects in Douglas a prevailing defamiliarization, a cultural and personal diaspora mobilized by war and place, the desert thus becoming the objective correlative for protean mutations of personality and the 'particular monster' that inhabits his interior and exterior spaces.[72] This resonates powerfully with my own intended examination of Douglas's 'beast', though not tied solely to concepts of place, and with my perceptions of Alun Lewis's inner contestations and response to displacement and the ambivalence of India.

Such readings of Second World War poetry as a redefinition of previously articulated registers and its expression frequently in oppositional, competing voices, have proliferated in the last decade. Almost invariably, such examinations are linked to language as an exploration of fragmented identity, often focused in the work of Douglas and Lewis, as well as what Bolton and others regard as personal responses coded in impersonality. Building on his earlier work, *Imagination at War* (1995), in which he refutes the primacy of First World

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[70] Hynes, in *A War Imagined*, p. 201.

[71] Simon Featherstone, in *War Poetry: An Introductory Reader* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995). Featherstone's argument resonates with that expressed in Jonathon Bolton, *Personal Landscapes: British Poets in Egypt during the Second World War* (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1997).

[72] Keith Douglas, 'The Bête Noire Fragments', Fragment A (II), l. 1, in *The Complete Poems*, p. 126.

War poetry over that of the Second and explores Douglas's burden of witnessing, Adam Piette's essay, 'War Poetry in Britain' (2009), continues this argument in a more general discussion of poetic impulse and testimony as the nexus of twin responsibilities between self-absorbed inwardness and the wider collective significance of poetic responses to war.[73] This leads Piette to identify this development in Douglas as a new register, an emphasis on modes of communication that distance and mediate his responses to killing. Like Bolton and Hynes, he sees the desert landscape as the locus of desolation in Douglas's mind and configurations of the dead as a means of mining his own pain. However, while commenting on the collective significance of the poet's vision he ignores discussion of this in terms of inner dialectical tension, or the ways in which the privatized 'introspective territories' are mediated but detectable in the interstitial spaces of language and shifting perspectives that occupy Douglas's poetic voice.[74] These are issues I will examine as central to the submersion or even desired 'extinction of Self' that I posit as detectable in the writings studied.

Recent critical attention has further illuminated one of the key concerns of my thesis, namely its focus on war poetry as testimony and, as Lyndsey Stonebridge puts it, 'how war can be held in the mind when the mind itself is under siege'.[75] Her argument is not in specific reference to Keith Douglas or Lewis, but is relevant to my intended examination of the relationship between trauma theory and the means by which stylistic impersonality and objectivity articulate dual perspectives, revealing the poetic voice in its traumatic encounter with an alien or disruptive part of the subjective self. Furthermore, Stonebridge argues that war can render narrative communication inarticulate, thereby mobilizing the need for the poet to place greater primacy on precision of language and imagery.[76] As this thesis will argue,

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[73] Adam Piette, *Imagination at War: British Fiction and Poetry 1939-1945* (London: Papermac, 1995). For Piette's essay in which he develops his earlier argument, see Piette, *Cambridge Companion*, pp. 13-25 (p. 18).
[74] Piette, *Cambridge Companion*, p. 23.
[75] Lyndsey Stonebridge, in 'Theories of Trauma', *The Cambridge Companion to the Literature of World War II*, pp. 194-206 (p.194).
[76] Stonebridge, *Cambridge Companion,* pp. 195-196.

such qualities imbue the concrete directness of Douglas's configurations of the detritus of desert warfare, and become increasingly evident in Alun Lewis's poetic realization of the Indian subcontinent.

The work of Freud and its application to trauma theory as presented by Dori Laub and Shoshana Felman in *Testimony: Crisis of Witnessing* (1992),[77] will relate significantly to my analysis, particularly of Douglas as witness and soldier-poet perpetrator, and to considerations of ethical responsibility submersed within the poetry. Similarly, I will draw on the analyses of Cathy Caruth in her Freudian-inspired work, *Unclaimed Experience* (1996),[78] in my own examination of the relationship between impersonality and testimony. Each of these studies informs Stonebridge's views on trauma and its capacity for inexpressibility as outlined above, and are particularly germane to my own considerations of poetic responses to the act of killing, along with issues of submersed guilt and seemingly suppressed compassion that will feature prominently here.

In this latter context, Anthony Rowland's critical examinations focus on World War Two poetry as testimony and as 'memory texts' that confront the representation of poet as perpetrator, so affirming an obligation to express and comprehend personal acts of war. In his essay, 'The Future of Testimony: Introduction', he posits that this forces a lacuna in the struggle of language to express the essential incomprehensibility of these actions, and that such poetry conveys a 'teleological insistence' on the reader's complicity in the crisis, thereby offering different challenges to our understanding.[79] While this discourse is heavily inflected with memory and representations of the Holocaust, Rowland's central contention is that the result is a disconcerting shift between victim and killer perspectives which conveys

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[77] Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History* (New York and London: Routledge, 1992).

[78] Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* (Baltimore, Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996).

[79] Anthony Rowland, 'The Future of Testimony: Introduction', in *The Future of Memory,* Richard Crownshaw, Jane Kilby and Anthony Rowland, eds (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2010), pp. 113-122 (p. 114).

their blurred distinctions. It is an important observation in terms of the exposure of perpetrator as well as victim vulnerability, one which I will explore in relation to the tensions, particularly in Douglas's work though present, too, in Lewis, arising from a shared predilection to express poetry as truthful testimony.

In his later study, 'The Oasis Poets: Perpetrators, Victims and Soldier Testimony' (2011), Rowland aligns himself with the views of Piette in his regard for Douglas's distancing techniques and apparent dispassion.[80] However, as in his earlier argument above, in claiming that the poetry of the desert war is characterized by ambivalence and shifts of personal perspective that offer a paradigm for 'perpetrator aesthetics', Rowland posits a view of Douglas that my thesis challenges. He argues for a detached impersonality of style that distances Douglas's voice so completely as to be 'an absolute refusal to identify with the enemy'.[81] In short, he regards Douglas's poetry as mapping a dehumanizing process through the perpetrator perspective. I will contend that, rather than a denial of identification with the dead, enemy or otherwise, Douglas's recursive imperative for us to see what he sees, and the uncertainty or subversions with which he freights the poetic voice, are evidence of understated but humane compassion and residual guilt. In this, the reader shares in witnessing loss and the extinction of life as a humanizing experience rather than the opposite.

A range of modern commentary, particularly in scholarly contributions to *The Oxford Handbook of British and Irish War Poetry* (2007), overlaps with modern and earlier views expressed above.[82] Their relevance is, however, occasional rather than schematically intrinsic to my intended focus and so they fall outside the scope of this review. Nevertheless, the work of the book's editor, Tim Kendall, is significant and will be referenced as such in this thesis. His introduction stresses his belief that the best war poets express their

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[80]Anthony Rowland, 'The Oasis Poets: Perpetrators, Victims and Soldier Testimony', in *Comparative Literature*, 63.4 (2011), 367-379.
[81] Rowland, *Comparative Literature*, 63.4, p. 378.
[82]*The Oxford Handbook of British and Irish War Poetry*, ed. by Tim Kendall (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

'monstrous negotiation' between poetic form and 'human suffering'.[83]   In particular, Kendall's keynote study, *Modern English War Poetry* (2006), seems to me to offer his clearest development of this credo in its emphasis on Keith Douglas's war experiences as the ultimate test of his already burgeoning negative capability.[84] His examination focuses on the notion of the poet witnessing his own survival as a ghostly, bi-located spectator, attesting to inner contestation. He sees the speaking voice and its poetic configurations of death, life-in-death and the killing act as integral to and separate from the landscape in which it survives.[85] As such, Kendall's argument chimes with my own, that the pain of poetic testimony involves an ethical challenge which demands our involvement as witness to the submersed tensions between complicity and compassion. Moreover, he frames Douglas's suffering and attention to human loss as intrinsic to his dialectical struggle to define the Self yet be freed from its own Otherness, to achieve an extinction of a fraught and fragmented identity.

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[83] Kendall, *British and Irish War Poetry*, p. 2.

[84] Tim Kendall, *Modern English War Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006). Kendall's main focus is developed over Chapters 8 and 9, respectively titled 'The Vision of Keith Douglas' (pp. 146-166) and 'Self Elegy: Keith Douglas and Sidney Keyes' (pp. 167-196).

[85] Kendall, *Modern English War Poetry*, p. 172.

Part 2: Alun Lewis: The Divided Self and the Journey Outwards

As has been acknowledged above, comparisons between Alun Lewis and Keith Douglas are largely limited to incidental references to a general agreement on their reputations as two of the finest poets of the Second World War. Detailed criticism that seeks to explore significant connections between their respective oeuvres or offer any schematic, conceptualised examinations of a shared stylistic development seems not to exist, other than Richard Poole's aforementioned examination.[86] The volume of Lewis criticism is more considerable than that on Douglas, but by far the greater proportion of it is by John Pikoulis whose critical biography is the only published book-length work on Lewis.[87] This thesis will draw on aspects of the biography and its insights into Lewis's work, alongside a summary of his critical discussions over a range of his journal essays. Of necessity, much of the latter requires to be condensed in its relevance to the focus of this thesis: a similar approach will govern this review in general, highlighting key elements that interweave with my concern to explore Lewis's inner tensions, his fragile and divided sense of identity and its impact upon a developing stylistic objectivity.

Alun Lewis's impulse to write was a deeply embedded aspect of his developing personality from his early years, both at school and at Aberystwyth University where, between 1932 and 1935, he contributed eight short stories and one poem to its magazine, *The Dragon*, and later, five stories to the Manchester University magazine, *The Serpent* (1936). He continued to write both poetry and prose, including dozens of unpublished stories between 1936 and 1940, and others published in editions of *The Manchester Guardian* from 1938 to 1939, but it was to be during his time as a wartime soldier from 1939 onwards that he generated the published body of work on which his reputation is largely formed and in which his creative impulse came to dominate his self-expression. His collection, *Raiders' Dawn*

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[86] See Poole, *The Welsh Connection*, pp. 16-17.
[87] John Pikoulis, *Alun Lewis: A Life* (Bridgend: Seren Books, 1991).

and Other Poems published in 1942,[88] his prose anthology *The Last Inspection and Other Stories* (1943),[89] and his final collection, *Ha! Ha! Among the Trumpets* (1945),[90] constitute the essence of his creative legacy. His letters and other writings are significant ancillaries which inform the critical canon, notably *In The Green Tree* (1948).[91] Following Ian Hamilton's pioneering *Alun Lewis: Selected Poetry and Prose* in 1966 and Jeremy Hooker and Gweno Lewis's *Selected Poems of Alun Lewis* (1981), Cary Archard's edition of *Alun Lewis: Collected Stories* emerged in 1990, while his edition of *Collected Poems: Alun Lewis* appeared in 1994.[92]

Immediately following Lewis's death in 1944 there is little available evidence of a developed critical response, though Gordon Symes's magazine essay, 'Muse In India' (1947), stands as early recognition of the 'compassion [...] which quickens all [his] work' and which, focusing purely on Lewis's writings in India, divines in the poetry a 'natural poet's eye' in which 'observation and image are often exquisitely yoked'.[93] However, while this seems at least a partial recognition of what I intend to explore as a development outwards from the primacy of the subjective self to a greater objectivity, Symes holds back from a deeper stylistic examination. Instead, he finds only fragmentary evidence in isolated images of the quality he observes, while asserting that Lewis's poetry is largely 'uncomplicated and personal', echoing the 'universal agonies of his whole generation'.[94] He alludes to Lewis's attempts to seek an emotional synthesis, though without penetrating further to explore the

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[88] Alun Lewis, *Raiders' Dawn and other Poems* (London: Allen & Unwin, 942).

[89] Alun Lewis, *The Last Inspection and Other Stories* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1942).

[90] Alun Lewis, *Ha! Ha! Among the Trumpets* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1945).

[91] Alun Lewis, *In The Green Tree: The Letters & Short Stories of Alun Lewis*, ed. with an 'Afterword' by John Pikoulis, and a 'Foreword' by Owen Sheers, rev. edn ([1948] Cardigan: Parthian, 2007). All further references to this text will be taken from the 2007 edition.

[92] Alun Lewis, *Selected Poetry and Prose*, with an 'Introduction' by Ian Hamilton (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1966); *Selected Poems of Alun Lewi*s, selected by Jeremy Hooker and Gweno Lewis, with a 'Foreword' by Robert Graves and an 'Afterword' by Jeremy Hooker (London: Unwin Paperbacks, 1981); *Collected Stories*, ed. by Cary Archard (Bridgend: Seren Books, 1990). *Collected Poems*, ed. by Cary Archard (Bridgend: Seren Press, 1994), was later published as the first paperback edition in 2007. All subsequent quotations from and references to Lewis's poetry will relate to this 2007 edition, unless otherwise stated.

[93] Gordon Symes, 'Muse in India: An Aspect of Alun Lewis', in *English: The Magazine of the English Association*, 6.34 (Spring 1947), 191-195, (pp. 192-193).

[94] Symes, 'Muse in India', p. 191.

centrality of the poet's inner division and profound feelings of displacement that I regard as pivotal, further positing that Lewis's Indian poetry and prose 'mostly avoid the larger social and political arena'.[95] This is in stark antithesis to the postcolonial studies of Lewis that have emerged more recently and to which this review and the thesis will later refer. It is also a view that I intend to contest in examining Lewis's quest for meaning, his trajectory towards an 'extinction of Self', and a compassion that widens outwards while intimating personal complicity and a collective imperialist guilt. These are elements that feed the inner enmity and contestation that will be examined as part of this thesis.

A wider view of Lewis's writings emerges in John Stuart Williams's contributions to *The Anglo-Welsh Review* between 1964 and 1965 in which he perceives in both the poetry and short stories an enlargement of Lewis's sympathies to a wider understanding of Self in relation to universal concerns, a movement he discerns as running parallel to a more visible objectivity. In 'The Poetry of Alun Lewis' (1964) he describes this as the writer's journey towards greater sharpness of focus, a need to develop his 'gift for the realisation of the moment'.[96] Williams regards this as a more pronounced achievement in the short stories, but one which he also uncovers in Lewis's poetry, despite what he discerns as occasional 'embarrassing' intrusions of 'self revelation'.[97] He identifies a growing and deepening expression of the paradox of a detached soldier-poet, environmentally alienated yet distressingly more involved in the 'bankrupt' Indian human condition, a predicament that he believes Lewis is able to articulate with more biting realism.

In 'The Short Stories of Alun Lewis' (1964/65), Williams detects a common core in Lewis's work: 'the short story may have the same sort of genesis as the lyric poem [...]. They

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[95]*Ibid*., p. 193.
[96]John Stuart Williams, 'The Poetry of Alun Lewis', in *The Anglo-Welsh Review* 14.37 (1964), 59-71 (p. 59).
[97]*Ibid*., p. 70.

are both crystallizations of experience'.[98]   Moreover, he discerns in that common core an interrelationship between Lewis's internal divisions and a mutually inclusive personal and stylistic impulse to find resolution outside the self. In effect, his view correlates with the intended trajectory of this thesis inasmuch as it suggests that Lewis's movement outwards, however shackled to his self-reflexivity, testifies to a desire to surrender the subjective self to a greater absorption in the universal. What Williams neglects is the opportunity to penetrate further into the pluralistic nature of Lewis's inner tensions and their fusion with his outer world. However, in recognizing Lewis's deepening understanding of the self in relation to others, he reveals a deeply relevant critical awareness of an increasing privileging of the outward-focused, objective eye over the self-reflexive subjective voice.

Ian Hamilton's essay, 'The Forties' (1964), already mentioned, is well-known for its condemnation of Keith Douglas's 'tightlipped insensitivity' and lack of a 'firm, discovered personality', set against a marked preference for Alun Lewis's work and what he perceives as the latter's resistance to the 'massively dehumanizing temptations of war'.[99]   Notwithstanding my own intended challenge to his view of Douglas, Hamilton's critique places valid emphasis on Lewis's sense of isolation, linked with an awareness of death's inevitability, which together constitute a threat to identity. In tracing an impulse for depersonalization in Lewis, he uncovers an increasing self-protective detachment in the poetic style and an advancing liminality and separation of the self, aspects that will become central in this thesis.

Hamilton's later biographical introduction to *Selected Poetry and Prose* (1966) develops this latter notion to focus on the seemingly paradoxical balance between Lewis's poetry as rooted both in his personal tensions and in his striving for greater impersonality, a

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[98] John Stuart Williams, 'The Short Stories of Alun Lewis', in *The Anglo-Welsh Review*, 14.34 (1964/65), 16-25 (p. 16)

[99] Hamilton, 'The Forties', *Poetry Chronicle*, pp. 62 63. The criticism is one I intend to challenge strongly.

quality that, like Douglas, he regarded as essential to the soldier.[100] In this respect, and in his observation of a greater stylistic objectivity and outwardly turned compassion that he finds more pronounced in the Indian poetry, Hamilton provides a valuable link to my intended examination. However, while the biographical insights are illuminatingly intertwined with attention to Lewis's quest for harmony and a greater Love, no real attempt is made to explore more deeply the fusion of inner and outer tensions, the acknowledged sense of displacement and the complexity of the recursive darkness that Lewis voices. Hamilton touches upon these issues but, essentially, the critique is circumscribed by its biographical framework.

The 1970s continued the critical interest in Alun Lewis, and in his 1975 study, *Spirit Above Wars* which, as earlier reviewed here, includes his appraisal of Douglas, A. Banerjee places astute emphasis on Lewis's impulse to sustain focus on his closeness to experience and his concern that if he got 'too far away from the *thing*, the *thought* becomes flabby and invalid', so stifling his creative vitality.[101] The statement is rightly seen by Banerjee as doubly relevant, both to Lewis's consciousness of his inner fragility and to his desire to objectify experience while remaining true to its personal rootedness. The critique emphasises Lewis's adoption of 'the stance of impersonality', a self–defensive impulse he detects in the short stories, and in a 'handful of poems'.[102] Banerjee concludes that the poet's quest for integrity of 'self' is ultimately defeated and that to posit that Lewis sought 'self realisation through a negation of self' is to ignore the greater evidence of his dialectical tensions as a man caught up in the alien obligations war engendered.[103] His final charge is that Lewis's 'poetic self' was ultimately rendered 'impotent' and that he succumbed to a sad, escapist,

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[100] Ian Hamilton (ed.), 'Biographical Introduction', in *Alun Lewis, Selected Poetry and Prose* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1966), pp. 9-59.

[101] A. Banerjee, *Spirit Above Wars*, pp. 136-171 (p. 142). Banerjee quotes Lewis's own words taken from his letter to Gweno, dated 22 December 1943, as reproduced in Lewis's 1948 work, *In The Green Tree*, p. 60.

[102] *Ibid.* The quotations are taken from pages 144 and 169 respectively.

[103] *Ibid.*, p.169.

romantic desire for death.[104]   This clearly ignores the uncertainties in Lewis's final questioning contemplation on death that I intend to identify. Furthermore, it is an indictment that seems to devalue the very qualities of imaginative enlargement and concrete realization of the objects of his compassion that much of Banerjee's analysis clearly grasps and which this thesis will seek to demonstrate.[105]

Like Amitava Banerjee in his earlier study, Vernon Scannell examines both Douglas and Lewis in *Not Without Glory* (1976).[106] His argument, too, continues a growing critical emphasis on Lewis's attempts to unify conflicting oppositions both within himself and in the external world at war, and thus to find a greater stylistic balance between the universal and the particular. Accordingly, his critical focus alerts the reader to a developing stylistic objectivity, a concern that matures in the Indian poems in their evocation of the hostile landscape and the peasants' impoverishment of spirit. He further identifies in this the complicity and implicit guilt that lie within the poetic voice, though he does not give due attention to Lewis's inner contestations and the concomitant effort to resolve the fractured identity, except in his analysis of 'The Jungle' (1944) in which he perceives a desire to extinguish the self that is complicit in the stain of imperialism, and a corresponding mobilization of unselfish, outward reaching love and human sympathy.[107]   However, he claims this to be an impulse thwarted by Lewis's inescapable ambivalence, distanced from but still belonging to a world in which he feels displaced.

In her paper, 'Seeking and Still Seeking: Alun Lewis in India' (1975), Jacqueline Banerjee focuses on the poetry and short stories written in and en route to India.[108] With more positive emphasis than Amitava Banerjee's above, she regards Lewis's progression as a

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[104] *Ibid.*, p. 171.

[105] *Ibid.*, pp. 159-160. For instance, Banerjee examines 'Karanje Village' and acknowledges Lewis as moving outwards to 'something more concrete and physical' in the Indian peasant landscape, thus awakening his 'humanitarian spirit'.

[106] Scannell, 'Keith Douglas', in *Not Without Glory*, pp. 23-51, and 'Alun Lewis', pp. 52-73.

[107] Alun Lewis, 'The Jungle', in Lewis, *Collected Poems*, pp. 155-158.

[108] Jacqueline Banerjee, 'Seeking and Still Seeking: Alun Lewis in India', *Poetry-Wales,* 10.3 (1975), 99-117.

journey to enlightenment, therefore focusing on his recursive preoccupation with tropes of darkness not as signifiers of an escapist death wish or nihilistic impulse but as representing the inner and external complexities that must be overcome. She argues that, while the human and topographical landscapes of India exhibit a distressing indifference which drains away Lewis's own energies, they also nourish his widening human compassion: she suggests that, in India, Lewis grappled with oppositional feelings that infiltrate his writing as inner conflict, but that, paradoxically, it is this dialectical tension that gives the work its power.[109] Her argument echoes that of Scannell, though, like him, she does not explore in depth what I intend to probe as Lewis's 'enmity within' beyond recognizing how distance from his wife and loved ones and doubts about his future intensify his darkness. Where she does concur with Scannell and other critical readings of this period is in her detection of India as the primary stimulus for Lewis's sharpening vision and stylistic objectivity, while reaching out towards selflessness and generosity of spirit. However, her greater emphasis comes in her conclusion that his primary struggle and impulse was to preserve his sense of identity and, in India, quoting Lewis's own words, to be able to observe 'in a detached but warm way the flux and reflux of it all and [how] it profoundly affects the way I wish to write'.[110]

In '"Living More Lives Than Are": Three of Alun Lewis's Poems from India' (1978), Jacqueline Banerjee revisits her earlier argument, focusing now on Lewis's constant need to achieve his negative capability, to 'nourish' the inner self and to confront new experience.[111] She concentrates on his configuration of India as the canvas on which he foregrounds the objectified reality of 'raw physical pain and human distress [...] the colossal weight of

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[109] J. Banerjee, 'Seeking and Still Seeking', pp. 105-107.

[110] *Ibid*., p. 117. The quotation is taken from Alun Lewis's letter to Brenda Chamberlain, dated 3 Oct., 1943, NLW MS 20798c fols 48v, reproduced in Lewis, *A Life*, p. 223.

[111] J. Banerjee, '"Living More Lives Than Are": Three of Alun Lewis's Poems from India', in *The Anglo-Welsh Review,* 27.60 (1978), 69-79. The poems discussed are 'The Mahratta Ghats' (1943), 'In Hospital: Poona (1) (1943), and 'The Jungle' (1944).

environmental, even cosmic oppression'.[112] The critique now gives greater emphasis to

Lewis's objectivity as the height of his power to realise atmosphere in a context 'at once

actual and symbolic', thus shifting his vision and achieving a finer balance between cosmic

and particular understanding, particularly in 'The Jungle'.[113] This clarifies her earlier

observations on Lewis's journey towards enlightenment and impersonality, ranging beyond

the confines of the self. It is an illuminating critical view but her conclusion that Lewis's

poetry ultimately voices a full understanding of the experiences of those around him and of

his own signifies a resolution of conflicts and unification of identity that seems to rely too

heavily on Lewis's own belief that these poems 'feel the world'.[114] It is a resolution and

unification I believe to be incomplete.

John Pikoulis's studies of Lewis, outside his aforementioned authoritative biography,

consist of a wide range of essays, all of which acknowledge the writer as burdened by a

divided self that, ultimately and most particularly expressed in his short stories, he desires to

shed. Pikoulis's early 1972 essay, 'The Way Back', strongly interlaced with biographical

corroboration of his analysis, proceeds from an identification of the ambivalent power of

death and suffering in war as both a distorting and nourishing agent in Lewis's creativity

(common also to Keith Douglas) to the idea of death as an aspect of Lewis's inner enmity.[115]

Moreover, Pikoulis regards Lewis's work as fraught with competing entities that comprise his

poetic vocation, a commitment to life and to embrace humanity, and the struggle to reconcile

his 'warring elements' and inner antagonisms in death.[116] He perceives this as an affirmation

of Lewis's freedom of choice to divest the self of its guilty burdens and thus 'die into the

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[112] J. Banerjee, 'Living More Lives Than Are', p. 70.
[113] *Ibid.,* p. 74.
[114] *Ibid*., p. 79. Banerjee quotes from Lewis's letter dated 26 January 1944, published in *In The Green Tree* [1948], p. 58. Lewis's words appear on page 69 of the 2007 Parthian edition used in this thesis.
[115] John Pikoulis, 'The Way Back', *Critical Quarterly*, 14.2 (1972), 145-166.
[116] Pikoulis, 'The Way Back', p. 157.

imagination'.[117] It is a view commensurate with that which this thesis will develop, and one which Pikoulis believes is expressed in terms of Love in 'The Way Back', the poem he regards as of fundamental importance to his critique. However, he finds it to be most consummately expressed in 'The Orange Grove' (1943), the story he considers Lewis's most articulate response to the power of place as a formative aspect of identity.

In 'East and East and East: Alun Lewis and the Vocation of Poetry', Pikoulis extends his focus to consider Lewis's writing as an exilic enactment in which he repeatedly articulates his sense of detachment and liminality.[118] 'The Jungle' is analysed as evidence of Lewis now placing these tensions in a new context, in an 'area of doubt and uncertainty' in which the potential either to restore and refresh the self or perilously subvert and lose it becomes a central dilemma.[119] He posits that writing for Lewis thus becomes the pain of separation in both human and topographical contexts and that this is inextricably linked to his inner lack of fixity. It is an opinion that has its embryo in his earlier essay, 'Alun Lewis and the Imagination' (1975), where he examines Lewis's early short story, 'Attitude' (1938), as a template for his story, 'Dusty Hermitage' (1942).[120] He identifies in the early story the author's inbuilt fracture, the competing elements that war intensified in a tripartite split of man, poet and soldier and sees in the poetry, too, a similar breaking down of Self that accompanies Lewis's emerging quest for ontological oneness in the universe.[121]

In his 1995 essay, 'The Two Voices in Alun Lewis's Poetry', Pikoulis turns his attention specifically to the presence of a dialogic tonality in a number of the poems, an aspect he describes as the recurrent 'trick of centring a poem's argument on the tension

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[117] *Ibid.,* p. 162.

[118] John Pikoulis, 'East and East and East: Alun Lewis and the Vocation of Poetry', in *The Anglo-Welsh Review*, 63 (1978), 39-65.

[119] *Ibid*., p. 52.

[120] John Pikoulis, 'Alun Lewis and the Imagination', *Poetry Wales* 10.3 (1975), 38-45. Pikoulis mentions Lewis's story, 'Attitude', published in *The Dragon*, 60.3 (Summer 1938), 7-12. The publication is the journal of Aberystwyth University to which Lewis contributed auspiciously.

[121] Pikoulis, 'Alun Lewis and the Imagination', p. 43.

between two voices'.[122] He frames this argument within his observation of stylistic contrasts in Lewis's work that can act to apply 'an impersonal measurement [...] to his feelings'.[123] His discussion of 'The Soldier' (1940) perceives this as a subtle construction which voices both a 'cultural disdain', or anger, and an oppositional, quiet calm in the poem's closure. This, says Pikoulis, creates a deliberate tension between a passionate reaction and feelings of impotence as the speaker senses impending calamity.[124] He traces similar dialogic tensions in other poems such as 'Goodbye' (1942) in which he observes 'contending qualities' that the poem 'enacts [...] dramatically rather than by merely describing them'.[125] This places a valuable critical emphasis upon a perceived technique of 'self-correction',[126] those changes of the subjective voice and stance within a range of Lewis's poems that link significantly to what Pikoulis sees as 'a man divided against himself'.[127] In so commenting, he raises the question of whether these dialogic tonal shifts act to subvert the text or, as performative language, to provide tension and 'energise coherence'.[128] This line of enquiry and the perceived interrelation of stylistic development, the outer disturbance of war and the writer's internal division, will become central to my own argument and to key aspects of my comparison of Lewis with Keith Douglas, to whose poetry such questions are also germane.

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[122] John Pikoulis, 'The Two Voices in Alun Lewis's Poetry 1940-42', in *Welsh Writing in English: A Yearbook of Critical Essays*, I (1995), 40-51 (p. 47).

[123] Pikoulis, 'Two Voices', p. 43.

[124] *Ibid*., p. 49.

[125] *Ibid*., p. 44.

[126] *Ibid*., p. 46.

[127] *Ibid*., p. 44

[128] *Ibid*., p. 46. In 1996, *Welsh Writing in English* published Patrick Crotty's rather strident opposition to Pikoulis's essay, arguing that the latter's 'comprehensive endorsement of tonal procedures [...] pays the poet the wrong sort of homage', amounting to 'an explaining away of a writer's deficiencies'. Crotty uses Pikoulis's analysis of 'The Soldier' to illustrate his oppositional argument, claiming the poem to be a 'stylistic disaster', resonant with weakening tonal discontinuities more appropriately indicative of Lewis's 'broken voice', rather than 'two voices'. Alongside this critical response, the journal publishes Pikoulis's justifiably aggrieved reply to what he regards as Crotty's own misreading of the poem, inflected with 'insulting references' and 'intra-Celtic condescension'. Pikoulis also takes the opportunity to point out that his discussion of Lewis's 'two voices' is limited in his essay to poems of 1940-42, and not posited as a 'comprehensive endorsement'. See Patrick Crotty, 'The Broken Voice of Alun Lewis', and 'Alun Lewis: a reply to Patrick Crotty', in 'Forum', *Welsh Writing in English: A Yearbook of Critical Essays,* II (1996), 162-176 (pp. 170-176).

In his essay, '"The Black Spot in the Focus": A Study of the Poetry of Alun Lewis' (1980), Roland Mathias counters Amitava Banerjee's opinion expressed in *Spirit Above Wars*.[129] The latter sees Lewis's work as the expression of a man bewildered by war, whose poems reflect a fragmented vision 'rather than constellations under one sky'.[130] Mathias, however, finds the poetry to be unified in its articulation of a quest for meaning in the darkness of a personal void. The binding agent in all this, he posits, is Lewis's central vision of Love and 'human perfectability', an expression Mathias interprets as a universalized Love that encompasses compassion for the world beyond the self.[131] Mathias explores this perceived search for meaning using an essentialist critical approach which conceives of Lewis's inner enmities and sense of displacement as a fusion of internal and external darkness, exacerbated by war and notions of death. In this respect and in the emphasis given to Lewis's concern to penetrate the 'darkness' as an epistemological and ontological journey, he offers an important variant on other perceptions of this preoccupation and its recurring configurations in Lewis's work. He diverges from those who fail to hear the shifts of voice, the struggle to balance intimations of death with affirmations of life such as Pikoulis discerns, or others who see Lewis's darkness purely as the source and primary determinant of his poetry.[132]

Jeremy Hooker's 'Afterword' to *Selected Poems of Alun Lewis* (1981) echoes Mathias's recognition of Lewis's 'darkness' as central to the poet's ontological and

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[129] Roland Mathias, '"The Black Spot in the Focus": A Study of the Poetry of Alun Lewis', *The Anglo-Welsh Review*, 67 (1980), 43-78. Mathias refers to A. Banerjee, *Spirit Above Wars*, p. 142.

[130] A Banerjee, *Spirit Above Wars*, p. 137.

[131] Mathias, 'The Black Spot in the Focus' (1980), p. 49.

[132] In his essay, 'The Poetry of Darkness: Alun Lewis's Indian Experience', *The Anglo-Welsh Review*, 19.43 (1970), 176-183, for instance, John Davies also adopts an essentialist approach to the poems on which he focuses but regards Lewis as expressing a 'testament to darkness' (p. 177) that reflects his quest for oneness and integrity of self, whilst writing from 'an extreme predicament' (p. 183). This may seem tangential to Mathias's epistemological focus on Lewis's multivalent trope of 'darkness', but it emphasises it in terms of a preoccupying theme and Lewis's main concern, 'the dark centre of [that] consciousness' from which he wrote (p. 183). Mathias, however, sees in Lewis a challenge to darkness in order to affirm life and its beauty as 'perfectability'.

epistemological journey.[133] In particular, he posits that it represents a source of creativity and that for Lewis the imaginative process is a conscious and active seeking of 'a new direction in the deep', a striving after meaning rather than 'merely an expression of the conflicts within his world'.[134] He therefore regards Lewis as a poet striving for universal answers within his particular experience, one who internalizes war and the uncertainties it poses, for whom the poetic journey involves – in Lewis's own words – 'seeking and not finding, *and still seeking, by a robustness in the core of sadness*'.[135] Hooker refuses to reduce this central significance of Lewis's multivalent 'darkness' to a 'psychological half truth',[136] preferring to acknowledge its ambivalence as a source both of internal enervation and contestation, and of creativity and purpose. In this thesis, I will pursue a similar evaluation of Lewis's 'darkness' as a pluralistic configuration in which reside profound tensions between creativity and internal fracture, and to develop an accompanying study of what I perceive as parallel concerns and oppositions in the work of Keith Douglas.

Dai Smith's essay, 'The Case of Alun Lewis: A Divided Sensibility' (1981), focuses more tightly on Lewis's divided artistic sensibility as the result of his being 'caught up in the bewildering conjunctures of his own time', therefore forced to 'grapple with his own, related contradictions'.[137] His argument is important in its emphasis on the writer's dialectical struggle as one with which he was thus '*necessarily* engaged',[138] engendering the dual, oppositional forces of obligation to life, to others and to his role as soldier, and his inescapable sense of separateness and lack of a confirmed identity. Like Hooker, Smith posits that Lewis's daring, anguished efforts are to trace universal significance in his

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[133] Jeremy Hooker, 'Afterword', in Lewis, *Selected Poems*, pp. 101-111.

[134] *Ibid.*, p. 111.

[135] *Ibid.*, p.107. Hooker quotes these words from Lewis's letter to Gweno Lewis, dated December, 1942, published in *In The Green Tree* ([1948] (Cardigan: Parthian, 2007), p. 15.

[136] *Ibid.*, p. 106.

[137] Dai Smith, 'The Case of Alun Lewis: A Divided Sensibility', in *Llafur: The Journal of the Society of Welsh Labour History*, 3.2 (Spring 1981), 14-27 (p. 16).

[138] Smith, *Llafur,* my emphasis.

particular experience while striving to relate himself to others. This, he avers, is more consummately achieved in the short stories than in the poetry. The argument, though tightly focused, is essentially circumscribed by its emphasis on biography and historicity and therefore does not pursue its core perceptions with close reference to much of the poetry, and only does so in a limited though insightful analysis of a few of the stories. Smith discovers in 'The Orange Grove' (1943) evidence of the protagonist's progression towards 'the concrete possibility' of imaginative enlargement and of 'human collectivity'.[139] However, he fails to explore more deeply the wider movement in Lewis's poetry towards a more objectified human compassion that I believe is central to his trajectory. Notwithstanding this omission, he observes that Lewis desperately wanted to immerse himself in a 'timeless humanity in whom he could lose, and thereby truly find, himself'.[140] This strikes a crucial chord with the intended direction of this thesis in its examination of 'the extinction of Self'.

In Chapter 4 of *British Poetry of the Second World War* (1985), Linda Shires follows a similar thread of argument to that implicit in the views of both Hooker and Smith, though framing it within a Jungian concept of a man overwhelmed by circumstances, desperately trying to understand them: she expresses this as the writer's 'drowning voyage in order to be reborn into a better self'.[141] This is relevant to the direction this thesis will pursue in its differentiation of Lewis from Keith Douglas in that the latter, though also suffering the personal cost perceptible in the submersions of poetic language, clearly knew and perhaps more fully assimilated his circumstances as soldier poet.

Shires detects Lewis's strong sense of personal disintegration, his 'fragile universe of self', but also posits a parallel stylistic movement that emanates from what she considers to be Lewis's 'prose writer's understanding of the power of concrete detail' whereby a self-

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[139] *Ibid*., p. 25.
[140] *Ibid*., p. 26.
[141] See Shires, 'Two Poets of War: Alun Lewis and Sidney Keyes', in Chapter 4 of *British Poetry of the Second World War,* pp. 85-112 (p. 86).

reflexive predilection turns increasingly to a loss of subjective focus and a more objective, outward projection of feeling, both anger and compassion, toward others.[142] As with most other critical readings, she concludes that Lewis was ultimately unable to resolve his inner division and the ambivalent demands of circumstance, becoming progressively more alienated from life, but her summary judgement that he failed to find in war 'the needed objective correlatives for his own inner turmoil'[143] is one that will be challenged, at least in part, by this thesis. In seeking to determine the increased objectivity and intensifying concreteness with which the Indian poems in particular configure human abjection, the numbing indifference and the interdependence of place and the spiritual condition of its inhabitants, I will contend that this stylistic development constitutes at least some significant discovery of the objective correlative Shires fails to perceive.

Of necessity, the development of this thesis and its focus on Lewis will entail reference to some of the critical views already discussed earlier in regard to Douglas. The more general context of the demand for new registers in Second World War poetic articulation of personal experience and its relationship to the traditional, institutionalized hegemonies of public discourse is of relevance to both poets, even if in differing ways and degrees. Similarly, previously reviewed considerations of the impact of cultural and geographical displacement on the exiled soldier poet, and others that focus on expressed awareness of the mutations and divisions within the self, will be relevant to examination of

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[142] The expression is taken from Lewis's poem, 'War Wedding' (1941), in Alun Lewis *Collected Poems*, pp. 62-67 (p. 65, l. 96), while Shires's comment on Lewis's increasing objectivity appears on page 93 of the aforementioned chapter. In an unpublished doctoral thesis, 'The Fragile Universe of Self: the Other and Identity in the Writing of Alun Lewis', (University of Wales, Bangor, 2006), Carrie Anne Jadud conducts a comprehensive examination of Lewis's crisis of fractured identity and what she perceives as a recursive and multi-layered propensity to struggle to conceive of himself in relation to multiple forms of Otherness. While this can be seen as too strictly essentialist an approach, I intend to draw upon Jadud's argument at times in terms of my own concern to divine the nature of Lewis's inner conflicts and what I also perceive as an inescapable sense of Otherness in his work.

[143] *Ibid.*, p. 99.

Lewis's writing as much as to Douglas's.[144] These considerations impinge critically upon intended discussion of the poets' mutual confrontations with inner contestation, the conflict between otherness and selfhood and their respective stylistic journeys and impulses. However, having been acknowledged above as relevant to both writers, these critical approaches need not be repeated in further depth in this section of the review.

To return briefly to Samuel Hynes's *A War Imagined* (1992), his emphasis upon World War Two writing as configuring a different reality from that of the Great War poetic representations of experience is surely relevant to Lewis's own configurations of place and defamiliarization in which natural beauty and human benevolence progressively seem to recede throughout his artistic journey. Hynes sees this in the context of an alleged new standard of truth-telling which affirms writers' growing distance from previous expressions of reality and a concomitant, deepening individualization of experience in the poetic voice.[145] It is a view he applies with general validity to Second World War writing and which therefore must be examined cautiously in terms of its relevance to the distinct individuality of the poetic oeuvres of Lewis and Douglas. However, it is a position that will form part of the discussion that will follow, namely that of the contextual relationship between Lewis, Douglas and the inherited generic tradition.

While the approach adopted in this thesis is not postcolonial, ideas expressed by Homi Bhabha in *The Location of Culture* (1994) are clearly relevant to study of the dislocated nature of identity, its fluidity and lack of rootedness.[146] Similarly, while the parameters of postcolonial critical arguments such as those of Stephen Hendon, Kirsti Bohata and other academics may extend beyond those of this thesis, the thrust of these studies remains apposite

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[144] See my earlier focus on the critical viewpoints of Mark Rawlinson and Jonathan Bolton, for example. Their arguments will impact on my discussion of both Alun Lewis and Keith Douglas.

[145] Hynes, *A War Imagined*, pp. 193-196.

[146] Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* ([1994] Abingdon: Routledge Classics, 2004). In this text, Bhabha asserts that journeys to other cultures can become transitional voyages to a 'beyond' that can engender 'complex figures of difference and identity [...] a sense of disorientation, a disturbance of direction, in the 'beyond', an exploratory, restless movement' (p. 2).

to my own concerns, not least how fractured or shifting identities are inscribed in the work of both the writers addressed. Postcolonial arguments therefore deserve some attention in this review, even if only selectively applied in the body of this thesis to issues of self-division and Otherness, and of liminality, transitiveness, and creative engagement with intransitive spaces in Lewis's re-imaginings of experience in India.

In his doctoral thesis which draws comparisons between Joseph Conrad and Alun Lewis, Stephen Hendon's analysis pivots upon his concept of Lewis as 'ambivalently associated with the dominant discourse of imperialism'.[147] Much of this exploration hinges on an application of the notion of 'hybridization', expounded in Bhabha's seminal work noted above, to Hendon's own textual excavations of voiced displacement and a migratory, unfixed sense of identity which he considers in the 'Indian' texts to be representative of 'conflictual' tensions. He posits that such works constitute performative [...] '"double narratives" of empire'.[148] Hendon's approach, drawing on postcolonial critical theory, unearths what will also emerge as crucial elements in my thesis. His critique of 'The Jungle', for instance, illuminates a 'narrative strategy of interchange'[149] in which language suggests both a renewal and termination of self, by means of which the soldiers' (and Lewis's) complicity in the cultural betrayal of India highlights a subtly interwoven theme of guilt and culpability.[150] For Hendon, this argues for Lewis's exposure of 'organic hybridization', a complex plurality of identity that is 'caught in the process of cultural traffic'.[151] The argument impacts on my own focus upon Lewis's 'enmity within', upon 'Place' as 'Other', and on the dissolution of self-fixity, concepts that will also bear on the comparative analysis of Keith Douglas's writings.

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[147] Stephen Hendon, '"Slaves of the Successful Century?": Ideas of Identity in Joseph Conrad and Alun Lewis', (unpublished doctoral thesis, Cardiff University, 2010).
[148] Hendon, 'Summary', in 'Slaves of the Successful Century?', p. i.
[149] *Ibid*., p. 29.
[150] *Ibid*., pp. 292-293.
[151] *Ibid*., p. 294. This clearly resonates with Bhabha's theory and his assertion noted above (see footnote 172).

Hendon's study forms part of recent postcolonial critical considerations of Lewis's ambiguous location in his native Welsh cultural and socio-political community. This ambiguity will become relevant to my exploration of the interconnections of Place and Self, and Lewis's inherent sense of separateness and detachment. In *Nations and Relations* (2000), Kirsti Bohata takes up Bhabha's theory of a "third space"[152] which, he argues, exists interstitially between differing cultures. Bohata suggests that such binary cultural oppositions, discernible in texts as either imperialist or anti-imperialist, need not be so polarized, while Hendon acknowledges that her argument affirms that 'the 'Third Space' brings the two positions together to form new and multiple meanings'.[153] Bohata is therefore arguing for uncertainty and ambivalence in Lewis's poetic and prose responses to India in which his duality as a Welsh man in a British imperialist wartime framework creates in him an insider/outsider perspective. Thus, she claims, this ambivalence nourishes his compassion for the Indian predicament as well as objectifying his own complicity in imperialism, expressed in 'The Jungle' as 'the slow poison of a meaning lost'.[154]

Bohata's argument interconnects with this thesis in its relevance to analysis of the nature of Lewis's inner division and ambivalence as presented, not only in his 'Indian' work, but in poems that project his relation to Wales. It is an approach that has generated productive and insightful debate on the nature of contestations within Lewis, particularly in the context of what M. Wynn Thomas sees, for instance, as 'tensions [...] between Welshness and a Britishness the dominant – even definitive – English version of which [is] alien to him'.[155] Part of this illuminating debate is Pikoulis's contestation of Thomas's view, an opposition that derives from his understanding of Lewis as locked into an outsider

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[152] Kirsti Bohata, 'Beyond Authenticity? Hybridity and Assimilation in Welsh Writing in English', in *Nations and Relations: Writing Across the British Isles,* Tony Brown and Russell Stephens, eds (Cardiff: New Welsh Review, 2000), pp. 89-121 (p. 101). Bohata's reference is to Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, pp. 53-56.
[153] Hendon, 'Slaves of the Successful Century?', p. 24.
[154] Lewis, 'The Jungle', in *Collected Poems*, p. 156, l. 42.
[155] M. Wynn Thomas expresses this view in a jointly written essay, M. Wynn Thomas and Tony Brown, 'Colonial Wales and Fractured Language', in *Nations and Relations*, pp. 71-78 (p. 75).

perspective. In 'Alun Lewis and the Politics of Empire' (2003), Pikoulis therefore disputes any notion that Lewis's work articulates the position of one who is to be defined by specific national identity.[156]

In *Postcolonialism Revisited* (2004), Bohata extends her analysis of 'shifting identity' in Welsh writing in English, locating in Lewis's writings the 'priveleged perspective' of the outsider.[157] Once again, it is an argument framed in postcolonial conceptualizations of hybridization, and founded on her observations of Lewis's fragmented sense of nationhood.[158] Tangential to this issue are the views of M. Wynn Thomas and Tony Brown on what they regard as linguistic code-switching.[159] This is not a re-expression of the earlier mentioned demand or impulse for new poetic registers in Second World War writings, but more particularly focuses on the evidence they find in works composed in Wales such as 'The Mountain over Aberdare' (1942).[160] Here, and in Lewis's story, 'The Raid' (1943),[161] they observe a linguistic feature that they describe as his switching between the codes of Welsh colloquialism and those of a more educated register. Bohata similarly explores evidence in Lewis's work of the interflux of culturally inflected and politically orientated language. These perspectives arguably reach beyond issues of colonialism *per se* to what I consider central: Lewis's wider artistic quest for the appropriate expression of experience and overlapping issues of identity and its annihilation.

This review has concentrated on critical approaches that, while varying in their degrees of emphasis and focus, suggest lines of enquiry that interconnect with the intended trajectory of this thesis, thereby informing comparisons between Douglas and Lewis in the

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[156] John Pikoulis, 'Alun Lewis and the Politics of Empire', *Welsh Writing in English,* 8 (2003), 157-175 (pp. 160-161).
[157] Kirsti Bohata, in *Postcolonialism Revisited: Writing Wales in English* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2004), p. 27.
[158] Bohata, *Postcolonialism Revisited*, p. 25.
[159] Thomas and Brown, 'Colonial Wales',
[160] Alun Lewis, 'The Mountain over Aberdare', in Lewis, *Collected Poems*, pp. 87-88 (p. 87).
[161] Alun Lewis, in *Collected Stories*, pp. 185-196.

contexts defined by this investigation. Such critical opinions will stimulate and infuse my examination of what I perceive as evidence in both writers, though in differing degrees, of a dualistic impulse for detachment and involvement. The critical field fluctuates in its emphases between a primarily biographical focus and a preference for analysis rooted in the writings themselves. Approaches are often framed in specific theoretical contexts, including those concerned with writing as testimony, trauma, or as expressions of the exiled imagination. My thesis will address such frameworks, but will give primacy to close analysis of poetic language, and to shifts of perspective that, through strategies such as ambivalence, dialogic and oppositional voices, deflection or subtly controlled linguistic subversions, illuminate and substantiate the impulses posited above. Chapter I now examines the central issue of impersonality and considers this in relation to the stylistic development of both Douglas and Lewis, to respective biographical influences, and to issues that reflect developing generic perspectives on the poetry of World War Two set against that of the Great War.

Chapter 1
Impersonality and the Poetic Impulse:
The Challenge of Truth

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This thesis does not seek to debate the validity of the complex and widely discussed theory of the impersonality of poetry. Merely to refer to the concept might suggest an attempt to challenge or probe the implications of T. S. Eliot's now iconic reaction against the somewhat contradictory Wordsworthian definitions of poetry as the 'spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling', or 'emotion recollected in tranquillity'.[1] However, in its emphasis upon poetic 'objectivity' and the artistic struggle to move outwards from a purely subjective re-imagining of the human predicament, Eliot's response to such dicta offers insights relevant to the trajectory taken in this and subsequent chapters. In 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' (1919), he states that to perfect one's art involves the withdrawal of the subjective in the service of a greater imaginative creativity: 'the more perfect the artist, the more completely separate in him will be the man who suffers and the mind which creates'.[2] This is not, however, a declaration of dispassion, of indifference to the pain, joy, rapture, fear or fraying uncertainties that demand articulation. Rather, it is an affirmation of poetic control and the transformative process of artistic creativity, as Eliot makes clear a little later in his essay:

> Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality. But, of course, only those who have personality and emotions know what it means to want to escape from those things.[3]

The ostensible paradox in this is, in fact, the very point of Eliot's conclusion: the essence of creativity is the control of the root impulse rather than a succumbing to it, a transformative

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[1] William Wordsworth, in the 'Preface' to *Lyrical Ballads* (London: A. J. Arch, 1800), pp. 5-26 (p. 10).
[2] T. S. Eliot, 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' [1919], in *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1920), pp. 42-53. The essay is reproduced in *Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot* (London: Faber and Faber, 1975), pp. 37-44. This quotation is taken from p. 41 of this publication. All further references to this text will be to the 1975 publication.
[3] Eliot, 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', *Selected Prose* (1975), p. 43.

process that aims to express the truth at the heart of experience, unimpeded by obfuscating emotional indulgence.

For both Keith Douglas and Alun Lewis, the creative process was an impulse to find modes of expression indivisibly located in the truth of experience. Each was profoundly impelled by the need to articulate the human predicament in which they found themselves, both in terms of increasingly fragmented personal identities and in terms of their place in history. Both have been canonised as 'war poets', though each is more than just that: the context of war as the precipitator and intensifier of both internal and external fracture and creativity pervades their work, as does their mutual commitment to manage and express such profoundly felt experience with total integrity. The central concern of this chapter is to examine the impact of these factors with particular emphasis upon the relevance of the notion of 'impersonality' to their respective stylistic impulses and developments.

In the case of Douglas, the term 'impersonality' has become the common denominator of critical responses to his work, whether as a charge of cold insensitivity to his subject,[4] or in more illuminating appraisals of a controlled detachment which distances yet still attests to the speaker's complicity in the death, killing and loss that form the thematic parameters of much of his oeuvre. In this apparent distancing lies the essence of his particular impersonality: it embraces the art of partial concealment, the capacity to shift the reader's attention from the explicit reality to the implicit ethical intimation, and to demand our own complicity as witnesses. For Lewis, a comparable degree of stylistic impersonality is less conspicuous, though what emerges at first sporadically and, in the later work, increasingly in his poetry and with arguably more assurance in his prose, is a greater attention to objectivity, a recession or at least relegation of the subjective self in a movement outwards to the concrete realities of the wider human predicament. Moreover, as his Indian poems

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[4] See Hamilton, 'The Forties', p. 62. Hamilton alleges that Douglas's poetry mirrors 'the tightlipped insensitivity of the officers' mess'.

demonstrate, he too invites us to witness, not Douglas's desert dead and the poet speaker as perpetrator, but the scope of India's aridity, the native indifference and 'slow poison' of lost colonial meaning in which, as a soldier, he and, by implication, his military masters, are complicit.[5] This constitutes in part what I term an 'extinction of Self' as a distancing of the poet-speaker, giving primacy to the objective correlative of feelings engendered by experience.[6]

Beyond this, 'extinction of Self' also relates to the profoundly decentring inner division that emerges in differing but overlapping ways in both poets, creating a sense of alterity, an apparent battle with Otherness, or, in Lewis's case, seeking escape from the self, and solace in the often addressed 'Beloved'. Chapter 2 will examine this issue in terms of Douglas's 'bête noire' and Lewis's 'greater enmity within,' each seeming to express a comparable plurality of inner hostilities that threaten and sometimes destabilize any sense of the subject as a unified self.[7] At times, a division or even separation of identity emerges in the employment of a mediating trope, a lens, window or dislocated space through which the subject is seemingly distanced, a device which Douglas repeatedly uses, so enhancing the impression of detachment. Such detachment becomes, in some instances, almost scientific, as in 'The Marvel' (1941), in which the excised, predatory eye of the eponymous swordfish yields to the 'sharp enquiring blade' (l. 4) and is conceived as an 'instrument forged in semi-darkness' (l. 7) to become 'a powerful enlarging glass' (l. 9): the images coalesce almost as a metaphor for Douglas's own poetic process.[8] Elsewhere, both with Douglas and Lewis,

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[5] Alun Lewis, 'The Jungle', in Lewis, *Collected Poems*, ed. by Cary Archard (Bridgend: Seren Books, paperback edition, 2007), pp. 155-158 (p. 156, l. 42).
[6] In his essay entitled 'Hamlet' [1919], T. S. Eliot defined the term 'objective correlative' by stating that '[T]he only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an "objective correlative", in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be a formula of that *particular* emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked.' See *Selected Prose of T. S Eliot,* ed. by Frank Kermode (London, Boston: Faber and Faber, 1975), pp. 45-49 (p. 48).
[7] The terms are taken respectively from Keith Douglas's, 'Note on Drawing for the Jacket of *Bête Noire*', in Douglas, *The Complete Poems,* pp. 129-130 (p. 129), and from Alun Lewis's poem, 'The Jungle', in Lewis, *Collected Poems,* p. 156, l. 56.
[8] Douglas, 'The Marvel', in *The Complete Poems*, p. 73.

impersonality is achieved through the physical distancing and detachment of the poet-speaker, a strategy that enables the eye to travel outwards, thereby establishing a sense of liminality or inner dislocation and division, often rooted in the poet's ambivalent relation to circumstance and environment.

Paradoxically, neither in Douglas's nor Lewis's oeuvre does the impersonal voice or striving for seemingly distanced objectivity equate to dispassion or disengagement. On the contrary, in differing degrees, each engages profoundly ethical, cultural and historically stimulated questions that emerge from their respective reactions to time and circumstance. Embedded within their work, expressed either by intimation or a more overt anxiety, resides a profoundly personal awareness and response to the pressures of a prevailing hegemonic discourse. This chapter therefore includes discussion of aspects of biography and historicity that impact on the stylistic impulse of both writers: the creative process for each represents a commitment to truth and, as soldier-poets, to a profound need to find new registers that can express the reality of their time and place within it, untrammelled by prescribed rhetoric and discourses freighted with protest and propaganda.

Arguably, that process is the means by which the artist extends his grasp not only of the truth he witnesses, but even of the self as an entity he has not formerly known. As Mohammed Sharafuddin argues '[T]he practice of poetry can become [...] a process of discovering and learning, not merely one of repetition and reassurance', a statement which is utterly pertinent to the art of Douglas and Lewis, and to their respective struggles to resolve inner contestation and a recurrent sense of fragmentation.[9] To confront and imaginatively articulate the truth of experience thus becomes a means by which these writers apprehend and grapple with their otherness in a wartime context that intensifies the loss of anchorage, so augmenting their sense of separation and psychic estrangement, in turn infecting the nostalgia

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[9] Mohammed Sharafuddin, *Islam and Romantic Orientalism: Literary Encounters with the Orient* (London: I.B. Taurus Publishers, 1994), p. viii.

that haunts the soldier in moments of debilitating, even savage torpor. Both writers experienced the latter, but in different degrees and with different reactions. For Douglas, in periods of military training, frustrating inactivity was the spur to plunge into combat: for Lewis, it was more often a source of deepening depression and displacement in what was, for him, the unreality of army life.

Whatever parallels exist, war ultimately presented these men with significantly different challenges. For Douglas, it was that of killing, of poetic exploration of the realities and debris of battle, of being a seemingly detached perpetrator whilst, in that detachment, betraying another reality, an implicit sense of guilt. In an ethical sense, this renders Douglas, the poet-perpetrator, a victim of his own actions. His greatest output was, indeed, that of the combatant poet, the paradoxical destroyer-creator. Lewis, by contrast, never saw combat, despite being about to engage in a guerrilla conflict immediately prior to his death: his battle was predominantly within, yet increasingly focusing with outward objectivity while intensifying his innate compassion. However, perhaps of equal significance to their forms of poetic testimony is that both experienced what it was to be the exiled, geographically and psychically displaced poet in a mobile war. The surreal space of the desert battlefield for Douglas, and the vast, ambivalent space of the Indian subcontinent for Lewis, infused the topographies of their minds. For both, such a combination of complexities fed an already latent sense of their own individuality and detachment, becoming the stimulus for their respective quests to give testimony, to transcribe personal realities as witnesses to their inner and outer battles, even at the cost of the ultimate self-extinction, death. This chapter therefore examines the ways in which this interlocking of circumstance, inherited generic developments, historicity, the discourses and rhetoric of war, and, not least, innate creative predilections, impacted on the stylistic development of both Keith Douglas and Alun Lewis.

Part 1: Keith Douglas: The Distanced Voice

While the details of Keith Douglas's life are in part salient to this chapter, I do not wish to offer a detailed, extensive biographical examination, for two reasons. Firstly, the overarching context of impersonality demands attention only to those aspects of his life that seem to have specific relevance to the formation of Douglas's stylistic impulse, and, secondly, it would be redundant within this thesis to attempt to repeat the findings of Desmond Graham's extensive and reputedly definitive biographical study.[10] Nevertheless, in the relative absence of background evidence other than that which Graham offers us, it is the latter that necessarily constitutes the main source of selective biographical detail I consider here. What are important are those stages in his short life which arguably reflect and influence his deep-rooted desire for poetic and personal individuality. In these one can trace his impulse to re-describe experience with a growing sense of detachment, interwoven with an expression, often masked or deflected, of his own inner struggles, disappointments, residual guilt, or vulnerabilities. Eliot's dictum regarding impersonality and 'the man who suffers' cited earlier seems difficult to ignore in this respect.[11] It engages with Douglas's predilection for the apparent distancing or camouflaging of his own involvement in pain and human loss, either as victim or perpetrator, in what amounts to poetic testimony.

Desmond Graham has stated that Keith Douglas, from his earliest years, was characterized by a determination to express his individuality, to 'force his will on events'.[12] As Graham explains, this would become most conspicuous when, in October 1942, frustrated by non-combatant training and administrative drudgery, he ignored the orders of his Divisional Headquarters and drove his truck to El Alamein to engage in the greater challenge and danger of the desert campaign. To those who knew him from boyhood, however, this

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[10] Graham, *Keith Douglas*.
[11] Eliot, 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', in *Selected Prose* (1975), p. 41.
[12] Graham, 'Preface' in *Keith Douglas*, p. ix.

would evince no surprise. Graham observes that Douglas's character expressed opposing sides, the apparent polarities of distant arrogance and open sensitivity, or ruthless honesty that generated stinging criticism of others and its counterpart, sympathetic understanding.[13] As the biography avers, this constituted an ambivalence in him that, even as a boy, emerged in his oscillation between a confessed attraction for the military life that prompted him to commit passionately to the O.T.C. at Christ's Hospital school, and later as a student at Oxford, and the repulsion he felt for the brutality of war for which such training was, in reality, a preparation.[14] He felt a similar revulsion for what he perceived in his school as a propensity for the inculcation of 'bullying, fascism, anti-Semitism, the love of Hitler, and militarism', despite paradoxically describing himself as a 'militarist' in a clearly autobiographical story which is believed to have been written in or around 1932, when Douglas was only twelve.[15] Its opening lines read: 'As a child he was a militarist, and like many of his warlike elders, built up heroic opinions upon little information – some scrappy war stories of his father'.[16] Even here, precocious though it may seem, the writing reveals an impulse to deflect from the subjective 'I' to the depersonalized 'he', a possible gesture towards controlled impersonality, while there is a hint, too, however unconsciously ironic it might be, of his later undoubted understanding of the gap between a public discourse based on the rhetoric of heroism and the reality of combat in war.

This section examines both the nature and roots of Douglas's stylistic impulse and, as the thesis will progressively demonstrate, a constituent of his poetic impersonality, an

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[13] Graham cites instances of Douglas's rather precociously arrogant censure of the rituals of Armistice Day encountered as a pupil at Christ's Hospital, set alongside acknowledgement of his sensitivity to the dangers inherent in 'the evil of militarism'. See Graham, *Keith Douglas*, p. 39.

[14] The Officer Training Corps that Douglas joined while at Christ's Hospital school to which he won a place in 1931.

[15] Graham, *Keith Douglas*, p. 39.

[16] *Ibid*., p. 1. Graham references this short opening extract from Douglas's untitled story on p. 263 as a manuscript originally held in the possession of Marie J. Douglas, Keith's mother. It currently forms part of the 'Keith Douglas Papers' held in the British Library, cited by Graham as British Library, Add. MS 56359, and is reproduced in full as 'An Untitled Autobiographical Story' in *Keith Douglas: A Prose Miscellany,* ed. Desmond Graham (Manchester: Carcanet, 1985), pp. 13-16.

implicit ambivalence. Analysis of a number of texts will show his ability to deflect the poetic voice from one perspective to another, or to convey perceptual shifts that offer an alternative signification from what at first appears a dispassionately detached response. It is through such shifts that controlled and skilfully submerged layers of thought and feeling are detectable, thus constituting the deeper textual reality. Ambivalence at times points to uncertainties and instabilities at the centre of the speaking voice, aspects which will be discussed in terms of psychic fracture, and as ostensible indicators of trauma and the management of guilt or injury. I will be drawing upon the previously cited theories of Cathy Caruth and Elaine Scarry to illuminate these aspects of Douglas's work in that I contend that Douglas's impersonal technique is, at least in part, a poetic strategy for coping with and expressing such tensions. The latter are often dialectically framed, therefore, suggestive of a vexing yet paradoxically creative ambivalence within, one that seems very likely to have been fed, not only by his immersion in combat and the inherently paradoxical role of a 'war poet', but also in no small part by the tensions of his childhood background. It is for this reason that some attention must here be given to key elements of Douglas's early life. Those pre-adult years deserve examination in that, as I believe, they are not only formative of his character and his sense of individuality, but also impact on his artistic impulse to find the core truth of experience, to express a disordered world with meticulous precision and objectivity. That truth, of course, may itself expose the ambivalence of such experience.

Desmond Graham observes that, in Douglas's teenage years, as he was shaping his view of the world, 'the ambivalence of his response to soldiering lay at the heart of it'. Indeed, the propensity for ambivalence was clear in a boy who, at an early age, could openly lament the cruelty of war yet who responded with a passion to the discipline, skills and efficiency that the training Corps offered him. This, as Graham says, was his desired contact with 'an ordered, traditional world, and a world of undeniable importance', a world that, at

this time in his life, was loaded with ambiguity.[17] Its dedication to drilling and weaponry bore deep fascination for him while also being a reminder of its darker, ultimate purpose, but it may also have represented an appealing contrast with an earlier childhood characterized by elements of insecurity, uncertainties, lack of peer companionship and the instability of family life. Keith's father, Captain Keith Sholto Douglas, MC, had distinguished himself in the First World War, only to fall into financial hardship and unemployment on his return home. It was, for Captain Douglas, a deep source of unrest. By 1921, he had returned to the Army, hoping for five years of active duty in the Irish Civil War, only to return after one year to unemployment and further frustration. Young Keith seemingly idolized this man with his exuberance and military dash, but financial uncertainties prevailed, so forcing a situation in which, while the father sought work, the boy was for a period brought up by his mother and her parents. In such circumstances, the infant Keith developed his independence, the art of self-entertainment in his quiet, private world: he lived without friends, strolling in the countryside with his elderly grandfather, or retreating into his own predilection to draw or relate stories to his toys.

In 1923, Douglas's father bought a house and some land and developed a chicken farm in Cranleigh, Surrey, but in its second year it was lurching from early success towards financial disaster, burdened by costly, ambitious expansion schemes and, more significantly, the collapse of his wife's health due to 'sleeping sickness' which, as Desmond Graham notes, had become common for a period after the Great War.[18] Its treatment increased the family's financial burden, while Mrs Douglas's health was in continuous decline. By 1926, the business collapsed and Keith's father was once again out of work. Thus, the family obtained a loan from a friend, having decided that the only likely stability for the boy was to send him to board at Edgeborough School in Guildford where his literary talent and academic gifts

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[17] Graham, *Keith Douglas*, pp. 40-41.
[18] *Ibid.,* p. 9.

soon burgeoned, as did his already keen interest in war and militarism, and his propensity for leadership. His innate energy and athleticism flourished, but there was little anchorage in his life outside that of school. By 1928 he had seen nothing of his father, even when visiting his mother who was still ailing and so, facing reality, she admitted to her son that the marriage was irretrievably broken. Douglas's father had moved to Wales and would soon marry the young woman, Olwen, who had been his mother's helper during the farming years. At the age of ten, if not earlier, in reality, the boy had irretrievably lost his father.

Graham's account of the years that followed and of Douglas's visits to his mother during school holidays confirms that, after 1933, he rarely saw her. The father was, of course, a constant absentee. The biographer's words suggest the depth of the young boy's private method of coping with and, perhaps, detaching himself from his sense of loss:

> When [he] did stay with his mother at Bexhill [...] he saw little of her, for she was out from seven-thirty in the morning till nine at night, as daily companion to an exacting old lady. Even when they were together, he rarely spoke about serious subjects and never about his father. At first his mother had tried to talk with Douglas about him, stressing Captain Douglas's military record for fear that her son would see him as wholly bad; but Douglas, she remembers, showed no interest and never brought up the subject himself.[19]

Arguably, the seeds of his impersonal art are detectable here in an evident capacity for suppressing, or holding at a distance, the emotional impact of experience, in this case in the virtual erasure of the paternal figure he had once idolized. This is the father whom, again revealing the stylistic propensity for deflecting from the subjective to the objective third person, Douglas had clearly represented in the untitled autobiographical story referenced earlier as one 'who did not spend very much time with him'.[20] Even at twelve, one feels he was finding the formally articulated prose which was consonant with the style he declared as his artistic objective when he wrote at the age of sixteen, 'I hope that some of the earlier

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[19] Graham, *Keith Douglas*, p. 26. Graham adds a footnote that, when Douglas left school in 1938, his father wrote to him but his suggestion that they should meet was ignored.

[20] Douglas, *Prose Miscellany*, p. 13.

experiences may shake out into a perspective in which I may look at them unemotionally'.[21]

Already, in such a remark, the intention not to remain under the boyhood influence of Romantic traditions, but to move closer to the modernist poetic world of T.S. Eliot, is audible. Moreover, as William Scammell observes, by the time Douglas was ready to take up his scholarship to Merton College, Oxford, physical symptoms of stress such as his asthma suggest that, 'beneath his tough exterior, he was more affected by the insecurity of his family background than he cared to show'.[22] The die was surely cast for such insecurities to 'shake out' into a 'perspective' that resisted any emotional overflow.

Douglas's early romantic relationships will receive closer attention later in this thesis, particularly in Chapter 4. However, their significance deserves brief consideration here in terms of how they affected his self-perception and the management of inner hurt. It was at Oxford that this layer of his life would begin to unfold against the emerging background of war, notably with Yingcheng Sze, the daughter of a former Chinese Ambassador to Washington to whom he showed an almost obsessive totality of commitment. Such feelings overflowed sufficiently for him to paint three portraits of her and journeyed' in produce a conspicuously subjective and untypically romantic poem, 'Stranger' (1939), though also laced with traces of Donne's metaphysical conceits as the speaker recalls her face:

> For your eyes and your precious mouth perhaps
> Are blessed isles once found and found no more.
>
> You are the whole continent of love
> For me, the windy sailor on this ocean,
> Who'd lose his ragged vessel to the waves
> And call on you, the strange land, to save.[23]

<div align="right">(ll. 11-16)</div>

While Desmond Graham draws attention to the poem's resonance with images of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (1610), what is also traceable is the ambivalence that, in the

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[21] Graham, in 'Introduction' to *Prose Miscellany*, p. 9.
[22] Scammell, *Keith Douglas: A Study*, p. 7.
[23] Douglas, 'Stranger (For Y.C.S.), in *The Complete Poems*, p. 25.

words 'blessed isles once found and found no more', conflates both finding and losing.[24] The

responsiveness to loss is inherent in Douglas's later work, not least in what some have argued

to be a callous detachment in his poetic configurations of death and the act of killing. In this

instance, there is a sense of anticipated loss, ironic enough in that Yingcheng was eventually

to grow more distant from Douglas and, after a fractious holiday, increasingly aware of him

as over-dependent on her and freighted with uncertainties that he masked with brash self-

confidence. She concluded he was 'not a very male man'[25] and, soon after, around the time

of Chamberlain's announcement that Britain was at war with Germany, Douglas learned that

she was going to be married, news that he reportedly took 'with impassivity'. Yet again, what

stands out is his propensity to submerge an emotional reaction, to mask his hurt, and perhaps

vestigial guilt, in an apparent dispassion. Nevertheless, he knew this to be a mask. As he

wrote to the parents of Antoinette Beckett, the woman with whom he almost immediately

struck up a relationship after his 'loss' of Yingcheng, and who would later become his

fiancée in a short-lived engagement:

> I shall never get over the idea of the world in general as a powerful force working for
> my hurt: nor would I wish to, for this conception of things saves me many
> disappointments [...] Reading this through, I must say I think it sounds rather a
> conceited letter [...] I believe I alternate between extreme conceit, and an extreme
> inferiority complex.[26]

The words confess his vulnerability but, equally, attest to a determination to use painful

experience as the stimulus that demanded a strategy for control and, implicitly, self-

protection. Together with the ambivalence implicit here, the remark seems to offer a

proleptic hint of the qualities that shape the stylistic impulse of his later work and of the

writings to emerge from his desert wartime experience. That experience began in July, 1940,

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[24]Graham, *Keith Douglas*, p. 72. Graham believes the poem's 'literary and full-blown style' carries this Shakespearean emphasis and that the poem was written during a period in which his romanticism obtrudes in a way that was neither typical nor sustained in his developing style.
[25]Graham, *Keith Douglas*, p. 78-79.
[26] Keith Douglas, undated letter to Mr. and Mrs. Beckett, [early 1940]. See Douglas, *The Letters*, pp. 123-124 (p. 123).

when, at the instigation of Antoinette he yet again suffered a broken courtship: he shrugged off an initial threat of suicide to go off and join the Third Horsed Cavalry Training Regiment. He had now truly become an authenticated 'militarist'.

Jonathan Bolton posits that, for those writers emergent in the period leading into World War Two, there was a sense in which they felt haunted by public anticipation of 'another Rupert Brooke or Wilfred Owen'. The climate of belief in the 1930s was tainted with disillusionment: everything that needed to be said about war seemed to have been said, thus rendering poetry of protest or patriotism a seemingly futile exercise.[27] This was the period in which Douglas's artistic impulse was gestating. Arguably, the climate was less disposed to re-discovering the voice of an Owen and more in tune with the view of W. B. Yeats who, recollecting the poetry of the Great War in 1936, and alluding to Owen's work, wrote that 'passive suffering is not a theme for poetry'.[28] As early as 1915, he had also written:

> I think it better in times like these
> A poet's mouth be silent, for in truth
> We have no gift to set a statesman right.[29]

His words, seemingly advocating the wisdom of silence, might easily fit the dominant feeling of writers in the late 30s that the political tide that would lead to World War II was irrepressible.

Of course, there were those like Auden and Spender, enmeshed in the shadow of the Spanish Civil War, who, out of hope and deep commitment, still felt the artistic obligation to speak.[30] However, their words are at times inflected with the recognition that political

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[27] See Bolton, *Personal Landscapes*, pp. 21-22. Bolton argues that, following the Great War, the 1930s bred a feeling that poetry was unlikely to prevent a repetition of history. He states, 'the "next war" had been anticipated for nearly a decade, and there was little hope of stopping it'.

[28] W. B. Yeats, 'Introduction', in *The Oxford Book of Modern Verse 1892-1935* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1936), p. xxxiv.

[29] See W. B. Yeats, 'On Being Asked for a War Poem' [1915], in *The Poems*, ed. Daniel Allbright (London: Dent, 1990), p. 205.

[30] W. H. Auden's pamphlet-poem, *Spain*, (London: Faber, 1937), reputedly galvanized the contemporary consciousness of British writers of like-minded individual commitment with its metonymic voicing of the

posturing and the claims of heroic discourse are at best fragile truths, however strongly Spain

had merged literary and political preoccupations. Spender, despite his exhortations to fellow

poets to express faith in a better future society,[31] was acutely aware of the painful and

disappointing realities of political struggle, while it was Auden who referred to the 1930s as

'a low, dishonest decade',[32] and who, disillusioned by the failure of the Republican struggle

in the Spanish Civil War, in his poem of mid-1939, 'In Memory of W. B. Yeats', seems to

recognize the inefficacy of poetry either as a means of protest or as a source for active

change:

> For poetry makes nothing happen: it survives
> In the valley of its saying where executives
> Would never want to tamper: it flows south
> From ranches of isolation and the busy griefs,
> Raw towns that we believe and die in; it survives,
> A way of happening, a mouth.[33]

The quiet, declarative tones suggest Auden's resignation to measurable realities, despite his

strong political conviction. Paradoxically, however, there is a sense in which these words are

both anti-political and yet politically resonant: they constitute testimony to the power of

poetry as a process of truth-telling rather than the cause of political consequence. This

consciousness of poetry as a mouthpiece for Truth that reaches from 'ranches of isolation',

beyond the grasp of those who are too distant to 'tamper', surely resonates with Douglas's

unwavering commitment to speak only of 'true things, significant things', and to do so in a

voice that refuses to succumb to the inflections of political ideology or to be a repetition of

his Great War poetic precursors, however much he valued them.[34]

It is this determination that possibly underlies the conclusion Douglas drew from his

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words, 'I am your choice, your decision. Yes, I am Spain' (l. 56, p. 9). The strategy of speaking as the nation, while an impersonalizing device, is deeply persuasive to the politically attuned conscience.
[31] This was an optimism he expressed in 'War Poetry in This War' in *The Listener*, 16 (16 October 1941), 539-540.
[32] W. H. Auden, 'September 1, 1939', in *The English Auden: Poems, Essays and Dramatic Writings 1927-1939*, ed. Edward Mendelson (London: Faber, 1977), p. 245, l. 5.
[33] W. H. Auden, 'In Memory of W. B. Yeats', in Auden, *English Auden*, pp. 241-243 (p. 242, ll. 36-41).
[34] Douglas stated this as his objective in his letter to J. C. Hall, 10 August 1943, partially reproduced in Douglas, *Prose Miscellany,* pp. 127-128, (p. 127).

absorption of First World War poetry, expressed in his essay written in Egypt in May, 1943:

> hell cannot be let loose twice [...]. The hardships, pain and boredom; the behaviour of the living and the appearance of the dead, were so accurately described by the poets of the Great War that everyday [sic] on the battlefields of the western desert [...] their poems are illustrated. Almost all that a modern poet on active service is inspired to write, would be tautological.[35]

By this time, immersed in the realities and unrealities of battle, profoundly beset by a sense of inner division and, as Graham says, 'multiple personality', his predilection is clear.[36] The protests of Great War poets, expressions of pacifist conscience or the obligation to reflect heroic discourse, do not constitute his impulse. His objective is not to express an ideologically purposeless war, but, instead, in a singularly personal way, to make fact, the essential truth, clear, as is seen in 'The Trumpet' (1943):

> O how often Arcturus
> have you and your companions
> heard the laughter and the distant shout
> [...]
> crying that war is sweet,
> [...]
>
> Tonight we heard it
> who for weeks have only listened
> to the howls of inhuman voices.
> [...]
>   We must be up early
>
> tomorrow, to forget the cry and the crier
> as we forgot the conversation
> of our friends killed last month, last week
> and hear, crouching, the air shriek
> the crescendo, expectancy to elation
> violently arriving. The trumpet is a liar.[37]

The opening apostrophe to the star, Arcturus, recalls a classical stylistic form of address, and possibly hints at Edward Thomas's imagery in his poem 'The Trumpet' (1916), though with

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[35] Keith Douglas, 'Poets in This War', unpublished essay [May, 1943], reproduced in Douglas, *Prose Miscellany*, pp. 117-120, (pp. 119-120).

[36] Graham, *Keith Douglas*, p. 190. This concept of plural identity or personality is the subject of my examination of Keith Douglas's 'beast' and its recursive appearance in his desert poems and, as he himself was to express in his note on the drawing for the jacket of his fragmentary poem, 'Bête Noire', possibly in all his poetry. The note appears in Douglas, *Complete Poems*, pp. 129-130.

[37] Keith Douglas, 'The Trumpet', in Douglas, *The Complete Poems,* p. 103, ll. 1-24.

contradictory significance. For Thomas, in a paean to nature, the stars illuminate the earth and the trumpet exhorts men to 'Arise, arise' in the joy of being alive.[38] Douglas's poem offers no such heroic, celebratory passion. As his poem progresses, its focus becomes rooted far more in the stark nature of a present, 'inhuman' predicament. The poem's tone segues into carefully modulated resignation to the objective fact of battle. There is a muted clarity of voice here, an absence of stridency or sentimentality: instead, the language conveys cool acceptance of what has been and what must come. The elision of 'last month, last week' subtly enacts the passage of time and the multiplying dead, so rendering any temptation to dwell on war's victims redundant, while the sense of anticipated 'elation' in the new onslaught is so utterly subverted in the adverbial phrase, 'violently arriving', two words that validate the terse truth of the final sentence.

The detectable vestige of Wilfred Owen's 'old Lie' here may confirm Douglas's absorption of generic tradition, but it is articulated in a new voice whose source lies in the sustained first-hand experience of a different war and which constitutes anything but tautology.[39] This is the voice that, in the aforementioned essay, is quite unequivocal in its critique of the inter-war poets and the discourse and received rhetoric to which they, and their audience, were servants:

> During the period "entre deux guerres" we were listening alternately to an emphasis of [sic] the horrible nature of modern war and to the vague remedies of social and political reformers. The nation's public character remained, in spite of all, as ignorant and reactionary as ever, [...] the poets [...] who were accustomed to teach politics and even supposed themselves [...] versed in the horrors of the current struggles in Spain, were curiously unable to react to a war which began and continued in such a disconcerting way.[40]

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[38] Edward Thomas, 'The Trumpet' [1916], in *Edward Thomas: Selected Poems and Prose,* ed. David Wright (London: Penguin Classics, 2013), pp. 244-245 (p. 245, l. 22).

[39] The expression is taken from Wilfred Owen's poem, 'Dulce et Decorum Est' [1917], in Wilfred Owen, *The Complete Poems and Fragments*, ed. by Jon Stallworthy, 2 vols (London: Chatto and Windus, 1983), I, p. 144, l. 27.

[40] Douglas, 'Poets in This War', *Prose Miscellany*, p. 118.

For Douglas, this new war demanded a new register that affirmed the unshackled truth of experience, one that could detach itself from political or ethical distortions and speak without sentiment or rhetoric to the reader. At the same time, however, as Edna Longley so accurately observes, this was a poetic voice that, having 'swallowed the lessons of the thirties along with those of the twenties [...] enlarged rather than abandoned the humane critique of war'.[41] It is in this enlargement that I believe Douglas's ostensible detached impersonality reveals its qualifying ambivalence, its shifts of perspective that convey objective truths and the undertow of both personal and universally human cost. In this respect, he gives the lie to his own conclusion to his essay in which he states: 'Meanwhile, the soldiers have not found anything new to say [...] it seems to me the whole body of English war poetry of this war, civil and military, will be created after war is over'.[42] Such words fail to acknowledge Douglas's own, far from belated expression of the uniqueness and originality of his war, both within and without, and of the style in which his imagination transcribes that experience.

A poetic commitment to Truth was, of course, not confined to Douglas: Wilfred Owen's credo that 'every poem, and every figure of speech should be a *matter of experience'* was a riposte to the sanitized propaganda of the media and government of his day which sought to sustain morale through what seemed justifiable falsification or suppression of fact.[43] Douglas's Oxford tutor, correspondent and distinguished First World War poet, Edmund Blunden, would echo the same commitment to honesty when he wrote to him that 'The fighting man in this as in other wars is [...] the only man whom Truth really cares to meet'.[44] Only six days earlier, Douglas had pre-empted these words when he told his friend, J.C. Hall, of his unwavering intention to 'write true things'.[45] It was a declaration

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[41] Edna Longley, *Poetry in the Wars*, (Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe Books, 1986), p. 101.

[42] Douglas, 'Poets in This War', *Prose Miscellany*, p. 118.

[43] Wilfred Owen to Leslie Gunston, 25 November 1917, in Wilfred Owen, *Collected Letters,* Harold Owen and John Bell, eds (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 510. The italics are original.

[44] Edmund Blunden to Keith Douglas, 16 August 1943, in Douglas, *Prose Miscellany*, pp. 129-130 (p. 129).

[45] Douglas, *The Letters*, p. 295.

crystallized by his experience at El Alamein. The essential difference between Douglas, Owen and, indeed, Blunden, therefore lies not in their attitude to poetic Truth but in how each conceived the language and form that, as Tim Kendall states, 'might [...] bridge the gap to make his audience see what he had seen, understand what he had endured'.[46]

For Douglas, as a camouflage officer, a camera was an entitlement. Arguably, this combination of training and privilege is more than coincidentally contiguous with his predilection for 'disguising' the subjective self in tones of detachment, not least in the numerous examples in his work of the trope of the 'lens' that mediates between the subject speaker and the object observed. The sniper of 'How to Kill' (1943) targets his quarry 'in my dial of glass',[47] paradoxically bringing him into clearer vision yet preserving the distanced efficiency of the seemingly cold, detached speaking voice. It is, however, a partial detachment, an impersonality that subverts itself subtly in an admission of self–damnation:

> This sorcery
> I do. Being damned, I am amused
> to see the centre of love diffused
> and the waves of love travel into vacancy.
> How easy it is to make a ghost.

(ll. 14-18)

The language conveys the tension of ambivalence, the conflation of sniper pride and implicit self-awareness that the repetition of 'love' suggests is as much guilt at it is the speaker's fascination with his own efficiency. The subjective 'I' is thus tonally impersonalized, but only to a point: detachment and engagement are held in skilful counterpoint. What Kendall calls 'the ultimate in detached observation' is not an affirmation of cold-hearted, complacent indifference: it is an impersonality that permits our observation of the objective reality of the killing act but, in a subtle perceptual shift, also intimates the conscience of one damned by his

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[46] Tim Kendall, *Modern English War Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 148.
[47] See Douglas, 'How to Kill', in *Collected Poems,* p. 119, l. 7.

own apparent amusement.[48]   Moreover, the poem thus testifies to a self-division, a doubleness of perception that permeates much of Douglas's work and which will form the core of my examination of the dialectical tension that generates the presence of his 'bête noire'.

In this controlled ambivalence lies the ethical challenge to our understanding, and to the speaker's.[49] As such, it constitutes soldier testimony that avoids overt pity, that which Douglas deemed 'useless', but which is sufficiently freighted to exert a coded, perhaps 'camouflaged' and seemingly unarticulated pressure upon the reader to recognize the awareness of human loss and the waste of love that the perpetrator himself perceives.[50] Both here, and in other poems such as '*Vergissmeinnicht*' (1943), the imperative for us to 'Look' dominates the speaker's address.[51]   In what Kendall calls 'the balance of brutality and compassion', the urgent tone expresses more than an invitation to scrutinize: it demands our attention to this as the moment in which the observer recognizes the consequences of his own act.[52] Equally, it forces upon the reader the responsibility, as witness, to be complicit. The art of such impersonality is that, however coded in the register of detachment, the undertow still conveys an affinity between the poet-spectator, the perpetrator, and the sufferer. It is an affinity that may also intimate Douglas's personal awareness of a lover's 'hurt'.[53] In this lies his poetic courage, the willingness to develop a style that offers no obtrusive voice of consolation for the brutal consequences of war, but which articulates the truth in a constant negotiation between detachment and engagement. It amounts to a style and poetic voice that, by their very difference and individuality, offer a different perspective on, and implicit

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[48] Kendall, *Modern English War Poetry*, p. 156.
[49] This will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3 of this thesis.
[50] Douglas, *Alamein to Zem Zem*, p. 51. Douglas records his reaction to a dead enemy soldier who, while dying, had clearly struggled to dress his wounds. He comments, 'It filled me with useless pity'.
[51] Douglas, '*Vergissmeinnicht*', *The Complete Poems*, p. 118, l. 9.
[52] Kendall, *Modern English War Poetry*, p. 160.
[53] Douglas's poetic treatment of love will be examined in Chapter 4 of this thesis.

challenge to, the relationship between writing and the political ideologies that prevailed in 1914-18 and which would have arguably hung over the poetry leading into Douglas's war.

Kendall is not alone in his detection of the ethical awareness in Douglas's seemingly impersonal voice. Jonathan Bolton, too, acknowledges this as part of both the inner war that becomes increasingly evident in the later work and, even more significantly, of Douglas's effort to avoid falling into the trap of silence. He remarks that, 'Unable to protest or praise, many writers opted to say nothing'.[54] In support of this observation he quotes Paul Fussell's explanation for such reticence:

> something close to silence was the byproduct [sic] of experience in the Second War. So demoralizing was this repetition of the Great War within a generation that no one felt it appropriate to say much, either to understand the war or explain it.[55]

Such silence is not characteristic of Douglas: the stimulus of war demanded of him a means of expression that neither evaded nor distorted the truth of his response. Gareth Reeves, speaking of non-combatants in wartime, acknowledges their difficulty in speaking of agonies only indirectly experienced, but he also states, 'to maintain silence is an act of wilful ignorance, to be blind to the altered terrain one finds oneself inhabiting, is to be, however unknowingly, complicit'.[56] Douglas, the combatant poet, rejected silence and was knowingly complicit. His impersonality distances but does not obliterate that complicity, nor the burden of guilt it embodies and which he demands we witness. Nor does it render invisible the tensions and fracture that such a burden imposes upon his sense of identity and his struggle to find unity, a struggle and inner dialectical battle that will become the central focus of the chapter which follows. His impersonal stance has the capacity to demonstrate a double vision such as already observed in 'How to Kill' in which the speaker's perceptions are in

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[54] Bolton, *Personal Landscapes*, p. 22.

[55] *Ibid*. Bolton is quoting from Paul Fussell, *Wartime: Understanding and Behavior in the Second World War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 132-133.

[56] Gareth Reeves, '"This is plenty. This is more than enough": Poetry and the Memory of the Second World War', *The Oxford Handbook of British & Irish War Poetry,* ed. by Tim Kendall (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 579-591 (p. 579).

negotiation between a seemingly bloodless detachment and his awareness of the man he is about to kill, a victim who 'moves about in ways / his mother knows, habits of his' (ll. 9-10).[57] Reeves states:

> In the words of Michael Schmidt, Douglas 'extended poetry into one of the extreme areas of modern experience. Yet he penetrates that extreme area without hysteria – as it were, dispassionately. That is the wonder of his verse: it is the world which is extreme, the strategy for survival and for witness is a kind of neutrality'.[58]

This is almost wholly true, 'almost' because 'neutrality' requires qualification, as does the word 'strategy'. Douglas's impersonal stance avoids hysteria but the textual reality so often betrays a sense of perpetrator guilt and responsibility that is far from unfeelingly neutral. Furthermore, the expression 'strategy [...] for witness' suggests a poetic artifice, a wholly cultivated technique: in so doing, it perhaps does disservice to what becomes an organic constituent of Douglas's mature poetry.

While recognizing the obligation to integrate the impressions of his Great War precursors, Douglas felt the need as an exiled desert poet to articulate experience in an individual voice that distanced itself from propagandist rhetoric and the symbolic discourse of heroism and noble sacrifice. Instead, he chose to depict the realities of desert warfare with stark honesty, unfettered by sentiments with which he could not identify. His preference, as Bolton argues, was for 'placing a premium on empirical observation and eyewitness accounts, with a corresponding emphasis on the relativity of truth'.[59] The term 'accounts' may suggest prosaic rather than poetic truth, but its intended focus is upon the language of poetry and on Douglas's commitment to honesty. The following words from Bernard Spencer's poem, 'Letters' (1943) seem appropriate in their consonance with Douglas's quest for personal and poetic integrity and his obligation to share his vision without evasion:

> Now that public truths are scarcer currency

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[57] Douglas, 'How To Kill', *The Complete Poems*, p. 119.
[58] Reeves, *British and Irish War Poetry*, p. 581. The quotation is cited as Michael Schmidt, 'Introduction', in *Eleven British Poets: An Anthology*, ed. by Michael Schmidt (London: Methuen, 1980), p. 3.
[59] Bolton, *Personal Landscapes*, p. 25.

> What measure for the personal truth?
> How can this ink and paper coursing continents
> Utter the clothed or naked man?[60]

Douglas's poetry expresses both the external and the internal landscape that provide the impulse to communicate the rarer 'currency' of his 'personal truth'. In so doing, his poetic impulse is essentially performative, permitting meaning and underlying feeling to appear without mediating rhetoric, but rather speaking for itself. Bolton observes that this constitutes the artistic burden placed upon language and the quest for a new poetic register:

> In many ways, the major field of battle in the war took place in the realm of language, and the poet found it difficult to make his voice heard above [...] the speech writers who controlled the forms of public discourse [...] [T]he form of language produced by the war was a coded one and the reader was forced either to ignore all reports or to decipher the truth that lay beneath the distortion of official reports, radio broadcasts, and newsreels.[61]

Douglas's solution was to dissociate himself from propagandist distortion, seemingly detaching himself as subject from the object. However, such detachment is itself a kind of code, a register in which empirical observation of war's skeletal and often surreal landscape carries an undertow of tension between protective detachment and the implicit weight of perpetrator guilt and complicity. Herein resides the 'relativity of truth'.[62]

Helen Goethals offers a convincing view on this: she argues that poets such as Douglas, and one may include Alun Lewis here, pose the reader a problem, namely that of unravelling how we understand 'war poetry' as 'an inherently historicizing term, postulating a relationship between the historical events [...] and the poetic response'.[63] The problem, of course, begins with the poet: the suppressive public discourse of 'careless talk costs lives' cannot be a reason for shackling the truth that, for Douglas, was the essence of his impulse.

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[60] *Ibid.* Spencer was a central figure amongst the Personal Landscape group of poets and served in Cairo. He was the founder of the magazine *Personal Landscape*, to which Douglas contributed, and wrote Douglas's obituary. The quotation is taken from Bernard Spencer, *Complete Poetry, Translations and Selected Prose*, ed. Peter Robinson (Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe Books, 2011), p. 211, ll. 1-4. Any further reference to this publication will be given as Spencer, *Complete Poetry* (2011).
[61] *Ibid.,* p. 27.
[62] See Bolton, *Personal Landscapes*, p. 25.
[63] Helen Goethals, 'The Muse that Failed: Poetry and Patriotism During the Second World War', in *British and Irish War Poetry,* pp. 362-376 (p. 362).

For him, as Goethals argues, poetry could not be 'powerless and marginal', nor could it be couched in the public discourse. Accordingly, she argues that for writers such as him, this resulted in a 'self-created split within the poet, between the public and the private self'.[64] The former is that which is constrained by the language of hegemonic 'truth': the 'private self', by contrast, seeks to express, however coded, what constitutes an absolute truth in its poetic response to the killing demands of combat. For Douglas, the need to be truthful, though paramount, thus betrays a dialectical tension that is discernible, however skilfully masked in his impersonal stance. His poetry increasingly reveals as its core concern, to use Yeats's words, that: 'We make out of the quarrel with others, rhetoric, but of the quarrel with ourselves, poetry'.[65] The quarrel within, as this thesis will explore, is at the core of Douglas's wartime and even earlier experience.

In acknowledging this, however, one is not committing Douglas's poetry to the ranks of the 'fatally self-regarding', as Goethals could be construed as implying.[66] To do so would devalue Douglas's pledge to speak of 'true things [...] significant things'.[67] While there is undoubted self-referentiality in his work, it is there as a window, not solely to its personal but also to its wider ethical significance, thereby revealing, through his apparent self-distancing, his own crisis of integrity. It is a crisis that is rescued from concealment in so many instances, such as in the fraught admissions and repetitive affirmations of his (the speaker's) plurality in 'Landscape with Figures 3' (1943):

> I am the figure burning in hell
> [...]
>   I am all
> the aimless pilgrims, the pedants and courtiers
> [...]
> and a murdering villain without fear
> without remorse hacking at the throat. Yes

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[64] *Ibid.,* p. 367.
[65] Quoted by Goethals in *British and Irish War Poetry*, p. 367, these lines are taken from W.B. Yeats, 'Per Amica Silentia Lunae', in *Mythologies* (London: Macmillan, 1962), p. 331.
[66] Goethals, *British and Irish War Poetry*, p. 367.
[67] Douglas to J. C. Hall, 10 August 1943, in *The Letters,* p. 295.

> I am all these
> [...]
> the house whose wall contains the dark strife
> the arguments of hell with heaven.[68]

The paucity of punctuation enhances the headlong rush of confession that betrays both inner crisis and self-recognition. Such poetry is openly voiced in the first person because, here, impersonality must, it seems, give way to an affirmation of inner crisis.

Elsewhere, as has been noted, Douglas's impersonal voice shifts almost dialogically to betray a submerged awareness of pain and even compassion. However, at other times, the voice of the openly subjective 'I' is almost paradoxically the mouthpiece of a coldly detached objectivity that deceptively suggests indifference. As is so evident in the desert poems, this is conveyed through skilful shifts of focus, through an accretion of conflicting responses which, in turn, shape our dual response and understanding. In 'Cairo Jag' (1943), for example, written while he was a patient in El Ballah General Hospital, Douglas's speaker shifts both time and perception from the sour stink and moral depravity of the city to the 'new world' of the desert battlefield in which the natural and the metallic, inanimate world of the dead conflate in starkly objective configurations. The poem will be discussed more fully later, but its tone of cool, unemotional acceptance of the residue of battle deserves illustration here:

> But by a day's travelling you reach a new world
> the vegetation is of iron
> dead tanks, gun barrels split like celery
> [...]
>   you can imagine
> the dead themselves, their boots, clothes and possessions
> clinging to the ground, a man with no head
> has a packet of chocolate and a souvenir of Tripoli.[69]

The coexistence of the depravity of the city and this ironically designated 'new world' not only holds the moral decadence of Cairo and the desert dead in startling counterpoise, but,

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[68] Douglas, 'Landscape with Figures 3', in *The Complete Poems,* p. 111, ll. 1-15.
[69] Douglas, *The Complete Poems*, p. 102, ll. 23-25, 27-30.

through its calmly journalistic tone and almost photographically conceived imagery, conveys a disquieting impression of almost Eliotesque detachment.

Not to speak openly and emotionally, of course, does not mean not to feel: in this lies the dual axis of Douglas's detached engagement. A soldier-poet held in the clutch of war, even a confessed 'militarist' such as Douglas, can feel the need to deflect fear or conscience through the mediating mask of dispassion. An implicit insight into the self-protective element of his impulse for the impersonal mode is evident in the closing lines of his poem, 'Tel Aviv' (1943):

> Do not laugh because I made a poem
> it is to use what then we couldn't handle –
> words of which we know the explosive
> or poisonous tendency when we are too close. If
> I had said this to you then, BANG will
> have gone our walls of indifference in flame.[70]

Earlier in the poem, the speaker's mind dwells upon its delicate balance as 'the many heads of war / are watching us' (ll. 9-10). Douglas uses the collective 'We' who, he admits, 'must balance tiptoe on a pin' (ll. 13-17): these words, and the reflexive metalanguage of the closing stanza above, affirm the precarious fragility of the poet-speaker's universe.

The 'walls of indifference' are clearly a cultivated protective strategy that can so easily crumble, the same 'walls' that reconfigure as 'barriers' and a 'fence' in an earlier, clearly subjective poem, 'Sanctuary' (1940), written when Douglas was profoundly conscious of his absent father. Here, the speaker's tone is both unequivocally confessional and perhaps expressive of a latent fear that his vulnerability may threaten safety:

> Once my mother was a wall;
> behind my rampart and my keep
> in a safe and hungry house
> I lay as snug as winter mouse:
> till the wall breaks and I weep
> for simple reasons first of all.

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[70] Douglas, 'Tel Aviv', in *The Complete* Poems, p. 113, ll. 19-24.

> All the barriers give in,
> the world will lance at every point
> my unsteady heart, still and still
> to subjugate my tired will.
> When it's done they will anoint me,
> being kinder if they win.
>
> So beyond a desperate fence
> I'll cross where I shall not return,
> the line between indifference
> and my vulnerable mind:
> no more then kind or unkind
> touch me, no love nor hate burn.[71]

What is clear, apart from the image of mother as sanctuary, is not merely the audibly ironic presentiment or even promise of the death that Douglas somehow always held in view, but also a sense of his having to hold a 'steady heart', to create walls or barriers that represent the protective construct between 'indifference' and his vulnerability. The words resonate powerfully with the nature of the mask of impersonality that characterizes his poetic growth, and which was to confirm his essential stylistic alienation from the First World War poets with whom he could also feel strong kinship. The poem is indicative of Douglas's attachment to the camouflage of mediating tropes such as the window or glass which, in his final poem, 'On a Return from Egypt' (1944), separates him from his uncertainties, but which is itself vulnerable to fragmentation:

> The next month, then, is a window
> and with a crash I'll split the glass.
> Behind it [...]
> I fear what I shall find.[72]

Gareth Reeves asserts that Douglas's impersonality can amount to a denial of feeling whose 'aftermath entails a deliberate emotional retreat',[73] a view that seems to veer far too much towards the earlier referenced 'tightlipped insensitivity' with which Ian Hamilton had

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[71] Douglas, 'Sanctuary', in *The Complete Poems*, p. 33, ll. 1-18.
[72] Douglas, 'On a Return from Egypt', in *The Complete Poems*, p. 132.
[73] Reeves, *British and Irish War Poetry*, p. 582.

charged the poet.[74]   The poet-speaker's admission here is hardly an emotional 'retreat': Douglas's desert poetry, rather than denying sensitivity, frequently offers us dual perceptions; whilst it can provide testimony to the pride and efficiency of the killer, it still allows access to a humane, even compassionate undercurrent.   The lines above are, however, more direct, testifying to the ethical uncertainties and vulnerability that are fed by the speaker's survival as a killer.

The influence of place and the fact of geographical separation are deeply relevant in the evolution and shaping of both Douglas's and Alun Lewis's respective artistic impulses. In the context of the former's impersonal style and his articulation of a new poetic voice, the desert landscape and his location within it are profoundly significant, as is surely implicit in Desmond Graham's acknowledgement that Douglas's arrival in Egypt in 1942 was a critical turning point in his poetic development.[75]   Distantly cast in a desolate, featureless battle arena, his imagination confronted the remorseless cruelty of space as well as of war, and of their interactive effect upon the nature of the self.   The desert thus becomes the dualistic locus of destruction and, paradoxically, of his own creativity.   In such circumstances the mind can become its own fragile fortress, so requiring its own protective strategy. Furthermore, this predicament becomes the source of an augmented sense of separation and individuality, a sense that lay behind the formation of the *Personal Landscape* group of poets of which Douglas was a member and whose editors declared their artistic interest 'to emphasize those "personal landscapes" which lie outside national and political frontiers'.[76] Keith Douglas's work asserts this same spirit of individuality: determined to avoid overtly

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[74] See Hamilton, 'The Forties', p. 62.

[75] Graham, *Keith Douglas*, p. 11.   Graham refers to Douglas's earlier style as 'ornate, descriptively metaphorical', in contrast with what would henceforth become a commitment to greater objectivity and 'reportage', a term Douglas would use to J. C. Hall in a letter dated 10 June 1943, quoted in full in Douglas, *The Letters*, pp. 286-87 (p. 287).

[76] Bolton, *Personal Landscapes*, p. xiii.   Bolton is quoting from *Personal Landscape,* 2.4, Lawrence Durrell, Bernard Spencer and Robin Fedden, eds (Cairo, 1945).   The magazine publication was in eight parts, each issued separately between 1942 and 1945, but published in their entirety in 1945 as *Personal Landscape: An Anthology of Exile.*

moral and emotional responses that he felt too often inflected the poetry of the First War, what he termed his 'extrospective' impulse thus becomes the means whereby the truth, even what might be otherwise inexpressible pain and injury, can be objectively conveyed.[77]

Such objectivity comprises both Douglas's commitment to shed the shackles of the sometimes oppositional voices of propagandist and pacifist discourse, and to generate writing that, as Philippa Lyon states, explores the 'far less palatable and socially acceptable emotion of cold curiosity'.[78] However, 'cold' may mislead: the exploratory curiosity can equally tap veins of responsiveness that subvert the coldness suggested. Douglas's voice neither constitutes a total withdrawal from feeling, nor complete submersion of his inner contestation and division: rather, it is a mediated, coded representation of experience in which he selectively and explicitly configures those images of war that his imagination confronts. While generically linked to underlying myths derived from the Great War poets, Douglas offers a different perspective. His poetry embodies testimony of the fragmentation of personal identity and, within apparent tones of dispassion and detachment, an ethical exploration of what is witnessed. In this respect, Douglas's work, so often characterized by a pared down, observational style and the imperative that demands us to share in the act of witnessing, conveys the ambivalence of his impersonality. The recurrent focus on the appearance of the dead or soon to be dead which is addressed in subsequent chapters, rather than denoting dispassion, emerges as the articulation of a need to confront the truth of a distinctly individual perception, and its dissonance from the aims and requirements of war as framed by public and official discourses. In that truth, however masked in detachment, so often resides a sub-layer of compassion, even survivor conscience and the burden of complicity as wartime killer.

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[77] Douglas to J. C. Hall, 10 June 1943, in Douglas, *Letters*, p. 287.
[78] Philippa Lyon, ed., *Twentieth Century War Poetry* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 14.

In its sustained control, Douglas's detachment emerges as a consummately developed strategy and, as such, may constitute a consciously evolved poetic posture. However, to deem it wholly so overlooks the central nature of the *ambivalence* that repeatedly underlies his work: rather than a cultivated device, it is an *organic* constituent of his poetic voice. Like his haunting sense of inner fracture which will be examined more fully in this thesis, ambivalence emerges as an inescapable, organic quality that remains perceptible through the strategic mask of impersonality. Arguably, the corollary of this is that utter impersonality can never be achieved: the belief of those such as Robert Nichols, a poet of the Great War, that the 'unimaginability of war' renders 'the individual [...] invisible', is surely not universally valid.[79] However isolating and surreal the desert is in Douglas's configurations explored in this thesis, his internal landscape still remains visible, both to him and the reader, howsoever concealing both the desert camouflage and his poetic tone may suggest. In 'Syria' (1942), for instance, he writes:

> Here I am a stranger clothed
> in the separative glass cloak
> of strangeness.[80]

Even here, despite the subjective 'I', there is evidence of the speaker's self-detachment, but in the admission of estrangement one perceives another level of awareness, that of the burden and self-deprivation this entails, and of the divisive challenge that the desert presents to identity.

Mark Rawlinson, citing '*Vergissmeinnicht*' as his example, argues that it is this quality of detachment that embodies the fraught nature of the canon of 'war poetry' to which, he says, Douglas relates in a special way, in that the poem is constructed on ambivalence, on a dialogic voice.[81] He argues that this and other desert poems thus reveal a coded

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[79] Robert Nichols, ed., *Anthology of War Poetry, 1914 -18* (Redhill: Love and Malcomsen, Ltd., 1943), p. 34.
[80] Douglas, 'Syria', in *The Complete Poems*, p. 89, ll. 11-13.
[81] Rawlinson, *British Writing,* p. 8. Rawlinson speaks of the poem's 'intermingling of abomination and fascination, the engaged and the attached'.

communication. In '*Vergissmeinnicht*', he discerns the speaker's apparent exhilaration in the act of looting, a testimony that conveys a callous detachment which he sees as a reconfiguration of the relations between killer and foe expressed in Wilfred Owen's 'Strange Meeting' (1918), so giving the lie to any sense of Douglas's poem being 'tautological'.[82] However, Rawlinson's reading, which at first seems to give primacy to the poem's callousness, is subverted by the main thrust of his understanding, namely that Douglas's 'unflinching' representation of the speaker's response to the dead is 'an emblem of the structure of war in which material and embodied acts of injuring are [...] yoked with perspectives that transvalue that destruction'.[83] The remark affirms my belief that Douglas's 'transvaluation' is the essential function of his ambivalence in which we can excavate below the surface impersonality and hear the 'second voice' that is conscious of injury, and of humanity's loss. The last stanza serves here to reinforce this point:

> For here the lover and killer are mingled
> who had one body and one heart.
> And death who had the soldier singled
> has done the lover mortal hurt.[84]

The deflection of 'hurt' to the dead soldier, and the use of the abstraction, 'death', as the killer, seemingly distance the speaker from the act, but it is a deception: the language fuses the lover, the killer (for whom the voice speaks) and the dead enemy as one, and the hurt is a distillation of a shared but stylistically muted pain. Herein resides Douglas's restructured idiom for poetic testimony, one which demands of us the obligation to probe the interstices of language, thereby transvaluing the illusion of callousness in penetrating to the truth.

Adam Piette posits a view that, while seemingly confirming my earlier observations on Douglas's camouflage training, also betrays a central flaw. He argues that, through such

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[82] Wilfred Owen, 'Strange Meeting' [1917], in *The Complete Poems and Fragments of Wilfred Owen,* ed. by Jon Stallworthy, 2 vols (London: Chatto and Windus, Hogarth Press, and Oxford University Press, 1983), I, p. 148. Rawlinson makes this analysis in *British Writing*, p. 6.

[83] Rawlinson, *British Writing*, p. 8.

[84] Douglas, '*Vergissmeinnicht*', in *The Complete Poems,* p. 118, ll. 21-24.

training in both camouflage and the coded language of wireless communication, Douglas's mind was 'trained to make such moves', to deflect his perceptions from apparently visceral fascinations with the human debris of the battlefield to other levels of signification.[85] Though plausible, this theory risks overlooking the *innate* artistic impulse that drove Douglas in search of a poetic style that could communicate only 'true things'.[86] His wartime experience, I suggest, intensified and modulated this impulse rather than created it. Nevertheless, Piette accurately identifies Douglas's impersonality as a new poetic register that comprises 'mediating modes' which both communicate the objective reality as poet-witness, and allow the reader entry to the underlying 'introspective territories' that reside in the interstitial spaces as a more 'privatized' response.[87] This, I believe, strikes at the far from still centre of Douglas's poetic impulse. As Chapter 2 will show, Douglas's predilection to 'lose' the self in objectivity emerges both as a strategy and a torment, an inescapable, protean 'beast' to which his sense of inner fixity is forfeit. Moreover, it is in the private core of the poetic voice that we detect the undertow of feeling that so often renders the language, and its impersonality, ambivalent. Douglas's perceptual shifts, his freighted imperatives and his recursive, mediating images thus become the conduit through which we reach the truth of his poetic testimony.

In closing this section and before turning to focus on Alun Lewis, it seems particularly appropriate and germane to refer to another of Mark Rawlinson's remarks:

> The signification of combat is a question of visibility, and of legibility. [...] It is a commonplace that the modern literature of war holds an oppositional relationship to the reified abstractions of the discourses which administer the larger movement of conflicts between states. Literature becomes war's secret history, bringing to light a truth of war which is always vulnerable to suppression, theoretical idealization, or amnesia.[88]

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[85] Piette, *Imagination at* War, p. 30.
[86] Douglas, to J. C. Hall, 10 August 1943, in *The Letters,* p. 295.
[87] Piette, *Imagination at War*, p. 18.
[88] Rawlinson, *British Writing*, pp. 110-111.

As I have aimed to show, while the term 'impersonality' commonly suggests an absence of feeling or a lack of human empathy, Keith Douglas's poetry extends its signification beyond that of battle-hardened indifference. Nor is this signification purely the by-product of immersion in the conflict of war, interlocked with experience of self-fragmentation, exile and Otherness. As already indicated, it emerges from his earlier years as an organic impulse to control pain and loss, to convey such experience with 'impassivity'.[89] Douglas's impersonality is thus a vehicle for the expression of truth, not only articulating what is objectively 'visible', but also – on closer insight - making 'legible' the artist's constant, imaginative negotiation between perceived appearances and what, in his 'secret history', lies beneath, so often implicit in his ambivalent stance.

Yone Noguchi has remarked that 'the real test for poets is how far they resist their impulse to utterance'.[90] Such words do not constitute a mandate to opt for silence in the poetic response, but resonate far more acutely with Douglas's mode of articulation. Alongside his seeming dispassion and apparent resistance to reveal overt emotional engagement resides the poet's demand for us to 'read the space between the lines'.[91] The art of Douglas's impersonality lies, not simply in an avoidance of political ideology or conspicuous emotionalism, but in its combination of natural impulse and a controlled negotiation between voice, person and perception. It is in the synergy of these elements and 'the space between the lines' that he meets the challenge of truth in a unique poetic register that, ironically, is deeply personal in its apparent impersonality.

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[89] Graham, *Keith Douglas*, p. 79.
[90] Yone Noguchi, 'The Spirit of Japanese Poetry' [1914], in *Selected English Writings of Yone Noguchi: an East-West Literary Assimilation,* ed. by Yoshinobu Hakutani, 2 vols (London: Associated University Presses, 1992), II, pp. 55-98 (p. 58).
[91] Yone Noguchi, 'The Japanese Hokku Poetry', in *The Spirit of Japanese Poetry* (London: J. Murray, 1914), pp. 33-53 (p. 34).

Part 2: Alun Lewis: Seeing Beyond the Self

> I've used my strength in striving for the vision,
> And *with* the vision – like old Jacob's stress;
> And I have worked to outline with precision
> Existence in its native nakedness.[92]

Poetic impersonality, while it is a means of distancing the subjective voice, cannot eradicate the self that is the source of its utterance. What may seem to be detachment can be a mask for engagement. As such, it is intrinsically paradoxical and, as already discerned in Keith Douglas's oeuvre, can articulate a profoundly personal vision, one that can envisage and objectify the 'world' outside his own without the distraction of obfuscating sentiment, yet, simultaneously, encompass a profound insight into the frailties, uncertainties, conscience or sense of isolation and un-belonging that flow beneath the spoken word. To see beyond the self, as it were, amounts to an engagement with external realities in such a way that the subjective domain is muted, even if only temporarily, either concealed or strategically distanced to give primacy to the observed over the observer. Impersonality thus demands that we discover in its detachment, distance, or objectivity, what lies in 'the space between the lines'.

In Alun Lewis's case, as with Keith Douglas, impersonality is not solely a stylistic strategy or mode of expression: it is embodied, too, in a recursive and pluralistic sense of Otherness that emanates from inner division, uncertainty and fractured identity, and in configurations of physical, cultural and imaginative displacement. From its earliest stages, Lewis's trajectory reveals a creative impulse balanced, often tenuously, on an inherent, vexing ambivalence that, like Douglas's, may be construed as an organic condition. The dialectical tensions so generated in the work of both writers constitute the central concern of much of this thesis, not least in their emergence as a struggle between the artist's profound personal engagement and the desire to find objective detachment, often combined with the

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[92] Lewis, 'Prologue: The Grinder', in *Collected Poems*, p. 21, ll.13-16.

allure of self-dissolution. It is, for Lewis, a struggle that is at times visible as an attempt to accommodate what Richard Poole calls 'a calculated sacrifice of self' in an outward focus, and the conflicting impulses of a romantic temperament.[93]

The lines from 'Prologue: The Grinder' (1940) that open this discussion are surely apposite here: they encapsulate both the avowed intent behind Lewis's stylistic journey and the strenuous creative effort it entailed. The poem, an internal dialogue, resonant of Blake's 'The Tyger', voices the speaker's self-questioning struggle to understand and validate his creative purpose:

> Nothing to grind? Then answer, and I'll go.
> Who carved the round red sun?
> Who purified the snow?
> Who is that hidden one? You do not know.
>
> Then, as you cannot answer, I will take
> Such odds and ends as likely you possess,
> And grind them fine and patch them for their sake
> And other reasons which you may not guess.[94]

(ll. 1-8)

The structure of address and response to the designated 'you' conveys a sense of Otherness, a bilocated self that imparts a distinctly impersonal tone and form to these lines, despite the subjective 'I'. It is, however, a skilfully constructed illusion, for in the following stanza, one senses that the speaker embodies the poet's own consciousness, in imagined retrospection, of the imperfections of his artistry. The speaking persona's language metaphorically projects and enacts the poet's unrelenting desire for creating perfection in shaping and articulating the deliberately understated 'odds and ends' of experience:

> I grind my words like knives on such events
> As I encounter in my peddling round.
> But the worn whetstone's whirling face prevents
> The perfect statement of the truths I found

(ll. 9-12)

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[93] See Poole, *The Welsh Connection*, p.133.
[94] Lewis, in *Collected Poems*, p. 21.

'Grind', the emphatic, voltaic 'But', and the spinning, alliterative assonance of line 11,

unmistakably enact a sense of the persona's failure to achieve what Lewis himself always

asserted, like Keith Douglas, as the core of his poetic integrity, 'the perfect statement of the

truths I found'. The significance of the lines above that constitute the epigraph to this section

thus becomes clearer: they express what I take to be a desire for poetic objectivity and

'precision' unimpeded by intrusive, emotional self-indulgence. Moreover, the allusion to

'Jacob's stress' (l. 14)[95] is, perhaps, not only to be framed within the context of Lewis's

artistic vision, but resonates as a veiled hint of his accompanying battle within himself,[96] to

be examined in Chapter 2 as his 'enmity within', and perhaps to his insecurities and need to

be valued for his art:

> But why should a grinder of words be counted much?
> His patched umbrellas and his notched old knives,
> His makeshift stone and lathe – who values such
> A stroller through ten thousand petty lives?

(ll. 17-20)

As this thesis will demonstrate, Lewis's journey testifies repeatedly to such needs. It also

emerges as a quest to resolve an invasive sense of inner disruption: paradoxically, in seeking

a reconstitution of the self, he would embrace an impulse for self-extinction, not solely to be

seen as a Freudian death wish or some devout consummation. Ironically, of course, his actual

death may confirm this impulse in literal terms: it would come with a fatal shot from his own

revolver at Goppa Pass in March, 1944.[97] However, the quest to expunge self-division may

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[95] Genesis 32. 1-31, provides an account of Jacob's struggles with both God and humankind, and with his own sense of unworthiness and of having been divided inwardly. He prays to God and admits 'I have become two camps' (v.10) as he prepares to confront his brother, Esau, in battle. The allusion seems relevant to Lewis's own sense of inner division and, at times, uncertain worth.

[96] In the Alun Lewis special issue, *Poetry Wales*, 10.3 (Winter 74/75), 79-83 (p. 79), David Shayer writes in his essay, 'Alun Lewis – the poet as combatant', that the poem constitutes 'a single brilliant point of light thrown out by Lewis in his effort to combat the darkness of loss, death, war and unimaginative feeling'. I find this difficult to endorse in its entirety, though the fear of producing 'unimaginative feeling' is implicit in Lewis's use of 'prevents' in line 11.

[97] As described in Pikoulis, *A Life*, pp. 234-235, the court of inquiry into Lewis's death recorded that the fatal wound revealed the temple as the bullet's entry point and the back of the head as the site of exit. The revolver was in Lewis's hand, despite a note which reported it as having been at Alun's side. The court's conclusion

feasibly constitute a further, metaphorical dimension of Lewis's 'impersonality'. In this section, therefore, I propose to examine those aspects of Alun Lewis's work that testify to his intensifying commitment to negotiate between an often fraught, sometimes numbing self-awareness, and the presence and development of those qualities of detachment, increasingly objective vision, and pluralistic Otherness, that together constitute the core of his particular mode of impersonality.

Initially, as in the case of Keith Douglas, an outline of those salient elements of Lewis's early life that impact on the trajectory taken in this thesis becomes necessary. Furthermore, because of the way Lewis's particular, divided sensibility emerged, it is vital to address his location in the socio-political and cultural framework of the time, and the extent to which his voice, often caught up in his own divisions and sense of displacement, sought its distinctive register, not only as a wartime poet, but also as one who, even from his boyhood, repeatedly felt a sense of disjuncture. Echoing the sense of incomplete accomplishment voiced in 'Prologue: The Grinder', he states, in his introduction to *Raiders' Dawn* (1941) that, 'these poems are not [...] a completed statement; but a soldier sees with his own eyes and nobody else's; and they are, therefore, a personal statement. They are not intended to be more than that'.[98] It is the declaration of an artist seeking his own voice.

Alun Lewis's upbringing, first in his birthplace of Cwmaman and later in nearby Aberdare, may be said to have nurtured in him a sense of his intrinsic separateness, of his distance from the cultural and social texture of his community. It was also to nurture an inescapable ambivalence, a longing for attachment vying in him with a proclivity for isolation

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that, as Pikoulis states, 'the shooting had been accidental', as reflected in the wording of the death certificate, was subsequently reviewed at John Pikoulis's request by Professor Bernard Knight, head of the Forensic Medicine Section of the Institute of Pathology of the Welsh National School of Medicine. Pikoulis quotes him as reporting, '[b]y and large the whole story to me smells of suicide but on the information available I would not think it justifiable to make any firm decision'.

[98]Alun Lewis, 'Author's Note' in *Raider's Dawn and Other Poems* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1942), p. 9.

and detachment. Born into an educated family (his mother and father were schoolteachers, while his uncle was a professor) who seemed relatively privileged in their self-sufficiency in a period of severe Depression, he was by family circumstance something of an outsider within a mining community characterized by hardship. In an environment characterised by generations of coalminers, his upbringing represented a break from the tradition to which he would otherwise have belonged. By virtue of his innate sensibilities, he was, nevertheless, informed with an empathic grasp of the spirit and warmth enfolded in his valley's impoverishment and social disadvantage. Yet, a scholarship to the prestigious Cowbridge Grammar School in 1926 became for him a significant and apparently less than happy stage in a process of estrangement from his roots.[99] It was a process that was never to be *fully* completed, despite his consuming effort to achieve a new and resolved self, freed of its past and lingering burdens.

The perceptible ambivalence that so frequently inhabits Lewis's work needs to be considered in relation to its apparent origins, including his time at Cowbridge. There, Lewis was capable of integrating well with his peers and teachers, yet equally prone to feel detached from what he perceived as insensitivity amongst fellow boarders. Ian Hamilton notes this inclination towards ambivalence as something that would later grow into 'longer withdrawals' as he felt, and intermittently retreated from, the 'intolerably taxing and confused' demands of 'the practical world'.[100] Yet the need to reveal the concrete realities of such a world, both in his early life in Wales and, later, in his passage to and time in India, was a constant that increased throughout his life. Even when strongly drawn to abstractions, to give voice to loneliness and separation, or to his self-fragmentation that stimulated, too, an accompanying metaphysical impulse, he sought also to transcribe the realities of his remembered background, and of the visible present. His sensibilities oscillated between a

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[99] Hamilton, in 'Biographical Introduction', p. 12.
[100]*Ibid.,* pp. 12-13.

growing need to transcend the self and lose its inner divisions, and the contradictorily lingering complex of yearnings for his past, fretted with his restless and ambivalent Welsh connections.

Boyhood in the coal village of Cwmaman, and in the market town of Aberdare with its strong Welsh language literary tradition, intensified Lewis's propensity for ambivalence. He spoke no Welsh, the language of his forebears, while he felt instinctively apart from the children of what seemed to him a smotheringly close mining community.[101] The Valleys were immured in an intensifying, grinding state of hardship, yet young Lewis and his family, partly by virtue of their relative financial comfort, untypical in the community, could regularly holiday by the sea at Penbryn, in Cardiganshire. To the boy, this was an escape, within the security of a loving family, yet removed from a social ethos from which he felt increasingly detached. In essence, neither the Valleys nor his Cowbridge experience sat naturally and comfortably with him. Such discomfort fed a growing tension within him between the senses of belonging and un-belonging, a duality that would pervade his creative imagination and his writing, and even affect his sensibilities in later student years. As John Pikoulis notes, by the time Lewis was a student at Manchester University, 'introspection had become his enemy', prompting him to voice his evident depression as an impulse for what may be seen as a form of self-extinction: 'I feel as though I've been feeding on myself [...] [T]he only true mood is when I'm not communicating with anything or anybody, almost not with myself'.[102] Such feelings were increasingly to stimulate Lewis's need to find the

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[101] John Pikoulis records Harri Webb's comments on Lewis's upbringing, published in 'Alun Lewis – the lost leader', *Poetry Wales*, 10. 3, Alun Lewis Special Issue (Winter 1974/75), 118-122 (p. 119): Webb describes Lewis as 'knowing [...] maimed and crippled men [...] drowning in dust, [...] school-fellows without fathers, families without hope, a village living on its nerves'. Pikoulis places this in the context of both the 'brotherhood' of the community, and the contrast between its 'stricter standards of domestic economy' and Lewis's home as 'a lounger's paradise'. See Pikoulis, *A Life,* pp. 17-21.

[102] Pikoulis, *A Life*, p. 45. Pikoulis recalls the poet's abject sense of misplacement in an atmosphere of 'academic argument' that was anathema to him, and quotes this remark made by Lewis to his friend, Christopher Cheney.

language and techniques with which to explore and express realities, both self-reflexively experienced and those externally encountered.

The 1930s were fraught with political and economic pressure for industrial Wales, and in particular the South Wales Valleys, where Lewis had his roots. He spent considerable periods away from his family home, studying at Aberystwyth and Manchester universities between 1932 and 1938, a period during which the threat and actuality of de-industrialization, unemployment and economically enforced migration of the labour force to England and overseas bit voraciously into the living body of the South Wales mining areas. It precipitated an acute historical experience that could so easily have sapped the will and dignity of Valleys men who were, by instinct and expectation, responsible for the wellbeing of their households. Yet the gathering momentum of the Depression, with its victimization of militant colliers, the parcels of food and cast-off clothing from London, the riots and demonstrations against the Means Test, was for Lewis largely 'derived from newspaper stories, outside his experience'.[103] Nevertheless, he was sympathetically aware of the sense of indignity that, for proud communities, accompanied the beneficent acts of outsiders, and what the contemporary writer Rhys Davies perceived as 'a sense of disaster forever lurking in the air'.[104] This was a period sliding inexorably towards the Second World War, one in which Welsh writers, particularly in prose, felt the obligation to react, framing their novels within an almost documentary, political and class-inflected context, focusing on the passage from the 1920s to the '30s with close attention to the perceived social injustices of the period.

Glyn Tegai Hughes suggests that novels of this period such as Lewis Jones's *Cwmardy* (1937) or Gwyn Jones's *Times Like These* (1936), for instance, are 'frankly documents of class warfare'.[105] However, though not unaware of such injustices bred by

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[103] Smith, *Llafur,* p. 17.
[104] Rhys Davies, in *The Story of Wales* (London: William Collins, 1943), p. 33.
[105] Glyn Tegai Jones, 'The Mythology of the Mining Valleys', in *Triskel Two: Essays on Welsh and Anglo-Welsh Literature*, Sam Adams and Gwilym Rees Hughes, eds (Llandybïe, Carmarthenshire: Christopher Davies,

class and the capitalist system, Alun Lewis was moved by a deeper and more complex impulse, aesthetically rather than predominantly politically motivated. His short story, 'The Housekeeper' (1939), embodies this impulse clearly, as well as illustrating the duality of attachment to, and distance from his roots, that pervades Lewis's life and work.[106] The narrative focus is upon Myfanwy, the eponymous central character, whose life revolves around the care of her unemployed husband, her two children, and her fractious mother. As Pikoulis says, '[H]ers is a bleak, narrow world of poverty and pit closures', further remarking that the story

> captures the ambiguity of the narrator's position perfectly, repelled by the ugliness before him yet savouring it as an artist at the same time as he identifies himself with those imprisoned by it. [...] 'The Housekeeper' shows all Alun's gifts as an observer [...] it is perfectly objectified and deserves to be regarded as his first considerable achievement in prose.[107]

The judgement is hard to dispute. When one examines Lewis's descriptive evocation of Myfanwy's life, one is confronted with poetic prose of unmistakable power and almost Lawrentian resonance. Her garden is 'a patch of rubble and ash', the shed's 'tarred felting' overhangs 'like the crippled wing of a black vulture', while her maternal heartache is palpable: as she observes her son's frail, thin body, '[h]er soul seemed to wilt inside her and tear in two in the darkness like an outworn garment when she thought of all those years ahead'.[108] The language is imbued with a deep attachment to, and empathy with, the mother's strength and compassion, yet it is also invested with Lewis's profound social awareness that, as Pikoulis says, 'derives from his own tensions', and his contradictory impulse to express his withdrawal from this social and human landscape.[109]

1973), pp. 42-61 (pp. 50-51). Jones discusses the impact of the social and economic conditions of mining valleys upon the prose literature that emerged from Wales in the 19th and 20th centuries, and on the authenticity with which it represented Welsh life.

[106] Lewis, in *Collected Stories*, pp. 94-105.

[107] Pikoulis, *A Life*, p. 61.

[108] Lewis, *Collected Stories*, p. 99.

[109] Pikoulis, *A Life,* p. 61.

Even before his immersion in the War, therefore, the 1930s, and Lewis's somewhat divided reactions to the place and years of his upbringing, were the source of his unique duality and his need and struggle to find his own mode of expression. He possessed what Raymond Williams calls 'the intense consciousness of struggle'[110] in the industrial Welsh Valleys, and though far more objectively framed than, for example, the autobiographical, almost diaristic narrative mode of B. L Coombes's 'Twenty Tons of Coal' (1939), the structure of feeling in 'The Housekeeper' determines the story's form as though written from personal experience.[111] Lewis's inherent sense of liminality in his community, placed somewhat paradoxically alongside his lingering sense of social responsibility which, quoting Lewis himself, Pikoulis refers to as the latter's 'radical humanitarianism', form inescapably recurrent constituents of his creative impulse. Furthermore, they comprise key elements of what this thesis explores as a tension between engagement and detachment, the personal voice and the impersonal.

Alun Lewis's creative instinct, though rooted in a Romantic propensity for finding consolation in nature and beauty, equally revealed from its early stages the desire to find some sort of solid fixity in an objective vision of his world. The romantic allure of climbing the Welsh mountains to 'see the rivers winding down to sea [sic] through the parched valleys [where] you would feel liberated – not because it is stale, but because I am preoccupied with things', constantly haunted him.[112] However, these words uncover the oppositions between an imaginative retreat into Romantic freedom and, as the socio-economic inflections of 'parched' and the declared fixation on 'things' intimate, a need to root oneself in realities and the tug of moral responsibility. Such oppositions manifest ambivalently in his writing,

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[110] Raymond Williams, *The Welsh Industrial Novel: The Inaugural Gwyn Jones Lecture,* 21 April 1978 (Cardiff: University College Cardiff Press, 1979), p. 12.

[111] B. L. Coombes, 'Twenty Tons of Coal', in *Story: The Library of Wales Short Story Anthology*, ed. by Dai Smith, 2 vols (Cardigan: Parthian, 2014), I, pp. 226-246.

[112] Lewis, in a letter to Jean Gilbert at Pontigny, dated 12 May 1938, and quoted in Hamilton, 'Biographical Introduction', p. 16.

repeatedly as self-examination and self-questioning, or as a tension between personal engagement and an impression of the speaker as physically and perceptually located in a position of detachment.

M. Wynn Thomas, speaking of Lewis's poem, 'The Mountain over Aberdare' (1941),[113] sees this detachment as evidence of the bi-located voice of 'a partly displaced person' with his 'rather detached sense of attachment', one who 'remains perched outside'.[114] Originally called 'On the Welsh Mountains', and written between 1938 and 1939 before Lewis left Wales, the poem was revised and re-titled whilst Lewis was undergoing Army officer training, further separated from his family. It will be re-addressed in the context of place in Chapter 4, but it seems particularly apposite here to an examination of Lewis's capacity for poetic objectivity, for expressing 'existence in its native nakedness', and an impulse to convey detachment bordering on impersonality, balanced against a profound personal awareness of human waste, daily struggle, and a lost quality of life.[115] The opening lines position the speaker as emphatically apart from the scene that he observes, despite the subjective, personal and possessive pronouns:

> From this high quarried ledge I see
> The place for which the Quakers once
> Collected clothes, my father's home,
> Our stubborn bankrupt village sprawled
> In jaded dusk beneath its nameless hills…[116]

The deictic precision of the 'high' ledge combines with 'once' to conflate physical remoteness and temporal distance, intensifying the speaker's sense of separation, the feeling generated almost certainly invested with Lewis's own apartness and the claims of memory during his officer training. Absence and presence fuse here, a coalescent quality repeatedly

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[113] Lewis, in *Collected Poems,* pp. 87-88.

[114] Lewis, in *Collected Poems*, pp. 87-88. M. Wynn Thomas's analysis appears in 'Writing Glamorgan', in *Internal Difference: Literature in 20th Century Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1992), pp. 25-48 (p. 37).

[115] Lewis, 'Prologue: The Grinder', in *Collected Poems*, p. 21, l. 16.

[116] See Lewis, *Collected Poems*, p. 87, ll. 1-5.

present in Lewis's work. However, the poetic voice, detached though it may be, gradually betrays its own ambivalence. The speaker's objectifying vision progressively fuses with a plangent, deepening awareness of insidiously excoriating conditions that subvert any notion of an impersonal distance. Disengagement segues to a revealing engagement, unmistakably articulated in the gathering adjectival intensity of the poem, thus modifying any complete sense of the speaker's otherness suggested in the poem's opening words. There is an accretion of performative verbs and epithets that visibly convey and enact grim, depressed dereliction, both human and environmental. 'Sprawled', 'bankrupt', and 'jaded' transfer their signification from the place or time they qualify to the human condition that prevails here. We see 'drab streets strung across the cwm' (l. 6), and

> Derelict workings, tips of slag
> The gospellers and gamblers use
> And children scrutting for coal
> That winter dole cannot purvey…

(ll. 7-10)

Despite the distanced tonal calm that has opened the poem, there is a gathering, unrelieved negativity in the language that seems to insist we share as witnesses to human deprivation. 'Scrutting', by its very construction and phonic force, dramatizes the desperation that demands such action within a meagre existence, while the allusion to the inadequacy of the 'dole' voices Lewis's palpable criticism of a restrictive social providence. Bruce Martin has remarked that Lewis's ideological commitment is never far from the surface in those of his poems that relate to locale: '[I]n Alun Lewis's poems social realism, not surprisingly, is linked to social protest'.[117] 'The Mountain over Aberdare' seems to justify this view, as it does that of Tony Brown who posits that 'Lewis not only considers the village but also measures his own relation to it'. The poet-speaker's audible detachment is modulated by the connection established almost unobtrusively in his early acknowledgement:

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[117] Bruce K. Martin, in *British Poetry since 1939* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1985), p. 34.

as Brown observes, quoting from lines 3 and 4, this valley is "'my father's home, / *Our stubborn bankrupt village*'".[118]   The possessive, though quietly voiced from a position of ostensible liminality, is a subtle signifier of Lewis's ambivalent relation to his subject.

As the speaker's eye penetrates further, the landscape becomes progressively saturated in the 'insidious' rain (l. 18), while 'mourners' feasibly relates, not just to a single death, but to the valley's condition and the passing of a less penurious existence.   The observer's ostensibly distanced stance begins to cohabit more conspicuously with deeply felt censure: the eye tightens its focus, moving downwards into the village, just as the poem itself moves downwards, singling out the detail of human life.   Landscape has until this point appeared to constitute a form of Otherness, spatially and imaginatively detached from the speaker: now, correspondingly, the imagery becomes less concrete as the scene gains a more pronounced metaphorical significance, quietly yet implicitly freighted with anger:

> And all the creaking mountain gates
> Drip brittle tears of crystal peace;
> And in a curtained parlour women hug
> Huge grief, and anger against God.

> (ll. 15-18)

The observing eye has travelled downwards into the intimacy of the 'curtained parlour', close enough to peer through the mourners' tears to the 'crystal' fragility of this moment of peace: it will dissolve, and turn to 'anger against God'.   One feels that the speaker's detachment is not wholly separative, but a mask that now barely conceals, if at all, Lewis's own 'anger', and his ideological distance from his community's Nonconformist heritage.

The mask becomes increasingly transparent in the final stanza, as does Lewis's hinted religious scepticism that, one feels, is not wholly deflected to the grieving women.   Similarly,

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[118] Tony Brown, 'Colonial Wales and Fractured Language', in *Nations and Relations*: *Writing Across the British Isles*, Tony Brown and Russell Stephens, eds (Cardiff: New Welsh Review, 2000), pp. 71-88 (p. 86).   The emphasis is the author's.   As this essay is jointly written with M. Wynn Thomas, all subsequent references will be given as Brown, *Colonial Wales*, or Thomas, *Colonial Wales*, according to authorship of the section of text cited.

the personified 'dusk', veiling the dilapidated dwellings, seems 'more charitable than Quakers' (l. 26), but it is a flimsy veil. Now, the lines take on an illusory quality, the speaker discerning that

> The colliers squatting on the ashtip
> Listen to one who holds them still with tales,
> While that white frock that floats down the dark alley
> Looks just like Christ; and in the lane
> The clink of coins among the gamblers
> Suggests the thirty pieces of silver.

(ll. 29-34)

The resonance with the Sermon on the Mount is inescapably ironic, conflated with the allusion to Judas's betrayal of Christ.[119] Lewis's detachment dissolves in an audible recognition of the social and economic betrayal this community has endured. The poem's closure now invests the subjective 'I' with a quiet, soulful sadness that imbues a sense of social injustice with recollections of things lost, the subjective voice thus seeming far less detached than in the poem's opening. Lewis's impersonality, one feels, is a guise that cannot be wholly sustained:

> I watch the clouded years
> Rune the rough foreheads of these moody hills,
> This wet evening, in a lost age.

(ll. 35-37)

However, in the spaces of this closure, and in its preceding context, lies an intimation of what would eventually dominate the poet's consciousness in India. As Brown so aptly states, '[I]t is a perspective which hints at the vulnerability and ultimate inconsequence of human activity and individual identity'.[120] It is a bleak judgement, but hard to escape.

Keith Douglas's impersonal mode, as earlier acknowledged, while also embodying his particular form of ambivalence, sustains its detachment with more apparent ease and control.

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[119] The Sermon on the Mount appears in Matthew, Chapters 5-7. The account of Judas's betrayal of Christ in return for thirty pieces of silver is given in Matthew 26. 14-16.

[120] Brown, in *Colonial Wales*, p. 87.

The underlying compassion, ethical uncertainty, or even complicit guilt, are more deeply concealed; in Noguchi's terms, less conspicuous, though present, in the 'spaces' between and beneath words. Lewis's predisposition for empathy seems always present when he confronts and seeks to share his vision of human impoverishment or, as in his Indian poems, an indifference arising from oppressive circumstance. Douglas, as noted, can render his view of a dead soldier with seeming dispassion, only to subvert such impersonality in a perceptual and philosophically-inflected shift: Lewis, however, is more concerned, even from an objectifying distance, with the concrete realities of the human condition. However mutually resonant are their concerns with poetic truth and integrity, or their inner fracture as Chapter 2 will examine, this aspect of Lewis's striving for objectivity constitutes one of the facets that differentiate his particular, less consistent impersonality, from that of Keith Douglas.

In 'The Rhondda' (1941), a mingling of impersonal objectivity and a subjective undercurrent of condemnation similar to that in the above poem resides within its elided descriptions and terse, broken rhythms.[121] The language synaesthetically evinces and enacts the visibly plangent condition of the valley, transferring a sense of degradation from the river's discharged boulders to the colliers who, like the 'gamblers' of 'The Mountain over Aberdare', must seek the vagaries of Chance to augment their livelihood. The imagery provides a vivid combination of the metaphorical and the concrete:

> Hum of shaft wheel, whirr and clamour
> Of steel hammers overbeat, din down
> Water-hag's slander. Greasy Rhondda
> River throws about the boulders
> Veils of scum to mark the ancient
> Degraded union of stone and water.
>
> Unwashed colliers by the river
> Gamble for luck the pavements hide.
> Kids float tins down dirty rapids.
> Coal-dust rings the scruffy willows.
> Circe is a drab.

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[121] Lewis, *Collected Poems*, p. 89.

She gives men what they know.

<p align="right">(ll. 1-12)</p>

The reverberating alliteration enacts the throb of the pit shaft wheel and the colliers who hammer out a meagre living, while the 'veils of scum', juxtaposed with the verb '[d]egraded', vividly convey the nature of both the landscape and the drab dependence of those dwelling within it who must 'gamble for luck'.

Despite being framed within the allusion that configures the pit and the allure of gambling as Circe, the temptress, the poem's impact lies primarily in this capacity for objectifying the despair of the Rhondda's plight, one which draws from the speaker an unequivocally negative response. The Circean pit offers a dehumanizing beneficence: the interminable wheels of 'her pitch black shaft / […] suck husbands out of sleep' (ll. 12-13), words that conflate Circe's deceitful sexual temptations with the spurious 'profit' that 'takes their hands and eyes' (l. 14). The allusive style coalesces powerfully with the concrete realization of the Rhondda and its people, intensifying the poem's objectivity in the final stanza:

> But the fat flabby-breasted wives
> Have grown accustomed to her ways.
> They scrub, make tea, peel the potatoes
> Without counting the days.

<p align="right">(ll. 15-18)</p>

The poet-speaker's pity is not overt; it is, instead, intoned in a distanced impersonality which is still capable of penetrating to the underlying pathos that resides in these de-feminizing images. The women have accepted their debilitated sexual allure and the loss of their husbands to the inescapable arms of 'Circe', the pit, while the asyndetic penultimate line above dramatizes the repetitive, monotonous continuum of their house-bound obligations. They are, in their acquiescence, effectively reduced to automata. Such loss as these lines

configure, however, would be augmented in Lewis's consciousness as the Valleys became denuded of so many of their men by the demands of war.

In 1947, Alun Llewelyn Williams, reviewing Lewis's posthumously published *Letters from India* (1946), highlighted the ambivalent quality that seems to lie at the core of Lewis's paradoxical quest, and which captures the tensions between an outwardly orientated need to objectify realities of which he was unavoidably a part, and an inescapable impulse to escape self-immersion in a world with which he increasingly felt disengaged and defamiliarized. Llywelyn-Williams perceives this quality as an 'all-embracing curiosity for life, and the contrary need for solitude and peace [...] at once the mark and the burden of a poet'.[122] His commentary seems to underline the price Lewis pays for seeking imaginative truth through his negative capability whilst simultaneously responding to an urge to withdraw, to detach the Self; in effect, become impersonal.

This 'curiosity for life' was not wholly concerned with outwardly observable realities, however. The epistemological impulse to explore one's own nature and to find meaning within it recursively informs Lewis's writing. As with Keith Douglas, the need to confront the complexities of identity and a sense of inner fracture emerges as a dislocating experience, in Lewis's case both in his poetry and his short stories. Even before enlisting in the Army in 1940, he had identified such fracture as he wrestled against his impulses as an objector: he stated 'The perversions of Hitler had affected me less profoundly than my own destructive impulses; [...] my desire to be first of all sure of myself restrained me [...] even when [...] my loneliness, my incompleteness longed to enter into the brotherhood of man'.[123] His inner struggle thus seems to have been a constant, whose power to mobilize and objectify a profound sense of his otherness demands attention at this juncture as a form of self-

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[122] See Alun Lewis, *Letters from India*, with a 'Note' by Mrs Alun Lewis and a 'Preface' by A. L. Rowse (Cardiff: Penmark, 1946). The review appears as Alun Llewelyn-Williams, 'A Review of Alun Lewis, *Letters from India* (1946)', in *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion* (1946-7), 328-331 (p. 328).

[123] Alun Lewis, 'Last leaves of A Civilian's Journal' [1940], in *A Miscellany*, pp. 102-114 (p. 106).

detachment. One feels that, Douglas's case, this is more clearly bound to his role as a combatant killer which generates a sense of multiple identity and perpetrator complicity, despite the apparent framework of poetic impersonality. For Alun Lewis, however, his sense of alterity seems more deeply rooted in his ambivalent connection to his Welsh upbringing and to the insider-outsider perspective identified above, one that emerged with increasing intensity and complexity as he journeyed into India as a soldier-poet constantly beset by a sense of difference and ambivalence.

In a letter of January, 1944, recounting a village scene in the Western Ghats, Lewis stated, 'if only I had the composure and self-detachment to write of all these things. But everything is fluid in me, an undigested mass of experience, without shape'.[124] His words articulate an extreme disturbance, a feeling utterly at odds with someone who so strenuously sought after, and could at times achieve the negative capability to assimilate and 'outline with precision' the realities he encountered.[125] The disorientating fluidity he describes testifies to a force that, in 'Prologue: The Grinder', he speaks of as the barrier to his 'perfect statement of truths' (l. 12). Paradoxically, however, in the same letter he speaks earlier of the scene as precipitating a liberating 'form of escape, a suspension of thought in an immediacy of feeling and control'.[126] His language here contradicts the self-denigrating admission of shapeless imprecision and disorder with which he charges himself. Rather, it testifies to the objectifying impersonality of one who, in the words of the aforementioned poem, sees 'native nakedness' with utter clarity, uninvested with redundant self-consciousness. The letter seems, therefore, to enact ambivalence, an impression ironically strengthened by the vividly objective clarity with which Lewis invests the scene described. His eye fixes on concrete detail, on the 'long streams of bullock carts', the peasants in their '*best* white pugrees and best red saris', culminating in his realization that the 'splendid old Indian' perched on the

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[124] Lewis, in letter 41, *In The Green Tree,* p. 67.
[125] Lewis, 'Prologue: The Grinder', in *Collected Poems*, p. 21, l. 15.
[126] Lewis, *In The Green Tree,* pp. 66-67.

'make-shift 'throne' is actually a corpse, supported by a 'little man keeping his head from lolling'.[127] The naked exactitude is openly visible, as is the intersection of the writer's engagement and a sense of his own detached cultural difference.

Stephen Hendon, in an essay stimulated by this epistolary reference to restless fluidity, examines a selection of Lewis's stories taken from his posthumous work, *In The Green Tree* (1948).[128] His discussion and the stories selected clearly demonstrate Lewis's configuration of Otherness both in the context of place, and in relation to what, using Homi Bhabha's terminology, Hendon calls the distortions of a 'performative reality'.[129] He bases his argument on his reading of Bhabha's theory of 'a double narrative movement' that exposes

> a split between the continuist, accumulative temporality of the pedagogical, and the repetitious, recursive strategy of the performative. It is through this process of splitting that the conceptual ambivalence of modern society becomes the site of *writing the nation*.[130]

This thesis, unlike Hendon's study, is not constructed in the framework of postcolonial theory, but one must acknowledge that Lewis was caught up in the role of a soldier of empire, and that, accordingly, the dislocations and sense of alterity he undoubtedly experienced become relevant to discussion of the flux and dissociation of identity Lewis projects in his work. Moreover, Hendon's exposition of what, citing Bhabha, he detects as a 'double narrative movement' in stories like 'The Raid' (1943) and 'Ward "O"3(b)' (1943), seems germane to what I perceive as impersonality in the form of displacement and dislocation. He traces the presence of colonial discourse, using Bhabha's terms, as a 'pedagogical' narrative line in which characters enact the expected, hegemonic behaviour of imperialists, in conflict with a conflicting 'performative' dimension that 'affects the fixities of identity through the

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[127] *Ibid.*, p. 67.
[128] Stephen Hendon, '"*Everything is Fluid in Me*": A Postcolonial Approach to Alun Lewis's *In The Green Tree*', in *Mapping the Territory: Critical Approaches to Welsh Fiction in English*, ed. by Katie Gramich (Cardigan: Parthian, 2010), pp. 131-161.
[129] Hendon, in *Mapping the Territory*, p. 135.
[130] Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* ([1994] Abingdon: Routledge Classics, 2004), p. 2, quoted in Hendon, *Mapping the Territory*, p. 132.

way in which people actually conduct their everyday lives'. He therefore argues that, in such stories as these, 'identities become the "site" of continual change, of contradiction and ambivalence'.[131]

Lewis's awareness of his own ambivalent position as a Welsh officer in a British imperialist army was augmented as the poverty, and the overwhelming human, cultural and religious difference of the Indian sub-continent, invaded his vision. In the short story 'The Raid', through the central officer figure, Selden, Lewis characterizes the ambivalent colonial stance that he himself grew to feel so profoundly.[132] The story traces the progress of Selden as he leads his platoon through the jungle in search of a native terrorist, culminating in a realization that the latter has killed three British soldiers as a 'performative' random act of war rather than an action of moral or national principle. The Indian readily, and without equivocation, 'nodding his head and sick, sallow', simply acknowledges his act as 'dreadful' (p. 105). Correspondingly, Selden's own fulfilled duty thus emerges as having no real meaning: in a sense, the terrorist's acquiescence renders Selden's 'pedagogical' role as an imperialist enforcer devoid of real punitive consequence.

Lewis's story exemplifies a conspicuously dialogic narrative voice which, to echo Hendon's astute argument, captures a strategic shift between Selden's officer persona, voiced in tones of 'pedagogical [...] imperial authority,' and the language of the speaker's private thoughts.[133] As Hendon illustrates, Selden's idiom changes from the assumed officer register of his opening remark, 'My platoon and I' (p. 95), and the distinctly 'British' military idiom of 'I'll give you a good show, sir' (p. 97), to an utterly different, personal register in which his interior narrative expresses the sense of insecure alterity that inhabits his 'inner consciousness' in a seemingly alien Indian environment.[134] Selden admits:

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[131] Hendon, in *Mapping the Territory*, pp. 133-134.
[132] Lewis, in *Collected Stories*, pp. 185-191.
[133] Hendon, in *Mapping the Territory*, p. 134.
[134] *Ibid.*

> I began to enjoy the sense of freedom and deep still peace that informs the night out in the tropics. [...] You feel so out of it in India somehow. [...] You feel very white and different. I don't know ... You know, I'd have said that valley hated us that night, on those rocky crests. Queer.[135]

Such shifts of register, as Hendon persuasively posits, serve to represent aspects of what Bhabha terms 'a double narrative movement'. They exist as conscious narrative strategies that articulate Lewis's pervasive awareness of displacement and Otherness which, together, constitute a mode of his objectified disruption of identity, and self-division. As will be further discussed later in this thesis, they are also imbricated in Lewis's pluralistically configured 'darkness', and in his trajectory towards the ultimate form of detachment, his self-extinction.

Selden's words, couched in tones of bewildered estrangement, are freighted with Lewis's own ambivalent responses to his Indian experience. Furthermore, they represent a far step from the naïvely Keatsian descriptions of country walks Lewis recorded in his early journals, youthful evocations that denote the Romantic temperament from which his journey towards a greater detachment evolved. Cary Archard quotes one such example, shortened here, but still sufficient to illustrate an almost illusory state in its sensory excesses:

> This day I am part of Creation [...] I hear the cattle pulling at the short October grass [...] I see all colours and the sun, alchemist in the woods [...] And my body is pressed against this branch, my cheek against the flaked bark. I see and hear and love and am alive.[136]

In Selden's internalized language, a different form of Otherness from that of the journal entry is articulated: the former is an expression of separation and difference in an ambivalently engaging and yet distancing environment, unlike the sense of fusion with nature voiced in the latter.

Gradually, as he both physically and imaginatively moved outward into a more exacting and turbulent world, Lewis's impulse would respond to external landscapes with a

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[135] Lewis, in *In The Green Tree*, p. 100.
[136] Extract from Alun Lewis's unpublished journals, quoted in Cary Archard, '"Some Things You See In Detail, Those You Need": Alun Lewis, Soldier and Poet', in *Wales at War: Critical Essays on Literature and Art,* ed. by Tony Curtis (Bridgend: Seren, 2007), pp. 75-92 (pp. 75-76).

more objectifying attention to observable details, conspicuously in India and in his poems in transit to the sub-continent, but evidenced, too, in evocations of place in poems such as 'All Day It Has Rained' (1940). This particular, relatively early poem, exhibits moments of documentary realism such as more consistently invest Lewis's stories, for example, 'Lance Jack' (1940), in which the narrative voice articulates the writer's own, characteristically ambivalent, view of impersonality.[137] Lewis's narrator expresses it as being a necessary and an inescapably dangerous condition, a means of preserving private, detached selfhood, yet capable of plunging one into nostalgia and a sense of collective love that dissolves the enmities and differences enforced by wartime soldiery:

> A soldier is always impersonal. That's the only way to preserve any privacy in conditions where one is never alone. Eight in a tent, lying on groundsheets, [...] cutting toenails, sewing buttons, contemplating something distant, brooding over something immediate. It is all impersonal [...] [B]ut it is dangerous, like cynicism. For sometimes, when he is utterly alone, utterly impersonal, [...] he can only envisage the human past, the great centrifugal force of the heart which draws into its orbit and unites all differences of people.[138]

Lewis's poem, in its diction and languorous rhythms, recreates at least part of this awareness, namely the boredom and collective existential liminality of the soldiers:

> All day it has rained, and we on the edge of the moors
> Have sprawled in our bell tents, moody and dull as boors,
> Groundsheets and blankets spread on the muddy ground
> [...]
> No refuge from the skirmishing fine rain[139]

> (ll. 1-5)

Images such as 'moody and dull as boors', the 'Groundsheets and blankets spread on the muddy ground' and, later, in line 14, the numbing routine of 'Smoking a Woodbine, darning dirty socks', are heavily freighted, realistic configurations of encamped, wartime existence. Moreover, they contain, together with the poem's final recollection of Edward Thomas's death, what Pikoulis detects as an 'anti-heroic' resonance, 'yet not without a certain longing

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[137] Lewis, in *Collected Stories*, pp. 63-70.
[138] *Ibid.*, pp. 63-65.
[139] Lewis, in *Collected Poems*, p. 23.

for action of a sacrificial kind'.[140] The 'longing' is the consequence of the dullness, and the unrelenting skirmish, not of combat, but of its symbolic substitute, the rain.

However, it is not only visible concretions and lethargy that are objectified in this poem. Boredom, and the enervating stasis of inertia, invaded the mind and writings of both Keith Douglas and Alun Lewis during periods of training and waiting for anticipated action. The sense of torpor and purposelessness this induced, which resonates in the lines above, constituted restless inner disruption for both poets, even precipitating Douglas's unofficial absence which took him into combat in North Africa. For Lewis, in 'All Day It Has Rained', this condition is configured as a collective liminality, and as an inescapable subjection to the enveloping rain. The subjective voice, though partially deflected as 'We', conveys a sense of listless inertia in the languid rhythms, before diverting inwards to become a more conspicuous, less detached, nostalgic meditation, an almost unreal dream-like evocation of boyhood days that is only finally broken in the poem's closing couplet where the speaker's recollection moves

> To the Shoulder o' Mutton where Edward Thomas brooded long
> On death and beauty – till a bullet stopped his song.

(ll. 30-31).

The poem's relevance here extends beyond Lewis's plangent, personal reminiscence in these lines on the poet whose work and thematic preoccupations he so admired, and whose death, so suddenly introduced here, was an ironic pre-enactment of his own.

Paradoxically, as the rain falls, gliding as a coalescence of 'wave and mist and dream' (l. 8), so it renders the scene unreal. Its effect is almost nihilistic, unravelling the life and energy of those who inhabit the scene. In so doing, it imparts a sense of gradual, surreal detachment from actuality, until the speaker suddenly intrudes as the subjective 'I': he recalls as follows:

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[140] Pikoulis, *A Life*, p. 96.

> I saw a fox
> And mentioned it in the note I scribbled home; –
> And we talked of girls, and dropping bombs on Rome,
> And thought of the quiet dead and the loud celebrities
> Exhorting us to slaughter, and the herded refugees;
> ` – Yet thought softly, morosely of them, and as indifferently
> As of ourselves or those whom we
> For years have loved, and will again
> Tomorrow maybe love; but now it is the rain
> Possesses us entirely, the twilight and the rain.

(ll. 15-24)

The veil of 'fine rain' that slowly distances clearly observed detail is, in fact, only a partial detachment: the speaker's sudden incursion betrays an audible, biting condemnation of those 'loud celebrities', the strident-voiced politicians and generals who order men to their 'slaughter'. 'Exhorting', with its expected connotations of heroic, inspirational speech, is loaded with a caustic irony that openly exposes the fallacy of such exhortations. It is a momentary return to the underlying protest in Wilfred Owen's 'old Lie'.[141] However, in the closing couplet of the first stanza, one senses not only the incipient uncertainty that resides in 'Tomorrow maybe love', but also, in the emphatic rhymes, a return to the sense of a receding self, possessed and absorbed into 'the twilight and the rain'. The poem thus rests on a deeply personal intimation of Lewis's own predilections. However, it is also, in its strikingly concrete evocation of a human and topographical landscape that recalls images of the trenches of the Great War, a configuration of the sense of separation and displacement as a soldier that would repeatedly haunt Lewis's poetry as part of his recursive 'darkness', a motif that, in India particularly, seemed to cohabit with his creative imagination both as a destabilizing source of dislocation and of something transcendentally enticing.

Lewis's compassion for humanity forms a palpable core within his navigation through his omnipresent sense of darkness. It also illuminates the paradox in him. His journey to and within India, both metaphorically and literally, was to open his soul to the suffering and

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[141] Wilfred Owen, 'Dulce et Decorum Est' [1917], in *Wilfred Owen: The War Poems*, ed. by Jon Stallworthy (London: Chatto & Windus, 1994), p. 29, l. 27.

abjection he encountered there while feeding his deepening inner sense of separateness and un-belonging. It correspondingly drew his eye further outwards to the concrete realities of a human predicament in which he felt increasingly defamiliarized. The dark wilderness in which he felt he was immersed elicited a profound pity with a new and penetrating poetic objectivity whilst simultaneously moving him further towards an extinction of the fragile self that his life and work had constantly articulated. The literal journey to the Indian sub-continent heightened his sense of isolation from those he loved, 'the warm ones about us',[142] augmenting his burden while intensifying the vision of the beloved and what survives 'Long after Death has come and gone'.[143] What also emerges from his estrangement and defamiliarization, even in those poems written in transit, is not only Lewis's growing internalization of death, but his accompanying exploration of a means of expressing this through poetic impersonality.

In 'Song (*On seeing dead bodies floating off the Cape*)' (1943), impersonality takes the form of a shift of focus to another persona: the speaker deflects the darkness of his own sense of absence, expressing it in seemingly depersonalizing dramatic monologue as the beloved's pain, but this is a deception.[144] It is he who has witnessed the floating dead and who fuses this image with his own dark predilection, here disguised as his beloved's 'darkness of despair' (l. 7). There is no dwelling on the externals of the floating bodies, no imperative for us to witness, as would have been Keith Douglas's compulsion: instead, the lines are testimony to 'the drag and dullness of my Self' (l. 31), to a profound apprehension and deep internalization of external deaths that Lewis articulates so spectrally in the closing two lines:

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[142] In his story, 'Dusty Hermitage' (1942), published in Lewis, *Collected Stories*, pp. 152-157, Alun Lewis concludes with the following words taken from a letter written by T.E. Lawrence and, in the story, discovered by Lawrence's housekeeper: 'I find myself wishing all the time that my own curtain would fall ... There is something broken ... my will I think ... As for fame after death, it's a thing to spit at; the only minds worth winning are the warm ones about us. If we miss those, we are failures'.

[143] Lewis, in 'Song', *Collected Poems*, p. 106, l. 19.

[144] Lewis, in *Collected Poems*, pp. 121-122.

> The nearness that is waiting in my bed,
> The gradual self-effacement of the dead.

(ll. 34-35)

The poem thus becomes a dialogic confession: one senses here the speaker as the poet, the journeying soul heavy with contemplation of his own self-extinction, another form of death. Impersonality and internalized estrangement are thus held in skilful fusion.

In 'Bivouac' (1943), the speaker's nocturnal recollections dwell on the Indian peasant drawing water at dawn, but such thoughts are juxtaposed with language infused with graphic images of death: a 'fat rat' (l. 7) fills his vision while, in the 'agitated wood' (l. 10), the presence of 'Mantillas dark with blood' is tangible (l. 12).[145] Moreover, a soldier's complicity is audible as the speaker voices the malevolence that invades his consciousness:

> And the darkness drenched with Evil
> Haunting as a country song,
> Ignoring the protesting cry
> Of Right and of Wrong.

(ll. 13-16)

The capitalization extends meaning beyond the particular to the universal: in the night's stillness, vestiges of guilt and the greater humanitarian questions haunt the conscience. Such questions increasingly infiltrated Lewis's quest for meaning and inner peace and resolution of the self in India. It was a quest constantly blighted by his confrontations with poverty and human suffering, a predicament that emerges in his Indian experience with increasingly vivid poetic objectivity: more and more, India draws the poetic eye to the physical reality of the impoverished landscape and its people.

Malevolence increasingly infects Lewis's configurations of India's deathly aridity. The hostile images and emphatically performative verbs of 'The Mahratta Ghats' (1943) suggest an inimical place of cremation in which death stalks and where

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[145] Lewis, in *Collected Poems*, p. 154.

> The valleys crack and burn, the exhausted plains
> Sink their black teeth into the horny veins
> Straggling the hills' red thighs
> [...]
> Dark peasants drag the sun upon their backs.
> […]
> Siva has spilt his seed upon this land.[146]

<div align="right">(ll. 1-3, 6, 10)</div>

The language combines the metaphorical with the literal: the objective eye sees the 'valleys crack and burn', recreating that vision for us, too. Despite the figurative intensification in the bestial image that follows, one senses here a stylistic tension, an implicit choice between recreating what is outwardly visible and tangible, or delineating the speaker's imaginative grasp of inimical nature. In this one detects a hint of an increasing poetic impulse to withdraw the subjective self, so foregrounding the deathliness that invests both the land and its 'lean folk' (l. 19). Siva is the ambivalent god, creator and destroyer, and his seed here is wasted on dead land. Aridity is all, and the peasants who 'drag the sun upon their backs' are burdened by the life-denying, voracious heat. It is the plight of India rather than the speaker's pity that fills our vision, though the speaker's compassion lingers audibly in the undertow of the language.

A subtle variant of this life-negating evil is configured in 'The Assault Convoy' (1943).[147] As Lewis's persona waits, stranded in time, he is aware, not of the malignant darkness that encompasses all, but of 'The nihilist persistence of the sun' that melds into 'The engines throbbing all night' (ll. 11-12): the relentless heat that the words configure renders the sun, paradoxically, as a form of death, an echo of Siva. As the speaker articulates in line 21, the oppressively conceived, physical reality of India is somehow internalized in the self: it 'fades into the meaning' (l. 21). Yet, alongside this internalization, the speaker simultaneously recreates the actuality outside the subjective self: the 'hobnails [that] stamp in

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[146] *Ibid.*, p. 131.
[147] *Ibid.*, p. 159.

crazy repetition' and the intimacy of 'Bodies sweat to bodies' sweat' (ll.8-9). Paradoxically, in their apparent outward, impersonal focus, the lines surely enunciate an implicit expression of Lewis's own deepening predicament in India. As India enveloped him more and more, it progressively engendered his recognition that its people, most specifically its peasants, were at the mercy of forces they could not control, the march of history, fate and the climate that threatened aridity and death. As Pikoulis states, India represented for Lewis a 'pitiless world', yet 'his compassion for the lean folk made him feel for the first time that he was coming to terms with [...] its arid, irresistible, beaten quality'.[148] Simultaneously, this widened his vision to a greater realization of his own vulnerability, despite the vast difference between himself and the peasants for whom his compassion achingly grew.

'The Peasants', also written in 1943, calls together much of Lewis's spiritual and epistemological enlargement, his deepening grasp of the coexistence of life and death, interlaced with his increasing objectivity.[149] Indeed, it is a poem in which, I believe, his growing poetic impulse towards stylistic impersonality is clearly discernible in Lewis's increasingly outwardly-orientated vision, palpably inflected with a deepening personal understanding and humanitarian selflessness. The opening stanza leads the eye directly to the landscape in which life seems steeped in lethargy:

> The dwarf barefooted, chanting
> Behind the oxen by the lake,
> Stepping lightly and lazily among the thorntrees
> Dusky and dazed with sunlight, half awake[.]

> (ll. 5-4)

The voice of the observer is audible only in the sustained assonance that accentuates the listlessness of the life depicted with such objective clarity. The poetic eye, however, alights instantly on externals, on diminished existence in the 'dwarf barefooted' (l.1) who chants,

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[148] Pikoulis, in *A Life,* p. 155.
[149] Lewis, *Collected Poems*, p. 144.

'half awake' (l. 4), while the 'thorntrees' offer a further hint of threat in this forbidding landscape. Reminiscent of Keith Douglas's controlled detachment and recursive diffraction of his gaze through the mediating trope of the 'lens', Lewis withdraws from ostensible involvement in the abjection he configures: he separates self from the event, or seems to. His objectivity borders deceptively on detachment from the observed hardship: it is the reader who becomes the witness, who sees, apparently unmediated,

> The women breaking stones upon the highway,
> Walking erect with burdens on their heads,
> One body growing in another body,
> Creation touching verminous straw beds.

$$(ll. 4-8)$$

The burdens carried are not only the physical, but the metaphysical, cosmic death that the peasants' predicament in history engenders. The lines are imbued with connotations of life pregnant with death and of the birth of Christ, the Creation that carried his death within. Such connotations reveal the deeper signification felt beneath the speaker's objective stance. Detachment and engagement are firmly held in balance.

In the final stanza, the aridity of India and of life trampled by the feet of war is conveyed in stark focus, while the stunted rhythms conspire with the language to enact the lifeless march of the soldiers and history:

> Across scorched hills and trampled crops
> The soldiers straggle by.
> History staggers in their wake.
> The peasants watch them die.

$$(ll. 9-12)$$

The syntactical parallelisms and unobtrusive simplicity of rhyme convey a drunken, stuttering vitality that constitutes life in the process of death. The hostility of this scorched land induces an almost universal fatigue that is both felt and visible in the verb, 'straggle'. In the first two lines, the objective eye sustains its seeming detachment, but there is an implicit shift

in the final couplet where the speaker voices his consciousness of what lies within this enveloping, charred aridity. The death that infiltrates this land also claims the soldiers, both physically and spiritually, and in the closing line resides the speaker's haunting recognition of the peasants' utter dispassion. Furthermore, in the collective configuration of the 'soldiers' lies a discernible hint of the poet himself. The witnesses to attrition and death are ourselves, the readers, and the peasants who gaze on in habitual indifference. The art of Lewis's objectivity here is that it suppresses the subjective voice, though does not obliterate it, in subtly shifting personal testimony to a shared, collective vision.

As Lewis's trajectory took him further into the 'dark continent' of India, so his work reveals a movement outwards, no less connected to the self and its internal struggle but intensifying the 'spotlight' on life, and bringing to the fore a spiritual enlargement that will be re-addressed later in this thesis. That outward movement generates a greater stylistic objectivity, a gradual movement towards poetic impersonality which, while not wholly sustained as dispassion, increasingly gives primacy to external realities as the objective correlative of Lewis's anguish and uncertainties. As I have tried to show, the origins of this impulse are detectable in some of Lewis's earlier, often romantically inflected work, reappearing with increasing frequency as his poetic journey advanced. India brought this development into greater focus, not just in his remarkable short stories: poems such as 'The Peasants' attest to this, perhaps expressing what Lewis meant in his letter of January 1943 to Robert Graves: '[a]nd I will have to abandon the vast for the particular, the infinite for the finite, the heart for the eye'. Ironically, while this resonates with the objectivity I detect in his artistic development, the letter also confirms this as a hope for a future beyond the war

and India, not while in the darkness of the jungle, nor in the arid plains where 'there is the sun & there is your shadow and there is time'.[150] It was to be a hope unfulfilled.

This chapter has sought to shed light upon the respective modes of poetic detachment and impersonality that are reflected in the poetry of both Keith Douglas and Alun Lewis, and in so doing, to demonstrate the source of such impulses. The focus, while concentrating on a sample range of their works, has also highlighted elements of their very different backgrounds in which can be discovered the roots of their differing, but overlapping ambivalence. The latter clearly informs their lives as an organic element of their individual responses to experience, and as a recurrent duality of inner consciousness that permeated their writings and intensified in each a sense of divided, even multiple identity. It constitutes, however, not only a profoundly divisive strand in their respective individualities, but one which also mobilizes and feeds their creative processes and the concomitant need to find an individual voice and mode of expression. The path taken in this chapter has aimed to reveal how that process culminated, in Douglas's case, as a uniquely inflected, impersonal voice, yet one that betrays its underlying, personal engagement with the human condition, contextualized within the parameters of war. In Lewis, it generates a more detectable fluctuation between the objective and the subjective, but nevertheless an escalating propensity for objectivity and self-distancing that was to become increasingly manifest as an impulse to lose the self in Otherness, an ontological state that is itself objectified in the poetry.

The Second World War stimulated Douglas's and Lewis's need to free the poetic voice, to resist succumbing to the hegemonic discourses that characterized the Great War

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[150] Both remarks were made by Lewis to Robert Graves in a letter dated 23 January 1943, reproduced in Lewis: *A Miscellany*, pp. 147-149 (p. 148).

which seemed to demand protest, polemic and propaganda. I have tried to show how and why both writers sought, as did other soldier-poets, to express a more personally inflected vision, far less encumbered by overt, politically framed modes. This does not imply that the relationship between writing and historicity is utterly absent in these inflections, however. Lewis's trajectory, for instance, reveals his progressively vexing awareness of his complicity as a soldier engaged in imperialism, in 'The tangled wrack of motives drifting down / An oceanic tide of wrong'.[151] I have therefore sought to elucidate the paradox in these poets' respective quests for a unique poetic register, the seeming contradiction that the personal vision can be and is present even in the impersonal inflections of both writers, though in varying degrees. As acknowledged earlier in my reference to the comments of Helen Goethals, to unravel and make sense of 'war poetry' demands recognition of the connections linking its historicity and its existence as imaginative response.[152] I have argued that, in most instances, this emerges in a more coded register in Douglas's poetry than in Lewis's. The former's impersonality is manifest, not just as strategy, but as a natural stylistic impulse to submerge guilt or the sense of the poet-speaker's complicity in the actions of war: for Douglas, killing demands both self-protective distancing and an avoidance of the temptations of overt polemic. However, such detachment, as when the poetic eye views the dead, for instance, does not equate to insensitivity or dispassionate curiosity. It constitutes a deception that is subtly exposed when Douglas shifts the perception of both speaker and reader as what I term 'complicit witnesses'. By contrast, while Lewis, too, shifts perceptions from vividly objectified images of the human and topographical aridity of the Indian sub-continent, or the details of soldiers immured in boredom or rain-sodden encampment, these deflections elicit from us a different response. They mark the connection between the speaker's engagement and detachment, or his profound sense of difference in a defamiliarizing, even alien

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[151] See Lewis, 'The Jungle', in *Collected Poems,* pp. 155-158 (p. 156, ll. 53-54).
[152] Goethals, in *British and Irish War Poetry*, p. 362.

environment. Furthermore, such modes of perception and of being appear even more defined and, therefore, more palpable in Lewis's work than in the writings of Douglas.

As indicated in this chapter, and as will be further discussed, Douglas's impersonality carries in the 'spaces between the lines' an undertow of compassion and a submersed but legible guilt, even hinted shame at times. By comparison, Lewis's compassion becomes increasingly visible as his poetic and physical journey advances, not in subjective affirmations of pity, but implicit in the resonance and concrete particularity of the landscape and impoverished humanity that command his focus. India drew this from him more acutely, correspondingly intensifying his sense of human injustice. In those poems that configure his recollections of Wales and the impoverishment of the valleys in the '30s, such injustices consequent upon the Depression are deeply felt and articulated, simultaneously framed in the speaker's imaginative or spatial detachment. In this, Lewis objectifies his own ambivalence. However, I have argued that the coalescence of engagement and detachment in the later poems, particularly those written in India, intensifies his compassion on a more cosmic scale, simultaneously deepening his self-division and his growing separation from imperialistic hegemonic ideology. His objectivity of vision strengthens, reaffirming what was intermittently present in earlier, often more romanticized work, and in his short story writing, but it is accompanied in the closing stages of Lewis's career by a sense of transcendental longing and the growing need to lose the self, thereby achieving an ultimate form of the impersonal movement, beyond spatial and temporal actuality. This will be addressed again later.

For Lewis, who never saw direct combat but witnessed its impotence to change both a distant culture and its apparent 'indifference', the war exacerbated but did not constitute the only determinant of his ambivalence, nor his stylistic maturation. Its effects upon his poetic impulse therefore cannot be said to have been as indelibly marked as those that distinguish

Douglas's work, even though the Indian sub-continent evinced from him a deepening sense of cosmic imbalance and injustice. Nevertheless, for both poets, the parallels and the divergences in their wartime experience are signifiers of a shared constant, their commitment to Truth and to discovering the language with which to express it. That commitment connoted an unassailable honesty and integrity of purpose, however masked in detachment. Moreover, to display one's ambivalence or, by legible shifts of perception to bear witness to what lies beneath ostensible impersonality, is itself an act of honesty, however coded it may be. It is an implicit statement of truth far more meaningful than the pronouncements of the politicians and militarists to whom Lewis was clearly alluding in his journal entry, quoted by Cary Archard, which records his comment of 1940: "The war isn't a war for truth, Jerry doesn't represent truth; Britain, U.S., Russia don't. The war is for independence, dominion, patriotism, property. Not truth'.[153] The tone of certainty herein would re-emerge in Lewis's consciousness in India as his fragile sense of rectitude as an imperialist soldier was openly dissolving.

In seeking the language of Truth, both Douglas and Lewis reveal their separate but related vulnerabilities. Equally, they each reveal the rupture and divisions that lie within their sense of identity. The enforced separations and distancing effects of wartime service deepened such fracture, and the struggle for a resolution of Self, consequent upon it. Sometimes, as discussed, their common need to transform such experience into imaginative creativity and a uniquely 'personal' voice demonstrates a duality of perception, or a dialogic voice that balances two worlds of experience. Accordingly, what emerge are not only poetic strategies to deflect from the subjective to the objective, but deeply rooted dialectical tensions. It is these tensions that lie at the core of the poetry of both Keith Douglas and Alun Lewis. They form an integral element of their respective stylistic journeys and, even within

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[153] Lewis, cited in Archard, *Wales at War*, p. 83.

the skilful strategy of concealment, manifest themselves as what Douglas termed his 'bête noire' and what I believe Lewis meant by his 'greater enmity within'. These terms and their significance will now occupy the central focus of the following chapter.

Chapter 2
Beasts and Burden: Voices of Conflict

Military experience inevitably confronted Keith Douglas and Alun Lewis with the nature and effects of external conflict, and with the impact of separation and wartime exile. However, their writings reveal a recurring, if not omnipresent, sense of divided identity, not solely as a response to war. While the latter exposed and intensified any vulnerability or fragility in what Douglas and Lewis each conceived of as an inner self, close examination of their creative output uncovers a mutual propensity for self-division and inner dialectical tension that, like the 'organic' ambivalence identified earlier, seems to have been present within them from their early years. Moreover, that propensity is inextricably bound up in their respective quests to find a distinctive creative voice and to unravel the ethical, epistemological and ontological questions that their experiences, especially as soldier- poets, generated. This chapter will therefore examine the presence and paradoxically creative impact of such tensions and inner dialectic, particularly evident in their manifestations as Keith Douglas's 'beast' and Lewis's self-designated 'enmity within'.

Part 1: Keith Douglas and 'The Beast on My Back'

As Chapter 1 avers, the trajectory of Keith Douglas's poetic imagination reveals the paradox of a man constantly wrestling with his awareness of self while often expressing a complex and contradictory personality with remarkable objectivity. His poetic maturation is characterized by an increasing stylistic impersonality, yet one which invites penetration beneath the control and apparent detachment to the interstitial spaces where compassion, loss and anxiety reside, arguably constituting what Douglas called 'the long pain I bore'.[1] Part 1 of this chapter continues from this recognition to examine what I believe is central to an analysis of much of Douglas's poetry and its underlying impulse, namely the dark, elusively pervasive other which he called his "bête noire", an often protean alterity that emerges paradigmatically in the iterative figures of 'the beast', a 'shadow', 'monster', or 'wraith'. I propose therefore to consider the nature of 'the beast' as it manifests itself in the poetry and as the presence Douglas conceived as the indefinable entity he sought to confront and unify in his 'Bête Noire' fragments but which became 'the poem I can't write'.[2]

This discussion is not intended as a reductive process: to simplify what Douglas himself saw as complex and insoluble would be to destroy rather than offer constructive insight. The figure of the beast is a construct of plurality, a configuration of what is both feared and desired. As such, it marks an epistemological journey, a conscious or unconscious navigation towards recognition of the self and the contradictions it embraces. Moreover, it appears ubiquitously within Douglas's oeuvre, demanding examination of a range of examples: poems such as 'Negative Information' (1941), 'Time Eating' (1941), 'The House' (1941) and 'Devils' (1942) resonate with significant echoes or 'tracks' of the beast, as he terms them.[3] His last poem, 'On A Return From Egypt' (1944), also deserves attention for its

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[1] 'Simplify Me When I'm Dead', in Douglas, *The Complete Poems*, p. 74, l. 14.
[2] 'Note on Drawing for the Jacket of *Bête Noire*', in Douglas, *The Complete Poems*, pp. 129-130 (p. 129).
[3] Douglas, *The Complete Poems*, p. 129.

ultimate expression of fear and uncertainty, both of which emerge in these 'tracks' as constituent elements of his disruptive inner conflict.   This examination leads to a more detailed analysis of 'Landscape with Figures', Parts 1, 2 and 3, a set of three contiguous poems written between April and September 1943 which form Douglas's most consummate grasp of the 'beast' and its relatedness to his struggle with identity.   In a sense, they represent the closest he came to his recognition of his own plurality both as a burden and a creative source.   However, the chapter begins with discussion of the 'Bête Noire' fragments and Douglas's own related note which provides a logical platform from which to examine some of the 'tracks' he identified, and to consider how and why his beast was so 'amorphous and powerful', so 'implacable'.[4]

Much of the following, including the comparative discussion of Alun Lewis in Part 2, pivots on concepts of alterity and of the tensions that can exist between the conscious and the unconscious.   Furthermore, the centrality of contradictions and interstitial traces of loss, uncertainty, fears, desires, even shame and guilt perceptible within the texts of both poets prompts attention to germane theories, including those associated with trauma, witnessing and the notion of boundary in the divided self.   Accordingly, psychoanalytical concepts explored by Freud, Jung and others such as Cathy Caruth, Shoshana Felman and Ken Wilber frame some of the discussion, as do a number of poststructuralist theories.   Part I of this chapter, however, focuses specifically on the nature of Keith Douglas's recursive preoccupation with his 'bête noire' in all its configurations, and attempts to understand its relationship to his struggle with identity and his impulse to be the consummate soldier-poet.

In a letter to Tambimuttu's assistant, Betty Jesse, in February, 1944, Douglas wrote, 'The Bête Noire style will begin again in our next issue'.[5]   It was a snipe in response to her innocent reference to him as her arrogant *bête noire* which, in the same letter, he developed

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[4] Douglas, *The Complete Poems*, p. 129.
[5] Graham, *Keith Douglas*, p. 233. Douglas was referring to the next issue of *Poetry (London)* to be published at Nicholas and Watson.

further with the remark 'Now (and all your fault), I have to think of and write a poem called

Bête Noire!'.[6] As Desmond Graham has elucidated, this seemingly confident self-promise

resulted in an enervating series of fragmentary attempts to confront and express an image that

embodied the contiguity of his past and present:

> Betty's words had given him an image for something which he had known about himself for a long time; but the attempt to write '*Bête Noire*' had become a struggle to master destructive feeling through poetic control.[7]

The fragments, which Graham's third edition of the collected poems claims are the latest

available drafts, are arranged respectively as A (i), A (ii), B, C and D, and demand attention

not least in the context of Douglas's own note of March, 1944:

> Bête Noire is the name of the poem I can't write; a protracted failure which is also a protracted success I suppose. Because it is the poem I begin to write in a lot of other poems: this is what justifies my use of that title for the book. The beast, which I have drawn as black care sitting behind the horseman, is indefinable: sitting down to try and describe it, I have sensations of physical combat, and after five hours of writing last night, which resulted in failure, all my muscles were tired. But if he is not caught, at least I can see his tracks (anyone may see them) in some of the other poems. My failure is that I know so little about him, beyond his existence and the infinite patience and extent of his malignity [...] I am afraid I know nothing about this beast at all: he is so amorphous and powerful that he could be a deity. Only he is implacable; no use sacrificing to him, he takes what he wants.[8]

The comment is fraught with characteristic ambivalence and uncertainty. It testifies to both

failure and success, acknowledging Douglas's sense of the debilitating inadequacy of poetic

achievement yet perceiving the beast as a recognizable, incipient presence in some of his

other works. Furthermore, it embodies paradox in that Douglas asserts almost total ignorance

of the beast's ontological make-up while offering a contradictory, significant construction in

the ekphrastic image of 'black care', despite its being 'so amorphous'. Douglas's jacket

drawings depict this configuration as a horned diabolical shape, suggesting a possible

conflation of Hades, companion to Death, the fourth Horseman of the Apocalypse (in

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[6] Graham, *Keith Douglas*, p. 233.
[7] *Ibid.*, p. 235.
[8] Douglas, in *The Complete Poems*, pp. 129-130.

Revelation, 6. 5-6) with Plato's notion of the human soul expressed in the *Phaedrus*. However we interpret it, the image expresses an inescapable, dark burden that rides upon Douglas's consciousness but which resists ultimate definition. In his closing sentence, his assured affirmation of this avatar's 'malignity' and 'implacable', acquisitive nature finally subverts the poet's earlier claim to relative ignorance. The instability of the text is thus performative of the anxiety that resides at the heart of the poet's opening confession and which is encapsulated in his word, 'indefinable'.

Fragment A (i) attests to this same nexus of anxiety: Douglas, aligning himself in the opening line with some undefined 'other' – reader or alternative self – asserts his burden as though purging himself of a secret. The reader thus becomes the privileged and similarly burdened recipient of a confession that cannot be repeated:

> Yes, I too have a particular monster
> A toad or worm curled in the belly,
> Stirring at times I cannot foretell, he
> is the thing I can admit only once to
> anyone, never to those who have not their own.
> Never to those who are happy, whose easy language
> I speak well, though with a stranger's accent.[9]

There is an unequivocal sense of displacement in this admission: Douglas is aware of his monster as a divisive entity, a 'particular monster', the trope suggesting a conscious etymological connotation of 'particular' as a special individual rather than a universal entity, belonging to the subjective 'I', perhaps the 'familiar' of 'How To Kill' (1943), though there equated with 'Death'. Its location here clearly mobilizes a separation in him. Conspicuously, it is aligned with 'monster', signifying a large, looming presence, and its constitutive capacity to instil terror. However, there is a degree of instability and contradiction here, perhaps that which underlies Douglas's repeated abandonment of his fragmentary efforts. The 'monster' is also a 'toad or worm curled in the belly' that stirs and occasionally consumes its host. The

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[9] See 'The Bête Noire Fragments', Fragment A (i), in Douglas, *The Complete Poems*, p. 126, ll. 1-7.

image connotes something small and insidious that induces disgust rather than fear, parasite rather than overshadowing succubus, possibly configuring a disease that can consume the speaker's self-unity. Blake's poem, 'The Sick Rose' (1794) haunts Douglas's imagery:

> O Rose thou art sick.
> The invisible worm
> That flies in the night
> In the howling storm
>
> Has found out thy bed
> Of crimson joy:
> And his dark secret love
> Does thy life destroy.[10]

Douglas must withhold his beast from those whose happiness he can only mimic with 'a stranger's accent' and in so doing, confront his own dishonesty, thus perceiving himself as the locus of inner tension and division. Herein lies the anxiety, conveyed in the repetitive 'I' and agitated rhythms with an overt self-consciousness that belies Douglas's belief in the need to write extrospectively, as stated in his indignantly defensive letter to John Hall in June, 1943.[11]

One might argue this introspection is inevitable, given Douglas is openly seeking to confront that which is both within him and figuratively an external Other. Much of Keith Douglas's mature poetry demonstrates a composure and stylistic objectivity that arises from what I regard as an element of his impersonality, but that quality, I maintain, is alien to 'The Bête Noire Fragments'. Indeed, this is arguably the gimbal point upon which Douglas's sense of failure and enervation pivots: the poetic control he so consummately achieved in his desert poems is not accessible in his ontological efforts to grapple with and define his 'particular monster'. The fragments simply cannot become more than frustrating poetic

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[10] William Blake, 'The Sick Rose', in *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* ([1794] Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 147.

[11] Keith Douglas, writing to J. C. Hall in an airgraph dated 10 June 1943, rebuked his friend for his 'cutting remarks about my poems' and for appearing to 'condemn all that is not anti-réportage and extrospective (if the word exists) poetry – which seems to me the sort that has to be written just now, even if it is not attractive'; see Douglas, letter 274, in *The Letters*, p. 287.

attempts precisely because of their angst-ridden self-reflexivity. In a sense, they are a performative testimony to the poet's elusive and divided sense of selfhood: they corroborate not his self-possession but a sense of being possessed. Desmond Graham has concluded somewhat differently that the poet's abandonment of fragment A (i), testifies not to frustration or anxiety as argued above, but is evidence that 'Douglas had come too quickly to an understanding for the poem to need to be continued'.[12] Stated in these terms, this seems too hasty a judgement: Douglas was to make four further attempts at the poem throughout the night, hardly indicative of the 'understanding' Graham attributed to him. As will be discussed later in this chapter, that achievement may have already materialised, though not consciously asserted, in the earlier set of three poems, 'Landscape With Figures' (1943).

Having abandoned this first attempt, Douglas wrote a second fragment, A (ii), approaching it almost as a palimpsest. Here, the tone is at first more confident, more indicative of control over his subject:

> This is my particular monster. I know him;
> he walks about inside me: I'm his house
> and his landlord. He's my evacuee
> taking a respite from hell in me[13]

The image of the self as a 'house' is recursive in Douglas's work, configured here ambivalently to convey the speaker as both the site of habitation and, implicitly, he who willingly offers tenancy. However, as the fragment progresses, it seems to decentre itself: the emphasis shifts to the beast as something malignant, a diabolical 'evacuee' possessing the speaker for its own 'respite from hell'. The confident claim, 'I know him', is subverted in the second stanza as the speaker admits to being fooled by this plausible, malefic joker:

> Such a persuasive gentleman he is
> I believe him, I go out quite sure
> that I'll come back and find him gone
> but does he go? Not him. No, he's a one

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[12] Graham, in *Keith Douglas*, p. 234.

[13] 'Bête Noire' A (ii)', in Douglas, *The Complete Poems*, p. 126, ll. 1-4.

who likes his joke, he won't sit waiting for
me to come home, but comes

(ll. 7-12)

The conversational tones belie the uneasy sense of possession that occupies these words, an unease that culminates in aporia as Douglas abandons the poem mid-sentence. The poet's inability to complete the self-exploration thus reflects in the poem's agitated structure and in the premature expiry of its last line.

What emerges in these fragments is a kind of psychological disruption, an undoing of identity in which the speaker positions himself as both victim and perpetrator of his own demonic possession. In a sense, the fragments do not configure a normal emotional landscape but adumbrate a kind of haunting that manifests as the dialectical tension between Self and Otherness. If, as Douglas acknowledged, his beast appeared 'indefinable', it is conceivably because – as the fragments above testify – it cannot be unified as a single identity and, even more significantly, because it is perhaps both the cause and product of trauma within the poet's psyche. The events of Douglas's life undoubtedly involved debilitating disappointment and a sense of loss in his various love affairs, as discussed elsewhere in this thesis; compounding such negative experience was his reiterative awareness of Death both as an intrinsic constituent of war, and as a recurrent presentiment of his own imminent fate. The complex interlacing of these elements informed his entire being as soldier-poet. If we agree that such events can coalesce in the person as trauma, Douglas's disruptively elliptical, fragmentary explorations surely testify to some such trauma within him.

Cathy Caruth asserts that trauma is the unspeakable, that it is 'outside or other to language', so that any testimony, be it as the speech act of a legal witness or as literary

testimony to experience, creates what we might regard as aporia.[14]   What needs to be expressed is contaminated by its own intensity so that a normal emotional or cognitive response is impaired.   Fragment A (ii) seems to reveal such impairment and appears to reproduce the linguistic properties approaching those of trauma as though Douglas finds the subject matter unassimilable.   Attempts to articulate trauma hauntingly 'reappear as fragments or sensations in a repetitive way that the subject finds hard to shield itself from': Caruth's words are strikingly pertinent here, as is her conviction that the metaphor of ghosts and their associative representations appear as formative elements in how we conceptualize trauma.   She regards such tropes as the 'traumatic experience's repeated *possession* of the one who experiences it'.[15]   That sense of 'possession' informs the second fragment which, despite its incompletion, testifies to the flux of conflicting voices and contesting forces within the poet.   The 'persuasive gentleman' becomes a recursive, dialogic intervention in the speaker's psyche, another voice that taunts and has 'his joke'.   In this sense it substantiates what Caruth addresses as a repetitive possession, a sensation or presence that reconstitutes the trauma that is its source and which its host, its 'landlord', cannot exclude or withstand.

Fragment B extends the concept of possession, but the 'I' or 'me' of the poem has now become the prisoner of what Douglas now designates as 'The Beast'.   The text invites us to see the latter as 'a jailer', resident in the speaker's mind as an autonomous and controlling, interruptive presence:

> The Beast is a jailer
> allows me out on parole
> brings me back by telepathy
> is inside my mind
> breaks into my conversation with his own words,
> speaking out of my mouth[16]

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[14] Cathy Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1995), p. 4.
[15] Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in* Memory, pp. 4-5.
[16] See Douglas, *The Complete Poems*, p. 127, ll. 1-4.

Ostensibly, the image conveys Douglas as his beast's plaything, but the subliminal sense overrides this: the 'malignity' to which Douglas referred in the note accompanying the cover jacket drawing clearly pervades the underlying textual reality. The speaker helplessly becomes a dialogic voice once more, is powerlessly overthrown at will and can communicate or form alliances or enemies as the Beast determines, hardly the work of impish mischief. This 'other' is a controlling force: it thus constitutes more than a mere 'monster' to be feared. It enslaves, and demands that the mind enacts its bidding. Moreover, it speaks its own words from the host's mouth, perhaps an echo of diabolical possession. It seems all-encompassing:

> [C]an overthrow me in a moment
> writes what I write, or edits it (censors it)
> takes a dislike to my friends and sets me against them
> can take away pleasure
> is absent for long periods, is never expected when he returns
> has several forms and disguises
> makes enemies for me

(ll. 7-13)

The predominant absence of punctuation reinforces the impression of an outpouring, a fear of interruption as the speaker seeks to list the characteristics of this reification. Once again, however, the text is destabilized in a new admission, a recessionary claim that counters the earlier asseveration of the Beast's controlling implacability: now, this 'other'

> can be overthrown by me, if I have help.
> I have been trying to get help for about eleven years.
> Three times I got help.
> If this is a game, it's past half time and the beast is winning.

(ll. 14-17)

The language and rhythms reflect a declaration, a constative admission rather than poetic self-exploration, but are simultaneously an enactment of Douglas's 'long pain'. There is no impersonality or detachment here; rather, there is, as Desmond Graham points out, an overt allusion to his successive attempts years before to assuage his destructive depression through

friendship and romance. [17]   The cynical reference to 'a game' delineates the speaker's perception of himself as his beast's plaything in a sinister contest.   However, Graham's reading might well apply as the poet's own adumbration of guilt, having clung to successive lovers as crutches in moments of despair.

In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), Freud identified what has become commonly known as the death drive within the pluralistic human psyche in which conflict is seen as inherent and internal to human existence.[18] He argued that it functioned as a source of negativity, externalised as aggression towards others, or internalised as aggression towards oneself, the Ego. Hence, he perceived human existence as a constant struggle between two opposing instincts, Eros, mobilizing creativity and harmony, and Thanatos, generating compulsion, aggression and even self-destruction. This theory is conspicuously relevant in its application to the internal conflicts of both Keith Douglas and Alun Lewis. With equal significance, Freud's work addressed the relation between his theory of trauma and historical violence in the context of World War 1 and what he saw as the emergence of a pathological condition of recurrently intrusive dreams and nightmares. He saw such dreams as a return of a traumatic event against the will of those they afflicted.[19]

Cathy Caruth's illuminating study of this latter theory raises an argument possibly germane to an analysis of Keith Douglas's 'bête noire' and to these fragments.[20] As stated earlier, she acknowledges a characteristic of trauma as its capacity to haunt recursively.

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[17] Graham, *Keith Douglas*, pp. 234-235. Desmond Graham offers a convincing explanation of this allusion. He states: 'A little less than eleven years earlier, he (Douglas) had written of the need for a companion, seeking her at Eastbourne Baths, trusting that if she were found she could put out the "*ignis fatuus*" of his discontent. His first letter to Kristin had proposed such a role for her; in his first year at Oxford his poems had celebrated Yingcheng's assumption of it; again, for a few months with Milena, he had been able to elude the devils outside him'.

[18] Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* [1920], in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. and trans. by James Strachey in collaboration with Anna Freud, assisted by Alix Strachey and Alan Tyson, 24 vols (London: Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psychoanalysis, 1955), XVIII (1920-1922), pp. 7-64.

[19] *Ibid*., p. 13. Freud states, '[d]reams recurring in traumatic neuroses have the characteristic of repeatedly bringing the patient back into the situation of his accident, a situation from which he wakes up in another fright'.

[20] Caruth, 'Traumatic Departures: Survival and History in Freud (*Beyond the Pleasure Principle, Moses and Monotheism*)', in *Unclaimed Experience,* pp. 57-72.

More than this, however, in analysing Freud's theory of trauma-based dreams, she elucidates these as painfully repetitive configurations of events that resist understanding. She posits that it is precisely because of this failure to attribute meaning that trauma repeats itself. Thus, she says, its reappearance reveals:

> [t]he absolute inability of the mind to avoid an unpleasurable event that has not been given psychic meaning in any way. In trauma, that is, the outside has gone inside without any mediation.[21]

This seems wholly pertinent to Douglas's compulsion to confront, define and free himself of the beast that is both his 'jailer' and tenant. In each fragment examined above, nothing mediates between the speaker and his other. The aborted poems, though not dreams, are testament to a similar intrusive disturbance and psychic breach. The beast resists entrapment in any fixed moment: its appearances are expressed as beyond the poet's control, its behaviour intractable. Freud, in taking his theory further, associated trauma-related dreams to events that included, not only a drive towards death, but the threat of death, itself a recurrent aspect of Douglas's consciousness, and argued that the source, the traumatic experience, resisted location in any specific time. Caruth expresses this succinctly as the dream representing a retrospective 'attempt to master what was never fully grasped in the first place'.[22]

For Douglas, as is well documented and discussed later in this thesis, the omnipresence of death in war and, ambivalently, in his consciousness as a source of fear and fascination, perhaps desire, was inescapable. Admittedly, there is no overt presence of death in these fragments. However, there is an interstitial fear in the sense of the powerlessness Douglas conveys and, in his inability to admit to his 'monster' more than once, an admission that intimates a profound reluctance to speak of it but, having done so, to consign it to

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[21] Caruth, 'Traumatic Departures', *Unclaimed Experience*, p. 59.
[22] *Ibid*., p. 62. Caruth's argument derives from Freud, *Standard Edition* (1955), XVIII [1920-1922], p. 32, in which Freud states, '[t]hese dreams are endeavouring to master the stimulus retrospectively, by developing the anxiety whose omission was the cause of the traumatic neurosis'.

silence. It embodies a fear that – for the soldier poet – is surely related to the threat of death, feasibly implicit in Douglas's awareness of the beast's 'infinite patience and extent of his malignity'. It is at least part of the poet's burden, his 'black care'. The fragments configure an image of an 'other' whose origins Douglas had not consciously 'grasped', in Freud's terms, but which continued to demand his energies in the remaining attempts, designated C and D.

The final fragments represent what Desmond Graham calls 'a counter-current to a mood' in that Douglas now seems less preoccupied with the beast's behaviour.[23] More pertinent, however, are the repetitions, the reiterated phrase 'beast on my back' that forms a refrain throughout fragment C and an emphatic conclusion to D. In fragment C, the trope appears both as a private confession and as a warning. Stanza one seems to intimate the beast as a barrier between the poet and his external world:

> The trumpet man to take it away
> blows a hot break in a beautiful way
> ought to snap my fingers and tap my toes
> but I sit at my table and nobody knows
> I've got a beast on my back.[24]

The self-conscious rhymes and imagery are almost resonant of song, of the coolness of nightclub jazz, but they descend to an admission of the speaker's isolation within his own secret, an abstract reified as an alien, bestial burden. In the second stanza, Douglas seeks to visualize this as 'A medieval animal with a dog's face' (l. 6) who is present in an imagined nightclub 'sneering at the hot musicians' skill' (l. 9). The malevolence is explicit in the language and its sibilance, taking us to the stanza's completion (ll. 9-10) and Douglas's terse acknowledgement, echoing the earlier confession but substituting the indefinite with the definite article, as if confirming permanence: 'He / is the beast on my back'. The tone is one of certainty, devoid now of any attempt to wrestle with, seek escape from or understand the

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[23] Graham, in *Keith Douglas*, p. 235.
[24] Douglas, *The Complete Poems*, p. 128, ll. 1-5.

beast, but rather communicating acquiescence before offering the reader a hypothesis and, more ominously, a warning in the final stanza:

> Suppose we dance, suppose we run away
> into the street, or the underground
> he'd come with us. It's his day.
> Don't kiss me. Don't put your arm round
> And touch the beast on my back

(ll. 11-15)

The imperative tone of the last two lines expresses both fear and the speaker's sense of the inescapable permanence of his bestial burden. The fear is not simply of its detection by his addressee, nor that it will instil terror or shock, but also that it will be disturbed and unleash its malignity. Douglas locates the poem in London, appropriately so as the place where Betty Jesse first designated Douglas as her 'bête noire', clearly framing his words in a romantic context. But it is the emphatic submission to the beast as owning the day and the ensuing warning to the lover, or anyone, that impact most powerfully. The truncated sentences (ll 13-14) prepare us and the poem's addressee unequivocally for the closing imperative. The underlying fear is almost palpable: Douglas shrinks from discovery of his malignant burden, a virtual alter ego, by anyone other than himself.

Fragment D brings 'Bête Noire' to a close. Interestingly, Desmond Graham has read it as an ambivalent achievement, both 'an affirmation of the imaginative powers which the creature cannot destroy' and an ultimate submission to the beast.[25] This concurs with Douglas's own judgement and is, I believe, incontrovertible. The poet now returns to the iterative trope of his eyes as 'lenses', noted earlier in Chapter 1 and which, here, denote a means of protective detachment from, and exploration of, the pain of loss and death. Thereby, these constituent elements of war and of personal history are transmuted into poetry:

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[25] Graham, in *Keith Douglas*, p. 235.

> If at times my eyes are lenses
> through which the brain explores
> constellations of feeling
> my ears yielding like swing doors
> admit princes to the corridors
> into the mind, do not envy me.
> I have a beast on my back.[26]

<div align="right">(ll. 1-7)</div>

Once again, the beast obtrudes as the ultimate victor, bringing closure to the poem. The speaker in whose voice one may detect Douglas himself, states in resigned tones that he must not be envied: instead, he admits that the burden he carries takes from him, that it is the destructive counterpart to his creativity. The final line bears the weight of this admission, echoing the jacket note in which Douglas acknowledged that the beast 'takes what he wants'.[27]

Cathy Caruth notes that, in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* [1920], Freud had referenced literature as a means of describing traumatic experience because, as she succinctly points out, 'literature, like psychoanalysis, is interested in the complex relation between knowing and not knowing'.[28] Douglas's regard for his beast as indefinable and his fragmented efforts to express and unify it in poetry are both a constitutive and performative recognition of this. They represent the point of intersection between Douglas 'knowing' and 'not knowing' that which haunts him. The poetic fragments are, as Douglas observed, an ambivalent achievement, both 'protracted failure' and 'protracted success', not only because he saw their 'tracks' elsewhere in his oeuvre, but because, ironically, they are the product of his creative impulse as well as testimony to his sense of fractured identity. In this, they constitute a tautology. The imprint of inner anxiety, even trauma, is registered in the ruptures and discontinuities and aporia of the texts, but it is in this imprint that the dialectical tensions

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[26] Douglas, *The Complete Poems*, p. 128.
[27] *Ibid,* p. 130.
[28] See Caruth, 'Traumatic Departures', in *Unclaimed Experience,* p. 3.

of the artist are communicated: the 'failure' paradoxically succeeds in projecting what must remain intractable.

G. S Fraser, in his Chatterton lecture on Keith Douglas, stated that 'one must read all his poems in terms of "Bête Noire". Fraser's argument pivots on his belief that Douglas struggled and failed to become a 'fully integrated personality' and that, while being obsessively aware of what equates to a Jungian shadow in himself, he 'never properly came to terms with it'.[29] Of the fragments themselves, Fraser postulates that they represent a sudden recognition of the nature of the Beast, the shadow, an 'irruption' of insight which, by implication, brought the 'tracks' to conscious awareness, simultaneously giving definition to what Fraser perceived as Douglas's 'own nature in its depths' and which is evidence of the poet's 'profound sadness'.[30] Fraser defines the shadow and this epiphany thus:

> The Shadow is the sudden awareness [...] blinding and shattering, of all the nastiness, all the ulterior self-centredness in our own motives and in those of others. To accept the Shadow is, in Christian language, to accept the possibility of damnation, and the reality of Original Sin. The Shadow, if we try to express our latent awareness of it [...] can, as it were, irrupt upon us. And the moment of its irruption is the moment when we feel not only that we have never loved anybody properly, but that nobody has ever loved us, that Love is a lie.[31]

Though rather heavily overlaid with Fraser's Christian perspective and his belief that Douglas, in terms of personal temperament, 'was a Romantic poet', it nevertheless alludes pertinently to the sometimes overt and often interstitial sense of loss, failed love and latent guilt to which Douglas's poetry, including 'Bête Noire', testifies.[32] The 'Shadow', as such, is an alternative expression for the beast, often as a specific metaphor or as other associated tropes as earlier stated. However, Fraser's notion that Douglas experienced a 'sudden irruption' either in the fragments or his jacket note, and that this 'moment' brought such clarity of consciousness, seems difficult to substantiate. Neither the set of fragments nor the

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[29] See Fraser, *British Academy Proceedings,* p. 98.
[30] *Ibid.,* p. 94.
[31] *Ibid.,* p. 98.
[32] *Ibid*., p. 91.

poet's analysis of them testifies to such instant enlightenment, but rather to the recognition of the burden of alterity as a protracted process more akin to what Jung, writing in 1945, termed as 'making the darkness conscious'.[33] Earlier in his career Jung had acknowledged the 'shadow side' as a 'positively demonic dynamism', an ambivalently destructive and creative conflict within the unconscious belonging to the whole personality of which man painfully held a dark suspicion but 'hesitate[d] to admit'.[34] These insights ostensibly correlate with Fraser's view but neither Douglas's commentary and poetic fragments, nor indeed Jung's analysis, confirms a 'sudden irruption' of clarity. The tension between creativity and a destructive presence is undoubtedly there, acknowledged by the poet and palpable in the fragments, but not accompanied by a sense of unification between man and beast in a single moment of epiphany.

Keith Douglas's recognition that 'Bête Noire [...] is the poem I begin to write in a lot of other poems' reinforces the notion of a poetic odyssey fraught with dialectical tension, a journey throughout which Douglas felt 'tracked', to use his metaphor. Jacques Lacan's concept of 'the self ex-centric to itself' seems germane here; he speaks of a 'ghostly presence' in which the subject strives to answer his own question, 'who then is this other to whom I am more attached than myself?'[35] Douglas's words suggest a similar intuitive awareness of the Beast as something persistent, a recurrent presence and obsession within the self which, through much of his poetry, finds expression, often as deep-rooted anxiety to find a unified identity. Repeatedly, its presence resonates with the poet's antinomianism, his constant exploration of opposites. In 'Time Eating' (1941), Time becomes a beast that is

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[33] Carl Jung, *The Philosophical Tree* [1945], in *The Collected Works of C.G. Jung, Volume 13: Alchemical Studies*, ed. and trans. by G. Adler and R. F. C. Hull (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), pp. 251-356 (p. 335).

[34] Carl Jung, *On the Psychology of the Unconscious* [1912], in *Collected Works, Volume 7*, pp. 8-41 (p. 35).

[35] Jacques Lacan, 'The Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious, or Reason Since Freud', in *Écrits: a Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Tavistock, 1977), pp. 146-178 (pp. 171-172). Lacan's discussion centres on the relationship between the structure of language and its discovery in the unconscious. It entails an extended examination of Freud's analysis of the self from which Lacan concludes 'the unconscious is the discourse of the Other' and that it is 'with the apparatus of language the dimension of truth emerges' (p. 172).

capable of creation and yet, ultimately, destruction: 'while he makes he eats' (l. 9); he can

'masticate all flesh' (l. 12). He is configured as 'Ravenous Time' (l. 1) and we are told:

> That volatile huge intestine holds
> material and abstract in its folds:
> thought and ambition melt, and even the world
> will alter, in that catholic belly curled.[36]

(ll. 13-16)

Its volatility implies a destructive, eruptive threat, embodying the binary oppositions of

materiality and abstraction. Here, the metaphor is sustained, a prolepsis of the 'toad or worm

curled in the belly' in line 2 of 'Bête Noire, Fragment A(i)', not as a figure of the poet's

duality but as unified thought and feeling acknowledging its ambivalence in measured,

unequivocal tones. It is, however, inescapable, and its ability to devour the speaker is

detectable, for he is representative of 'all flesh'. This is announced in the final stanza where

the poem's trajectory as a generalized configuration of Time's 'catholic belly' (l. 16) is

subverted in the deeply personal admission that has been delayed until now:

> But Time, who ate my love, you cannot make
> such another. You who can remake
> the lizard's tail and the bright snakeskin
> cannot, cannot.

(ll. 17-20)

The rhythms and repetition enforce the sense of loss, specifically of a love conceived as

devoured: there is, too, an implicit acknowledgement, the 'Shadow' of awareness that 'Love

is a lie', as Fraser observed.[37] Arguably, these lines resonate with thoughts of Yingcheng

from whom Douglas had recently parted on leaving Oxford University, leaving him in

fluctuating moods of resignation and depression. Having discovered from a garage attendant,

just as war was declared, that Yingcheng was shortly to be married, he felt betrayed and

traumatized, soon after announcing he would 'bloody well make my mark in this war. For I

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[36] Douglas, in *The Complete Poems*, p. 71.
[37] Fraser, in *British Academy Proceedings*, p. 98.

will not come back'.[38]   Whilst one must treat biographical interpolations with caution,

evidence for such a reading is feasibly present here.   The poem conveys anger born of

despondency, and a presentiment of his death that borders on resignation and determination.

It is this latter complexity of feeling that invests the final address to 'Time', which in itself

may be ambivalent, simultaneously addressing the lost lover:

> and though you brought me from a boy
> you can make no more of me, only destroy.

> (ll. 21-22)

His declaration surely constitutes an element of Douglas's 'long pain' and is arguably an

intimation of his darker side, part of the trauma and dialectical tension that inform the

complex nature of the beast on his back, his protean 'black care'.

Around the time of composition of 'Time Eating', Douglas wrote 'The House' which

also bears significant imprints of his beast.[39]   Its iterative tropes of 'glass' and 'the house'

inhabit much of his work, and form the focal point of later discussion.   Here, Douglas

identifies himself repeatedly as a 'pillar':

> I am a pillar of this house
> of which it seems the whole is glass
> [...]
> for men like weightless shadows march
> ignorantly in at the bright portico[40]

The second stanza extends the image to focus on the house as comparable to 'the house that

devils made' (l.12), redolent of Milton's Pandemonium,[41] but its visibility is selective and its

defensive battlements concealed within itself:

> Yet this queer magnificence

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[38] Graham, *Keith Douglas*, p. 79. Graham also points out that Yingcheng had recently written to Douglas from Bermuda, telling him bluntly of having met 'many handsome young men' there. See Graham, *Keith Douglas*, p. 78.

[39] Douglas, *The Complete Poems,* pp. 69-70.

[40] *Ibid*., p. 69, ll. 1-5.

[41] John Milton, in *Paradise Lost, Book 1* [1667], presents the raising of Pandemonium as the diabolical seat of Satan's rule, first naming it as such in line 756. See John Milton, *Paradise Lost Books I-II,* ed. by John Broadbent (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), p. 80.

> shows not to many, its defence
> not being walls but in the property
> that it is thin as air and hard to see.

> (ll. 13-16)

As the poem progresses into stanza three, there is an overt shift which now configures the speaker as both pillar and occupant, an external material structure and an internalized inhabitant, a figure of duality. Moreover, he is a witness:

> walking a perpetual up-and-down
> scrutinizing all these
> substances, shadows on their ways
> crowding or evacuating the place.

> (ll. 18-21)

He is aware of ethereal presences, disembodied voices, a 'face traversing the stair' (l. 24), solitary inhabitants 'which are of the imagination, or of air' (l. 27). Shadows populate the speaker's consciousness, sometimes as a lone 'face traversing the stair' (l. 240), an image that perhaps reiterates itself in corporeal form in an attic room later in the poem:

> In this room which I had not entered for months
> among the old pictures and bowls for hyacinths
> and other refuse, I discovered the body
> conventionally arranged, of a young lady
> whom I admit I knew once, but had heard
> declined in another country and there died.

> (ll. 45-50)

Desmond Graham posits that this alludes to Yingcheng whom the poet had by now lost, possibly in Bermuda.[42] Despite the temptation to accept this biographical reading, it is the redolence with death and echoes of Marlowe's play, *The Jew of Malta*, that seem more persuasively relevant:

> Friar Barnardine: Thou hast committed...
> Barabas: Fornication. But that was in another country. And besides, the wench is dead.[43]

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[42] Graham, *Keith Douglas*, p. 118.
[43] Christopher Marlowe, in *The Jew of Malta* [1589 or 1590], IV.I. 40-41., ed. by Stephen J. Lynch (London: Hackett Publications, 2009), p. 128.

The detached formality of the language in Douglas's configuration conveys a distancing of the speaker from his discovery, almost a cool dismissal that conceals vestigial guilt and conscience. Echoes of Eliot's 'Portrait of a Lady' also linger here, in the bare traces of conscience for a former liaison.[44] Douglas's recursive, shadowy images suggest a nascent pre-figuration of his 'bête noire' as both internalized and external to the self, though not yet fully understood or anatomized. Implicitly, too, there is recognition of this as the product of the unconscious, filtered through the creative imagination.

Even as early as 1940, while at Oxford, Douglas had written that the act of writing poetry is a process of creative discovery in which one can 'discover something outside your bounds', perhaps a hinted perception of divided selfhood, a half recognition of a shadow or alter ego as a projection of his own creation, his own psyche.[45] It is also, of course, a presentiment of a darker confrontation with the truth that would emerge in his experience of war, in his own ability to see 'outside', expressed in 'Desert Flowers' in 1943:

> I see men as trees suffering
> or confound the detail and the horizon.
> Lay the coin upon my tongue and I will sing
> of what others never set eyes on.[46]

The poem's closure is a both a prophecy and a promise, an ambivalent image in which Douglas alludes to death as a revelation, a testament to destructive images 'slaying the mind' (ll. 4-5) and poetic creativity, what Desmond Graham sees as expression of 'the desire to reach the battlefield's vision'.[47] The vision, however, is blighted with 'suffering', distorted by the lens of war: it alludes to the biblical account in which Jesus heals the blind man who,

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[44] The poem appears in *T .S. Eliot: Selected Poems* (London: Faber and Faber, 1954), pp. 8-12. Eliot quotes Marlowe's lines as the epigraph to his poem in which his male speaker takes us through a relationship with a woman whose implicit love for him is unrequited. For the man, the lady's hopes of fulfilment with him are always a known impossibility. The poem's close, however, expresses the speaker's self-questioning, and a vestige of conscience that comes in retrospect.

[45] Douglas, 'On the Nature of Poetry', in *The Complete Poems*, p.133, first published in full in *Augury: An Oxford Miscellany of Verse and Prose*, A. M. Hardie and Keith Douglas, eds (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1940), pp. 33-37.

[46] Douglas, *The Complete Poems*, p. 108, ll. 13-16.

[47] Graham, in *Keith Douglas*, p. 188.

at first restored to imperfect vision, utters, 'I see men as trees walking'.[48] As Jesus lays his hands upon him once again, the blind man is now restored fully, 'and saw every man clearly'. Douglas's closing line is imbued with promise of renewed vision in death. As William Scammell has perceived, the poem possesses 'the correlatives of clear-sighted life and death, in which the resolved self, cured of its doubleness, will sing like a bird'.[49] That resolution has not yet materialised, but the ambiguity of vision attests to Douglas's inescapable awareness of death's presence in war and its relatedness to himself as both soldier and poet. In this, however, there still resides a haunting constituent of Douglas's beast: war unfixes the self that witnesses suffering and its images remain as a heavy burden.

Reading Douglas's poems in the light of his 'Bête Noire' commentary, the 'tracks' of the beast become readily visible, however embryonic. In 'Negative Information' (1941), they are couched as ambiguous omens, portents of death 'received casually' (l. 23) to the speaker and a lover.[50] As the poem progresses to its final three stanzas, the poet adopts a deceptively casual stance:

> You and I are careless of these millions of wraiths.
>
> For as often as not we meet
> in dreams our own dishevelled ghosts;
> and opposite, the modest hosts
> of our ambition stare them out.
>
> To this, there's no sum I can find –
> the hungry omens of calamity
> mixed with good signs, and all received with levity,
> or indifference, by the amazed mind.[51]

The 'indifference' is a mask, betrayed by the underlying tension sensed here in the balance between life and death that constitutes a recursive element in Douglas's oeuvre. The poetic voice, speaking as the depersonalized 'we', delineates the meeting with 'our own dishevelled

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[48] Mark 8. 22-23.
[49] Scammell, in *Keith Douglas: A Study*, p. 186.
[50] Douglas, in *The Complete Poems*, pp. 81-82.
[51] *Ibid*., ll. 24-32.

ghosts', while 'hungry omens of calamity' ambivalently fuse with 'good signs'.[52] The images coalesce as tracks of the beast, projections of the imagination, the 'amazed mind', in which the sense of unreality echoes John Waller's impression of Douglas as:

> [a] new Alice gone to explore a new Wonderland in which the scenery is unaccountably composed of strange forms made by the dead and the dying and their broken machinery.[53]

Waller's words constitute an even more striking comment on the images that would subsequently populate poems like 'Cairo Jag' (1943) and, in particular, 'Landscape with Figures' (1943), which is discussed later.

Vincent Sherry's examination of Douglas's war poetry focuses on the silence that he detects as an underlying 'hectic stasis', a concept he regards as germane to an evolving impersonality of poetic style.[54] 'Devils' (1942) is an overt expression of the poet's attempts to both conceptualize his 'mind's silence' (l. 1) and to confront its ambivalence, its deceptiveness and vulnerability. It is also palpable evidence of the bestial track, a paradoxical attempt to both distance and apprehend his inner devils. The poem is fraught with dichotomy, the contestation between the inner and outer worlds that the speaker inhabits. It surely testifies, too, to the poet's conscious grasp of his mind's fragility, sensed in the opening genitive:

> My mind's silence is not that of a wood
> warm and full of the sun's patience,
> who peers through the leaves waiting
> perhaps the arrival of a god,
> silence I welcomed when I could:
> but this deceptive quiet is
> the fastening of a soundproof trap

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[52] This spectral image holds an echo of Edward Thomas's poem, 'Roads' [1916], in *The Collected Poems of Edward Thomas,* ed. R. G. Thomas (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), pp. 79-80. The speaker on his journey hears the dead men returning from France who 'lightly dance'. Their 'pattering' footsteps, perhaps also signifying their ghostly conversation, represent a sense of otherness, an alterity akin to that of Keith Douglas in his poem, though as a configuration that brings respite from the world's din rather than delineating 'calamity'. As such, Thomas's image equates perhaps to Douglas's 'good signs'.

[53] John Waller, 'The Poetry of Keith Douglas', in *Accent, A Quarterly of New Literature*, 8.3 (1948), 22-28 (p. 24).

[54] Vincent B. Sherry, 'Hectic Stasis: The War Poetry of Keith Douglas', *University of Toronto Quarterly,* 58 (Winter, 1988/9), 298-304.

> whose idiot crew must not escape.
> Only within they make their noise;
> all night, against my sleep, their cries.[55]

The meditative tones of the opening are disrupted with the voltaic shift that introduces the silence as a deception, a shift that gathers intensity with the language: the 'idiot crew' emerges as a nightmare, defeating sleep:

> Outside the usual crowd of devils are flying in the clouds
> are flying in the clouds, are running
> on the earth, imperceptibly spinning
> through the black air alive with evils
> and turning, diving in the wind's channels.
> Inside the unsubstantial wall
> these idiots of the mind can't hear
> the demons talking in the air
> who think my mind void. That's all;
> there'll be an alliance of devils if it fall.

(ll. 11-20)

The externalized evils of war are normality: it is the internal 'idiots of the mind' that are the real demons. If the 'unsubstantial wall collapses' then the dichotomy is transcended in a diabolical 'alliance'. Ostensibly, this conveys a desideratum fulfilled, an ultimate unification of the internal and external demons, but the poem suggests an implicit ambivalence, a desire that pivots on fear. The poem, as David Ormerod argues, projects Douglas's 'preoccupation with barriers, and his psychic struggle to transcend them': metaphysically, the 'alliance' implicitly represents the fusion of the speaking self with the beast.[56] The impression Douglas leaves is that this is both a wish and a dread, each of which occupies a mind too troubled to be 'void'.

Ken Wilber postulates that the projected shadow is intensified the more the subject seeks to resist it as part of the self. It is this conscious or unconscious refusal to recognize the coexistence of inside and outside that creates a boundary: 'I feel it in myself only as the

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[55] Douglas, *The Complete Poems*, p. 92, ll. 1-10.
[56] See Ormerod, *Ariel* (1978).

symptom of fear'.[57]   The statement is articulated by Wilber, but placing himself as the mouthpiece of his subject. Keith Douglas's iterative confrontations with his demons, his bête noire, testify implicitly and often overtly to that symptom. Repeatedly, the poetic 'tracks' expose his projection of the beast as both internal and external, as a conflict of polarities that generate a battle in him. It is what Wilber terms the creation of a boundary between denied facets of one's ego which one seeks to force into the unconscious, but which are then projected as a conflict of opposites: '[t]he boundary [...] becomes a battle between persona and shadow, and the war within is felt as a symptom'.[58] The shadow, which we may delineate as the beast, thus becomes an aspect of the self that one seeks to alienate and annihilate but, to do so is counterproductive: what Wilber perceives is the necessity to unify the divided consciousness. For Keith Douglas, the battle to confront and shed the beast on his back was both the source of creativity, 'protracted success', and deep-seated anxiety, a paradox reflected in Wilber's observation:

> So when I try to cast out my shadow, I do not become free of it [...] I am left with a painful reminder that I'm unaware of some facet of myself.[59]

Douglas's struggle, seen in these terms, becomes a painful attempt to shift his boundaries, to remap the self as a single identity, to create a wholly desirable 'alliance'. However, for the most part, the persistent attempts to confront the beast are evidence of the traumatic past infecting the present. They become what Shoshana Felman has acknowledged as both an attempt to make sense of and to escape the trauma to which the subject bears witness. It is, in her terms, the ambivalent nature of bearing witness and giving testimony: the witness must relive trauma in the present by offering testimony, thereby purging himself of it.[60] Douglas is

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[57] Ken Wilber, *No Boundary: Eastern and Western Approaches to Personal Growth* (Boston: Shambala, 1979)*, p. 87.
[58] Wilber, *No* Boundary, p. 91.
[59] *Ibid*., p. 92.
[60] Felman and Laub, *Testimony*, pp. 1-56.

repeatedly seeking both understanding of and escape from his companion beast throughout his journey, thus enacting a quest for its purgation.

Douglas's final poem, 'On a Return from Egypt', written sometime between March and April 1944, presents us with what has frequently been construed as his premonition of his own death which came on 9 June. Yet this presentiment forms part of a more encompassing sense of the poet's apprehensions and divided self. Its opening two stanzas foreground an ominous sense of fatigue and spiritual attrition in their language and languid rhythms:

> To stand here in the wings of Europe
> disheartened, I have come away
> from the sick land where in the sun lay
> the gentle sloe-eyed murderers
> of themselves, exquisites under a curse;
> here to exercise my depleted fury.
>
> For the heart is a coal, growing colder
> when jewelled cerulean seas change
> into grey rocks, grey water-fringe,
> sea and sky altering like a cloth
> till colour and sheen are gone both:
> cold is an opiate of the soldier.[61]

The lines generate a feeling of emptiness, reminiscent of Alun Lewis's 'The Jungle' (1944), discussed later. The poem articulates a feeling almost of defeat, the soldier-poet's surrender to the demons within and without, turning inner strength to 'depleted fury'. It is an admission of 'all passion spent', though there is no sense of cathartic calm.[62] Instead, Douglas proceeds in a framework of retrospection to rue Time's intervention which has thus denied him the fruition of poetic endeavour. He perceives the 'lilies of ambition' (l.15) as his poetic promise unrealised, before displacing his cold vacuity and confronting the reality of his underlying dread in the final stanza:

> The next month, then, is a window
> and with a crash I'll split the glass.
> Behind it stands one I must kiss,

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[61] Douglas, *The Complete Poems*, p. 132, ll. 1-12.

[62] John Milton, *Samson Agonistes*, [1671] ed. by F. T. Prince (Oxford: Oxford University Press, May 1977), p. 88, l. 1745.

> person of love or death
> a person or a wraith,
> I fear what I shall find.

<div align="right">(ll. 19-24)</div>

It is a statement both of intention and prophecy but, even more, a vision pervaded by contradictions and uncertainty that culminate in expressed fear.

The interplay of binary opposites so conspicuous here asserts Douglas's sense of his plurality as he contemplates breaking through his barrier, the reiterative trope of the 'glass' that separates poet and his other. The beast's tracks are still there, the 'wraith' that he may discover rather than his single, unified identity, the 'person' he wants to find but of whom he is uncertain, while the speaker's resolve to 'split the glass' may express, not just a desire, but an obligation to penetrate to what lies behind the window. The anxiety lies in the potential for discovery of a self, reversed, or even beyond recognition. Significantly, whatever he will find, he 'must kiss': it is a recognition of an obligation both feared and desired, a pre-cognition of either 'love or death'. David Ormerod's belief that it is a vision of the afterlife is reductive and too simplistic a reading: while acknowledging the poet's inner contrarieties, it ignores the hinterland of uncertainty within the language and in the overt repetitions of 'or'.[63] Rather, the poem presents us with both a desire for resolution and a fear that the pluralities cannot be reconciled. The beast may still be 'winning'.

Douglas seems to have navigated towards his discovery of a distinctive poetic style often simultaneously striving for the definition of what he would call 'indefinable'.[64] His final poem discussed above attests to a failure to resolve the conflicts that constituted his beast, even though he had earlier achieved what I believe was his most complete

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[63] Ormerod, *Ariel*, 1978, p.11.

[64] As Jonathon Bolton remarks, Douglas's demonic beast, or doppelgänger, is an entity he seeks to engage 'in a kind of combat he is doomed to lose, and one of the crucial battlegrounds is language'. See Jonathon Bolton, '"Lucid Song": The Poetry of the Second World War', in *The Edinburgh Companion to Twentieth-Century British and American War Literature*, Adam Piette and Mark Rawlinson, eds (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), pp. 85-93 (p. 90).

identification and acceptance of the plurality that actually defined him. This acceptance is partially implicit in his 'Bête Noire' commentary but it is most detectable in a set of three poems, each separately numbered, written in 1943, namely 'Landscape with Figures'.[65] The first of this sequence, believed to have been written between April and September 1943, represents a shift of the poet's focus: in it the speaker is configured ambivalently as both observer and participant.[66] He concentrates with explicit attention on the minutiae of physical mutilation and distortion that litter the battlefield and, more significantly, on his own relationship as a witness, inseparable from its carnage. He is, as Felman would observe, giving testimony and insight into the trauma of war that underlies his experience. Douglas pursues his image of a battle's aftermath from the external perspective to the internal and, in so doing, passes through recognition of the dead as an unreal, theatrical mime, almost a deformed waxwork, to what could be read as an incipient, even unconscious grasp of his 'beast' which he articulates as such in 'Landscape with Figures 3'.[67] Read in their published sequence, the three poems establish a clear trajectory.

In the opening of Part 1, the speaker seems to detach himself ambivalently as 'a pilot or angel' coolly viewing a coalescence of metallic debris and dismembered human bodies:

> Perched on a great fall of air
> A pilot or angel looking down
> On some eccentric chart [...][68]

The 'or' carries uncertainty, hinting at an insecurity that implicitly questions whether the 'seeing eye' is living or dead. The tone of casual detachment that invests 'some eccentric' heightens the uncertainty, distancing the observer both physically and, it seems, emotionally.

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[65] Douglas, *The Complete Poems*, pp. 109-111. All three parts are annotated by Desmond Graham with '?' as being of uncertain date.
[66] *Ibid.,* p. 109.
[67] See Scammell, *Keith Douglas: A Study*, p. 46. Scammell makes a similar observation, in which he notes that 'the figures are actors, mimes, waxworks'.
[68] Douglas, 'Landscape with Figures 1', in *The Complete Poems*, pp. 109, ll. 1-3.

However, there is a sudden, emphatic shift as the poet jolts our attention, diverting it to the reader as witness:

> scattered wingcases and
> legs, heads, show when the haze settles.
> But you who like Thomas come
> to poke fingers in the wounds
> find monuments, and metal posies:
> on each disordered tomb
> the steel is torn into fronds
> by the lunatic explosive.

<div align="right">(ll. 7-14)</div>

The lines enact the eye's movements as the 'haze' disperses, but what strikes us most tellingly is the subtly controlled fusion of reader and poet in the voltaic 'But you': Douglas is simultaneously acknowledging himself and his own fascination as witness and, moreover, intimates his own complicity in the lunacy. The speaker likens his addressee to the disciple, Thomas, whose doubt could only be dispelled by touching the stigmata.[69] Implicitly, we sense that he conceives the human distortion that he witnesses as beyond our comprehension unless we, too, assuage our curiosity and disbelief by touching the dead. Now, his observation point has shifted and, correspondingly, conveys his transference from distanced observer to one who coexists with the observed. However, that coexistence embodies the paradox or duality of the speaker-self as both killer and killed: it is to unfold more clearly as the poetic trajectory progresses further into the landscape in parts 2 and 3.

'Landscape with Figures 2' presents a continuum from Part 1 as the poetic eye draws closer and the images gradually intensify: the dead and wounded are depicted as an oddly theatrical, unreal mimesis that compels the observer to move closer. Douglas's consciousness alights on them with almost forensic fascination:

> They are mimes
> who express silence and futile aims
> enacting this prone and motionless struggle

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[69] John 20. 19-31.

> at a queer angle to the scenery
> [...]
> The décor is terrible tracery
> of iron.[70]

The 'queer angle' conveys a tragi-comic perception, but this sense of absurdity is soon subverted: the emphatic alliteration of 'terrible tracery' reveals an intensifying awareness and identification between observer and observed. The focus tightens, closing in on 'cosmetic blood' to the point at which the subject momentarily holds both himself and reader only a pace away from touching the dead:

> A yard more, and my little finger
> could trace the maquillage of these stony actors,
> I am the figure writhing on the backcloth.

(ll. 12-14)

It is in this closing line that Douglas asseverates his own painful complicity in the scene, yet – paradoxically – the line has the detached positioning of an out of body experience, recognition of another self. The trope is unequivocally performative, enacting both a realisation and a confession in which we detect a sense of burden in the centrality of 'writhing' and the weighted rhythm, the heavy descent of the line. There is, here, a strong intimation of 'the beast on my back'. Furthermore, the fusion of poet and 'landscape' again establishes a Lacanian sense of 'the self's ex-centricity to itself'.[71] Douglas sees himself as part of the theatrical extended metaphor yet we discern an expression of some deeper sense of involvement that re-expresses itself as hellish possession in the conclusion of the set, 'Landscape with Figures 3'.

The poet's trajectory now completes itself: the imagery resonates implicitly with the trope of 'the beast', offering a significant plurality to its nature which can now be discerned more clearly in the polysemy of the eponymous 'Figures'. The opening lines are,

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[70] Douglas, 'Landscape with Figures 2', in *The Complete Poems,* p. 110, ll. 2-9.
[71] Lacan, in *Écrits,* p. 171.

paradoxically, an expression of an assured single self, carried over from the closing 'I am the

figure' of Part 2, which then 'ex-centrically' becomes a multiplicity of self-recognition:

> I am the figure burning in hell
> and the figure of the grave priest
> observing everyone who passed
> and that of the lover. I am all
> the aimless pilgrims, the pedants and courtiers[72]

The unequivocal 'I am' now subverts itself as the speaker twice introduces other identities

with 'and' to acknowledge himself as 'priest' and 'lover', only to expand his awareness in a

further, inclusive asseveration, 'I am all' (l.4). We witness an expanding consciousness in

which the speaker countenances himself pluralistically.

The tensions that seem to exist between the figures of priest and lover constitute the

poet's reason for 'burning in hell': he is, painfully, the 'grave priest', he who blesses and

commits to earth or desert 'everyone' who passes beyond, the dead soldiers who are the

'aimless pilgrims'. Significantly, he is also the figure of 'the lover', the image interplaying

with these 'pilgrims' and spilling over both to the sense of aimlessness and, perhaps, redolent

of a lost love. The declarative tones of these admissions carry the poet's sense of futility,

though not as overt moralising. His recognition of multiple identities seems at first to imply

the fascinated detachment of one seeing his many faces, but this is then subverted by the

unbroken flow of the poem into a shift of focus from 'I' to 'you':

> more easily you believe me a pioneer
> and a murdering villain without fear
> without remorse hacking at the throat.

> (ll. 6-8)

The imagery reiterates the theatrical metaphor that permeates Part 2 as it addresses us:

Douglas is challenging his readers to perceive him as the soldier-pioneer, the fearless

butcher-murderer of some revenge tragedy who has no 'remorse'; the language is

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[72] Douglas, *The Complete Poems*, p. 111, ll. 1-5.

deliberately, melodramatically brutal. It is as though he is conscious, in the hyperbole, of being read as the cold, insentient killer, the impersonal soldier-poet, and so prompts us to expect him to refute this in sudden disavowal. However, there is no such retraction: instead, the poet asserts an even more inclusive and disturbing identity, a consciousness that is plagued with ambivalence:

> Yes
> I am all these and I am the craven
> the remorseful the distressed
> penitent: not passing from life to life
> but all these angels and devils are driven
> into my mind like beasts. I am possessed,
> the house whose wall contains the dark strife
> the arguments of hell with heaven.

(ll. 8-15)

The affirmation is definitive, a confession that the speaker *is* 'all these', and more: he is 'craven', a conscious antithesis to the poet's acknowledged 'shit or bust' reputation.[73] He is, too, the remorseless 'murdering villain', fearlessly 'hacking' his enemy victim and yet a 'remorseful and distressed penitent'. The contraries are deeply revealing: Douglas's trajectory reaches a moment of acceptance, of admission of his plural self that coalesces into 'all these angels and devils', oppositions that inhabit him. It expresses utter inclusivity. There is certainty expressed here, the voice of one who recognises the hellish forces 'driven [...] like beasts' into his mind. Both figures, angels and devils, fuse into ambivalent entities and the poet acknowledges himself as 'possessed', a 'house' of conflict in which is played out the dialectic of 'hell' and 'heaven'. In this 'dark strife', however, there is neither implicit nor explicit resolution of dispute and no logic. Part 3 thus completes a set of 'landscapes' which testify to a certainty that he is occupied by 'beasts' but, equally, that there has been no exorcism. Alongside this, their textual reality signifies uncertainty: the poet mirrors himself in many forms, 'all these' identities, but there is an underlying sense that he craves

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[73] Douglas, *Alamein to Zem Zem*, p. 17.

singularity and peace. Moreover, the imagery that characterises the set throughout places each 'Landscape' firmly in the realm of ekphrastic poetry: it is conspicuously pictorial, a graphic illustration of the landscapes of both war and the visionary poetic mind.[74]

For Keith Douglas, therefore, the beast is no simple distillation into the 'particular monster' of 'Bête Noire': its plurality and its capacity both to destroy and create reflect the complex identity of the poet himself. It is the site of 'dark strife', as was Douglas himself, a strife often concealed in impersonality, in his 'hectic stasis'. The fragmentary attempts to define and be freed of the beast and its ubiquitous tracks, testify to Douglas's struggle, conscious or otherwise, to unravel his own Ariadne's thread: they thus represent an algorithmic journey that both mapped his soul and was an organic element of his creative impulse. His 'bête noire' was a recursive element of his material, at times saturating his language as an imagined projection of Otherness, sometimes creating a sense of rupture yet also often advancing him towards the perfection for which he strove. He embodies the 'man who suffers and the mind which creates'.[75] Douglas did not regard himself as a hero, but one is left with the sense of what Jung asserted in his studies of man's Shadow, though perhaps without the stated expectation:

> The hero's main feat is to overcome the monster of darkness: it is the long-hoped-for and expected triumph of consciousness over the unconscious.[76]

'Landscape with Figures' is the closest to 'triumph' in Douglas's epistemological navigation in that the poet identifies his own plurality: it thus remains tantalizingly close to Douglas's discovery of a unified self, to an acceptance of the beast within.

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[74] Ekphrasis is achieved when the object focused upon appears to pass from one medium to another, as in the pictorial image becoming language. Douglas's graphic representations of the 'landscapes' seem to embody this transference from the almost photographic actuality to the verbal, thereby adding a new dimension to their meaning.

[75] T. S. Eliot, 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' [1919], in *Selected Prose* pp. 37-44 (p. 41). Eliot wrote, 'The more perfect the artist, the more completely separate in him will be the man who suffers and the mind which creates'. His remark seems apposite here.

[76] Jung, *Collected Works* [1940], p. 284.

Part 2: Alun Lewis and 'The Enmity Within'

In war's matrix of internal and external disruption, the combatant may experience a crisis of identity that is both circumstantially and psychologically motivated. For the soldier poet, this can easily manifest itself ambivalently as both his pain and inner disruption, and as the stimulus for his creativity. Just as with Keith Douglas, the struggle to define the borders of the self, to grapple with uncertainties and the meeting point between internal and externally perceived conflict, permeated the work of Alun Lewis. For Douglas, it seems, this was only brought to consciousness in his perplexed attempts to define his 'beast', only then producing his concomitant recognition of this other as a protracted, implacable malignancy: its discovery comes as an eventual revelation drawn in enervating fragments from the unconscious. In Alun Lewis, however, one discerns, along with inescapable parallels, a fundamental difference, namely the palpable presence of an inner contestation, a sense of self-division that has been there in him and which he has known as a lack of inner fixity from the beginning. It is what he himself identified as the 'fragile universe of self', an image that simultaneously registers personal and cosmic vulnerability, and which arguably resonates with Douglas's 'beast' in its constitutive plurality and its conflation and distillation of conflicts.[77] It is what Lewis, confronting the collision between his inner and outer worlds, was able to express in his final and possibly greatest poem, 'The Jungle' (1944), as 'The greater enmity within ourselves'.[78]

Like Keith Douglas's 'bête noire', Lewis's 'enmity' constitutes an inhabitation within the poet as both a source of anguished self-division and as a creative impulse, a quest for poetic and personal fulfilment mobilized by an ineluctable need. However, while both poets navigated shifts in the external structures of their lives, it is in Alun Lewis's poetry that one is more powerfully aware of the absence of a still centre, of a personal core in which nothing

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[77] See Lewis, 'War Wedding', in *Collected Poems*, pp. 62-67 (p. 65, l. 96).
[78] Lewis, 'The Jungle', in *Collected Poems*, pp. 155-158 (p. 156, l. 56)

holds, and of a constant, reiterative attempt to construct the self in an inner and outer world of flux, insecurity and renegotiation. The 'enmity within' was thus his composite 'Other', his 'beast', a shifting contestation between the internal and external that was always there, though resisting definitive configuration. Furthermore, an examination of the constitutive meaning of the word 'enmity' now becomes significant as I believe Lewis uses it with conscious preference over 'enemy'. The latter signifies a single or collective foe, either material or abstract, as a source of hostile opposition and which is therefore inevitably present in the fabric of a war poet's imagination. 'Enmity', however, signifies contestation itself, a state of being. Furthermore, it embraces plurality rather than singularity, a discord of conflicting elements that denote division and instability. There seems no doubt that this is the configuration that resides in Lewis's identification of his 'enmity within'.

Critical excavation of this inner contestation and its multiple configurations, rather like an analysis of Douglas's disruptive habitué, unearths its presence in varying forms and tropes that constitute Lewis's pervasive sense of Otherness. The discussion that follows focuses on a range of poems that yield diverse evidence of a speaker's haunting burden, sometimes in brief but significant poetic extracts, or as more developed manifestations, particularly in poems such as 'Midnight in India' (1943), 'The Sentry' (1940), 'War Wedding' (1941), 'A Fragment' (1943), and 'Burma Casualty' (1943). Some poems examined will need to be readdressed in the respective contexts of later chapters, but the primary focus here is upon a representative selection of works that articulate this inner conflict. It is there in so many moments, sometimes detectable or overtly expressed within a wider contextual framework, sometimes subliminally felt. It emerges in the 'Darkness' that both pervades and often presides within the psyche of the poetic voice or as external presence and even transcendental 'Beyond', often as the consummation of death itself. It is located, too, as the sense of rootlessness, defamiliarization and strangeness that Lewis offers us in his

ambivalent conceptualizations of Wales and India and his periods in military transit, or even in his explorations and attestations of love.

Within such plurality of configuration, there is a persistent sense of the interplay between the poet's need to find selfhood and unity and a prevailing absence of fixity, a sensation that Carrie Jadud describes as characteristic of 'people made strange to themselves [...], feeling the known self evaporating'.[79] In its more extreme expression it is what Lewis declares in 'The Madman' (1942) to be 'The shattered crystal of his mind', an image in which the depersonalized genitive, 'his', is a deception, a motion towards poetic impersonality that barely conceals the speaker's self-reflexivity.[80] So much of the poetry constructs an image of the Self in dissolution, succumbing to or confused by conflict within, a 'secret sharer', and an overarching feeling of loss, of the speaker addressing us from a position of uncertainty and insecurity.[81] Again, Carrie Jadud's comments are illuminating. However, her predication that Lewis is 'writing of the crisis of the self' must be qualified with caution and privileged as the poetry's textual reality above any biographical intimation of the writer's prescribed aim.[82] She states:

> [T]he self begins in a position of loss, of constantly and disturbingly shifting signification. The other serves as a reminder of the self's precariousness.[83]

The resonance with Keith Douglas resides clearly in this precariousness, in the poets' mutually inescapable quests to find unity of being in their own liminal uncertainties and self-

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[79] Carrie Anne Jadud, '"The Fragile Universe of Self": The Other and Identity in the Writing of Alun Lewis' (unpublished doctoral thesis, School of English, University of Wales, Bangor, 2006), p. 4. All subsequent references will be cited as Jadud, 'Fragile Universe'.

[80] Lewis, 'The Madman', in *Collected Poems*, pp. 85-86 (p. 85, l. 1).

[81] The term, 'secret sharer', derives from the title of Joseph Conrad's short story, written in 1910 and built around the tale of a sea captain and a mysterious character, Leggatt. The latter emerges as an embodiment of the captain's darker self, an ambivalent and perhaps sub-rational alter ego who may indicate, too, the capacity for good. The story embodies the notion of flux and interplay between the conscious and unconscious, between self and other, hence my incorporation of the eponymous expression. See 'The Secret Sharer' [1910], in *'The Nigger of the Narcissus' and Other Stories*, ed. by J. H. Stape and Allan H. Simmons, with an Introduction by Gail Fraser (London: Penguin Classics, 2007), pp. 23-47.

[82] Jadud, 'Fragile Universe', p. 4.

[83] *Ibid.*

division, and in their shared battle to define what seemed indefinable. Inner contestation and the struggle to resolve it thus act as a paradigm for fraught creativity.

In April, 1943, Lewis wrote an airmail letter to his wife in which he expressed the following:

> And although I'm more and more engrossed with the single poetic theme of Life and Death [...], I find myself quite unable to express at once the passion of Love, the coldness of Death (Death is cold) and the fire that beats against resignation, acceptance. Acceptance seems so spiritless, protest so vain. In between the two I live, I think you live too, and I think the certainty grows gradually upon us – the certainty that we have exalted ourselves to an indestructible love. I feel it more and more, and it stops me being abject, but your old husband is so terribly anxious to get back to you that he hits out violently at any suggestion the poet might make to the contrary.[84]

The significance of this to the 'enmity' residing within the writer is inescapable. The prose expresses that same sense of inadequacy and defeat when faced with the effort to 'express at once' the Manichean contraries of Life (embracing Love) and Death that Douglas felt as he struggled with the 'Bête Noire' fragments. However, while Douglas's 'jacket' notes essentially asseverated a creative impasse, Lewis's language draws us in further. It pivots on uncertainty, on a sense of irreconcilable duality, despite the affirmation that love endures indestructibly. The closing admission subverts his declaration, intimating moments of doubt and fragility when the poet takes over. Abjection 'might' and, therefore, can return and unfix in moments of creativity.

Keith Douglas's beast of 'black care' was, as he admitted, 'amorphous',[85] sometimes felt as an imprisoning force, sometimes a dark monster within. In its most reified form, it was that which he carried as a palpable burden. It was always divisive, always felt as malignant and insidious, disrupting the speaker's fixity and destabilizing his grasp of identity. No exact parallel with this distinctive reification is detectable in Alun Lewis's oeuvre: there is nothing that corresponds directly and entirely to both its ekphrastic and entropic

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[84] Alun Lewis, in *Letters to My Wife*, ed. by Gweno Lewis (Bridgend: Seren Books, 1989), pp. 326-327.
[85] Douglas, in *The Complete Poems*, pp. 129-130.

representations. Nevertheless, its echo is there as a pervasive presence of dialectical tension and inner battle that similarly constitutes Douglas's struggle to define his other. At times, its presence is overtly stated, of course, and Lewis does actually configure this in the trope of the 'beast': however, this construct almost certainly shifts its signification between and sometimes within those poems in which it appears. As an example, 'A Fragment', written in 1943, despite being one of his later poems, provides an interesting aspect of Lewis's 'beast' with which to open an examination of its nature.[86]

Almost certainly written as an address to Freda Aykroyd, the poem configures Lewis's 'beast' as an embodiment of ambivalence, simultaneously expressing the self as lost in its crisis of solitude and reconstituted in the beloved.[87] It is brief enough to consider here in its entirety:

> Where aloneness fiercely
> Trumpets the unsounded night
> And the silence surges higher
> Than hands or seas or mountains' height
>
> I the deep shaft sinking
> Through the quivering Unknown
> Feel your anguish beat its answer
> As you grow round me, flesh and bone.
>
> The wild beast in the cave
> Is all our pride; and will not be
> Again until the world's blind travail
> Breaks in crimson flower from the tree
>
> I am, in Thee.

The pulse of the poem is the quest for the speaker's completion, unmistakably conflating sexual and metaphysical penetration into the 'quivering Unknown' (l. 6). The speaker's words are born from a silence paradoxically heralded by a solitude that 'Trumpets the

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[86] Lewis, *Collected Poems*, p. 161.

[87] See Pikoulis, *A Life*, p. 226. Pikoulis designates 'A Fragment' as a poem written to Freda (whose name Lewis habitually spelt as 'Frieda') and 'Midnight in India' as being addressed to Gweno Lewis.

unsounded night' (l. 2), resonating with Keith Douglas's configuration in 'Devils'[88] of the 'mind's silence' as 'deceptive quiet', within which he hears his demons, 'all night, against my sleep, their cries' (ll.1-10). The imagery is densely layered, the 'shaft' (l. 5) and 'deep cave' (l. 7) coalescing as metaphors for physical, anguished passion, yet also intimating the darkness and obscurity of death that is omnipresent and threatening in war, 'the world's blind travail'. The 'wild beast' is both masculine 'pride' (l. 10), connoting the phallus, and perhaps an adumbration, however undefined, of War, the indiscriminate killer. The capitalized, metonymic 'Unknown' reinforces this inference while the penultimate line suggests the menace of blind destiny as well as an orgasmic consummation.

This 'beast', like Douglas's, is a figure that resists simple, singular interpretation, but it remains something darkly threatening as well as the means of completion of the self in the other. The enjambment of the last two lines acts to imbricate the 'tree' as both phallus and the regenerative blood of the 'crimson flower' (l. 12), also a hint of the dead in battle, and to affirm an ultimate consummation. Through the agency of his 'wild beast', the speaker achieves both continuance and validation in the poem's final pendulous word, the unnamed 'Thee' whose capitalization intimates the sublimely ontological, almost transcendental moment in which the crisis of Self is resolved. However, the penultimate stanza attests to this as a consummation that is yet to come, a unity that

> will not be
> Again until the world's blind travail
> Breaks in crimson flower from the tree

(ll. 10-12)

The tones of certainty that foreshadow the speaker's renewal and release in 'crimson flower' from his fierce solitude balance on a perceptible fragility that intimates death, embodied in the 'quivering Unknown'. The resolution of identity in his other seems both desired and yet a

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[88] Douglas, in *The Complete Poems*, p. 92.

form of departure, a hint of dissolution that reaches beyond connotations of physical ecstasy: John Pikoulis's designation of this as one of two 'poems of farewell' (the other being 'Midnight in India'), written after five days Lewis spent with Freda before re-joining his battalion, accords readily with this intimation of leave-taking, of Lewis caught in the dialectic tension of certainty and uncertainty in the passage from love to death.[89]   The 'beast' liberates and releases, but at a cost. Its passion is both regenerative and destructive: it is promise and threat conflated, and in the poem's closure the beloved's felt 'anguish' (l. 7) now fulfils its meaning as the fear of loss, of ultimate separation, of which the speaker, too, is profoundly aware.

It is apposite, here, to focus on what Pikoulis considers the partner 'farewell' poem, 'Midnight in India', in which the speaker's inner enmity again coalesces with the discovery of an at least temporary, transcendental peace in his beloved.[90] Here, too, it is located as 'the beast' (l. 33.), though only explicitly towards the poem's close. The speaker's opening word unequivocally and emphatically sets us in the 'Here' that is India, separated and distinct from the West and its 'mined and cratered deep' (l. 1). As in 'A Fragment', the poem balances absence and presence: in the inimical darkness of India, this Eastern wilderness where 'The human war is lost' (ll. 3-4). In the transition between night and day, Lewis finds some release from the pain of separation from the beloved, fused with the guilt war bestows on the mind.

> Oh I have set the earth aflame
> And brought the high dominions down,
> And soiled each simple act with shame
> And had no feelings of my own.
>
> I sank in drumming tides of grief
> And in the sea-king's sandy bed
> Submerged in gulfs of disbelief
> Lay with the redtoothed daughters of the dead.

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[89] Pikoulis, in *A Life*, p. 226.
[90] Lewis, in *Collected Poems*, pp. 162-163.

> Until you woke me with a sigh
> And eased the dark compression in my head
> And sang and did not cease when I
> Broke your heart like holy bread.

<div align="right">(ll. 9-20)</div>

Yet, in these lines, appeasement finds no truly secure place. The opening 'Oh' and the emphatic 'I' carry the anguish of confession while the dominating patterns of alliteration and sibilance in lines 10-11 lead us to the desperation detectable in the verb, 'sank', and the profound incredulity of 'Submerged in gulfs of disbelief'. The image achingly asseverates the underlying guilt that mobilizes the speaker to confront his mind's 'dark compression'. The contiguity of the latter with the aforementioned 'enmity within' is inescapable: this is Lewis's projection of inner contestation, a manifestation of his own bestial burden. The 'drumming tides of grief' seem to be contextualized as a haunting dream that breaches the speaker's mind, a re-visitation of acts of violence in war that penetrate consciousness. Cathy Caruth's analysis of traumatic experience seems apposite here: 'In trauma, [...] the outside has gone inside without any mediation'.[91] Certainly, the speaker's words attest to this. Despite the easing intervention expressed in 'Until you woke me' (l. 17), there is no absolving mediation, no complete cessation of his darkness, even in the sacrament of heartbreak: the beloved's pain continues in a song that prefigures her mourning, subverting the speaker's ease with a sense of ineradicable guilt. The 'shame' that 'soiled each simple act' (l. 3) still hovers, conflating the traumas of war with separation in love. The lover's sigh wakes the speaker, but the nightmare image of the latter lying with 'the redtoothed lovers of the dead' still pervades: the speaker's indifference earlier expressed in his admission to having 'no feelings' is a flimsy, transparent mask through which the 'dark compression' remains perceptible. It is 'eased' (l. 18) but not expunged.

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[91] See Caruth, 'Traumatic Departures', in *Unclaimed Experience,* p. 59.

As the poem progresses, the speaker moves from acknowledgement of humanity's pain, and his own, to declare a sense of deliverance achieved in the imagined presence of his beloved, unequivocally stated to be his wife. He draws together a mutual configuration of the boundaries of life and death and the unity of marriage to express an inner stillness that is achieved through his beloved's protective embrace. The vicissitudes of the external and inner war thus seem to recede:

> We cast away the bitter death
> That holds the fine circumference of life
> And gathered in a single breath
> All that begins and ends in man and wife
>
> And though the painful errors grow
> And youth sprawls dead beside the Gate
> And lovely bodies stiffen in the snow
> And old devotions breed a newer hate,
>
> Yet time stands still upon the east
> The moonlight lies in pools and human pain
> Soothes the dry lips on which it lies
> And I behold your calm white face again.

<div align="right">(ll. 21-32)</div>

His words now affirm a soothing beneficence in which Carrie Jadud has detected the 'power to confer immortality or unearthly protection'.[92] Her analysis holds together if, as she does, one focuses primarily on the beloved as an idealization, goddess-like in presence and regenerative in influence. However, that power is not the loved one's alone: it resides, too, in the temporal stasis of 'the east', that wilderness location that returns us to the 'Here' of the poem's opening, the meeting point of the speaker's internal and external worlds. India and the beloved coalesce in their capacity to soothe, but the unpunctuated flow from line 30 to 31 exposes the disquieting ambivalence: it is 'human pain' that paradoxically becalms the anguish as much as the envisaged 'white face'. The leap from 'though' (l. 25) to 'Yet' (l. 29) can neither conceal nor displace the litany of anguish, the recognition of 'painful errors',

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[92] See Jadud, 'Fragile Universe', p. 138.

while the repetitive 'And' that connects the sprawling dead with the oxymoron of stiffening 'lovely bodies' and with the 'newer hate' for war's inhumanity (ll. 26-28), imprints these realities indelibly. The images locate an unrelieved, palpable urgency that is both figuratively, and in the stanza's syndetic flow, rhythmically 'gathered in a single breath' (l. 23), despite the veneer of resignation.

Only now does the 'beast' identify itself in the poem's closure, in the speaker's ultimate moment of realization 'within' his beloved:

> Mysterious tremors stir the beast,
> In unknown worlds he dies;
> I lie within your hands, within your peace,
> And watch this last effulgent world arise.

(ll. 33-36)

The sexual overtones of these lines are unambiguous, but the greater presence is of the newly aroused beast as more than a simply phallic configuration. Richard Poole's brief analysis of Lewis's 'beast'[93] confidently asserts that its location here is as an entity hitherto tenuously present if not even absent from the poem. He states:

> The 'beast' here isn't obviously placed by anything else in the poem: it seems to stand for something within Lewis himself – restless sexual desire, perhaps – as well as something outside him – a force coming into, and passing out of, being, in existences beyond his comprehension. Gweno and the moon fuse in the figure of 'this effulgent world', placid and annealing; a composite presence possessed of the power to counteract, even neutralise the menace of the beast. Yet the implication that the beast is inward as well as outward has been made.[94]

Certainly, the designation of these stirrings as 'Mysterious' validates Poole's understanding of it as resistant to simple ontological definition, but his opening predicate either overlooks or undervalues the arterial guilt and incipient psychic enmity and crisis that thread through the poem. Their presence surely constitutes the 'beast' of the final stanza as much as its

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[93] Poole discusses Douglas's and Lewis's use of the pluralistic trope of 'the beast' in his essay in *Welsh Connection*, pp. 152-157. He identifies its common significance to both poets as an externalized presence that relates to an internal disturbance, resistant to comprehension. His argument is thoughtful and persuasive, though understandably constrained by the limitations imposed by the brevity of his examination in essay form.

[94] Poole, *Welsh* Connection, pp. 155-156.

configuration of 'sexual desire', thereby offering evidence of its placement in the speaker's earlier pained admissions. The mystery of its 'tremors' and its physical and metaphysical dying into 'unknown worlds' admittedly convey something epistemologically elusive and beyond concrete expression. However, the 'composite presence' of moon and 'Gweno' which Poole identifies equally connotes the plurality of these 'painful errors' (l. 25) that constitute the speaker's 'dark compression' of devils, his 'enmity within'. That this presence is, as Poole says, capable of neutralising 'the menace of the beast', acknowledges only a temporary assuagement of the conflicts within and without.

While one must observe caution in correlating textual reality and autobiography, nevertheless 'Midnight in India' where 'time stands still upon the east' (l. 29) draws us to Alun Lewis's letter to Robert Graves written from India in January, 1944. There he stated his clear desire:

> [T]o fuse finite and infinite, in action. Or at least get rid of the illusion for ever. I want to go East and East and East, faire le tour; there is a consummation somewhere: after it is over, then I can be particular & exact[.] [95]

The poem echoes this: it embraces the 'east', fusing 'human pain', the moon and love as a salve that signifies a declaration of renewal and safekeeping in the speaker's 'other'. But, like that of 'A Fragment' it is not yet a 'consummation' achieved in perpetuity. If the beast is neutralised, its presence remains appeased only while the speaker lies 'within your peace', arguably connoting what Carrie Jadud perceives as the beloved's 'metonymical proximity to death', a reading that seems justified in the ambivalent trope of 'this last effulgent world' (l. 36).[96] The spectre of death is as constitutively present in Lewis's poetry as in Keith Douglas's and, for both poets, cannot be extricated from their respective, multi-layered

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[95] Extract from a letter to Robert Graves, reproduced in Lewis, *A Miscellany*, p. 148.

[96] Jadud, in 'Fragile Universe', p. 140. Jadud further cites Elisabeth Bronfen, ' Death Drive (Freud)', *Feminism and Psychoanalysis: A Critical Dictionary*, ed. by Elizabeth Wright (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), p. 53, in which the author argues that both '"death" and "woman" function as Western culture's privileged tropes for the enigmatic and alterity'. This reinforces Jadud's central exploration of Lewis's divided self while also reinforcing my own perception of the ambivalence in the poem's closing trope.

conceptualizations of their inner battle. So it seems here, in the 'dark compression' of India and of the mind, imbuing the speaker's closing words with an implicit sense of farewell, an imminent departure from the '*last* effulgent world' (my emphasis).

Keith Douglas's 'bête noire' was his demon of malignity, a figure of dark alterity and an omnipresent burden that he conceived as possessed of 'infinite patience'.[97] The image embodies the sense of an entity or inward hostility waiting to claim its host. It is constituted as an implacable threat that can control and mediate between actor and action and is always ambivalently conceived as an agent of destruction and creativity. That ambivalence also extends to its identification as death, an element of its plurality, and an eventuality and circumstantial reality that Douglas configures as something that both annihilates and yet fascinates. For Alun Lewis, too, death emerges in his poetry as both a painful consequence of war and a desired consummation that, in 'Burma Casualty' (1943), is inextricably bound to his conceptualization of 'The Beast' whose presence fascinates because it resists any simple or direct configuration of its nature.[98] Instead, the text moves through a pattern of flux and shifting identifications that pivot on the interplay between the beast and the trope of 'darkness' that, in so many forms, permeates Lewis's work. It is an interplay that begins to emerge perhaps most conspicuously in the following:

> Lying in hospital he often thought
> Of that darkness, whence it came
> And how it played the enchantress in a grain
> Of morphia or a nodding of the head
> Late in the night and offered to release
> The Beast that breathed with pain and ran with pus
> Among the jumping fibres of the flesh.[99]

(ll.17-23)

Taken from stanza 3 of the poem, these lines contain its only overt reference to 'The Beast', therefore warranting consideration here, but the extract presents an interesting variant on its

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[97] Douglas, *The Complete Poems*, p. 130.
[98] Lewis, in *Collected Poems*, pp. 146-148.
[99] *Ibid.*, p. 146.

significance in terms of its configurations of death and Lewis's recurring, multi-layered trope of 'darkness'.

Dedicated to the poet's severely wounded friend, Captain G.T. Morris, the poem conveys an intermodal sense of transference between speaker and the objective 'he' (l. 17): the identification of poetic voice and the offer of 'release' (l. 21) it enunciates is suffused with an empathy that borders on personal desire, despite the depersonalizing lens of third person perspective. The 'darkness' is here conceived as something of which the patient 'often thought' (l. 17), but as an 'enchantress' rather than something feared. It seduces and proffers the enticement of release from both the putrescent wound and the pain within, a pain that is 'The Beast' itself, the capitalization seeming to signify its brutish reification, redolent of Douglas's construct, and thereby intensifying its presence. Its configuration here conceals nothing of its festering obscenity: it suppurates 'Among the jumping fibres of the flesh', an image that also resonates with obvious sexual overtones and further hints towards the death throes that might come.

Richard Poole argues that it is the Beast who is the 'enchantress', a nocturnal feminine presence.[100] This is, surely, a misreading. It is the 'darkness' of line 18 that plays the siren and which has 'offered to release', a darkness that connotes both anaesthesia and death as a seemingly desired consummation and which, in his pain, seduces the soldier's imagination. As in the two poems discussed immediately previously, the presence of a lover who excites erotically can be felt here, but this 'Beast' is more than a phallic configuration. The darkness on which the soldier meditates offers to release all his suffering, an encompassing anguish that the speaker understands. Moreover, darkness persists in its presence, both constative and penetratingly metaphorical, to the poem's conclusion in which

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[100] Poole, in *Welsh Connection*, p. 156.

Lewis's unappeased sense of dislocation still hovers. Death, the ultimate dark, seems preferable to life, and the 'enmity within' remains unresolved.

Less overt manifestations of Lewis's 'beast' appear elsewhere in his poetry, and though he had never declared anything that directly correlated with Keith Douglas's pervasive recognition of the tracks of his 'bête noire', one feels Lewis might well have reached a similar moment of identification had he lived so to reflect. In 1942, in his collection, *Raiders' Dawn*, he published 'The Sentry' in which he depicts the speaker's reiterative sense of his gradual dissolution in the silence that enfolds him:

> I have begun to die
> And the guns' implacable silence
> Is my black interim[.][101]

The poem becomes a progressive evocation of the dialectic between inner and outer worlds. The trope of 'black interim' is doubly resonant: it conveys its overt context as an image of the speaker's suspension between sleeplessness and the moment in which the guns of battle break silence, but also intimates an inner, profound darkness that declares the liminal location of the soldier held in the 'no man's land' that bridges this life and the feared beyond.[102] Furthermore, the identification between the enshrouding implacability and this 'black interim' is unequivocally intensified in the definitive 'is'. The poet asserts an epistemological moment that resonates with the 'dark compression' of his mind in 'Midnight in India', the instant in which the enmity without and the enmity within coalesce.[103] Moreover, this 'black interim' establishes a further resonance here, namely with Keith Douglas's 'black care' and its apocalyptic overtones: it intimates the confrontation with the frontier between life and death, but echoes, too, a sense of the speaker's internalized

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[101] Lewis, *Collected Poems*, p. 28, ll. 18-20. This poem is discussed more fully in Chapter 3 of this thesis in relation to Lewis's configuration of 'Death and Darkness'.

[102] The notion of liminality is addressed more specifically in Chapter 4 of this thesis. It is, of course, a reiterative conceptualisation in poetry and prose of both the Great War and the Second World War.

[103] See Lewis, in *Collected Poems*, pp. 162-163 (p. 162, l. 18).

otherness, both oppressing and yet of the self.[104] While not articulated in the trope of 'beast',

it thus conveys a related signification, of a presence indivisible from and burdensome to the

speaker, and so unfixing his sense of secure identity. The subjective 'I' has 'begun to die'

and the 'black interim' offers no escape because it is rooted in the Self.

As Jeremy Hooker avers, Lewis's poetry demonstrates a man 'internalizing the

war',[105] seeking to resolve the conflicts that such experience intensifies: this being inarguably

so, it is only a small step to take from the 'black interim' of 'The Sentry' to the 'dark cancer'

that Lewis identifies in the emphatically subjective voice of 'The Soldier' (1940). Its

opening, which carries the tone of confession, is relevant here:

> I within me holding
> Turbulence and Time
> [...]
> Feel the dark cancer in my vitals
> Of impotent impatience grope its way
> Through daze and dream to throat and fingers
> To find its climax of disaster[106]

The image of the 'dark cancer' is located as 'impotent impatience', but it emphatically

configures a consuming presence with which the darkness inhabiting the later poem seems

contiguous. John Pikoulis believes 'The Soldier' offers us an 'isolated calm' in its closing

stanza that contrasts with 'the melodramatic opening'.[107] This is clearly so but the words

conveying this calm also attest to a complexity of anguish that has only subsided in a special

moment of epiphany:

>   Yet still
> I who am agonized by thought
> And war and love
> Grow calm again
> With watching
> The flash and play of finches
> Who are as beautiful

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[104] Douglas identifies his inner burden as his 'black care' in *The Complete Poems*, p. 129.

[105] Jeremy Hooker, 'Afterword', in *Selected Poems of Alun Lewis*: selected by Jeremy Hooker and Gweno Lewis (London: Unwin Paperbacks, 1981), pp. 101-111 (p. 105).

[106] Lewis, *Collected Poems*, pp. 24-25 (p. 24, ll. 1-2, 4-7).

[107] Pikoulis, *Alun Lewis: A Life*, p. 79.

<blockquote>
And as indifferent to me
As England is, this Spring morning.
</blockquote>

<div align="right">(ll. 33-41)</div>

The stillness of tone belies the admission of agony. Nor does it obfuscate the plurality that constitutes his agony, prompting thoughts of 'war and love' that, in their union, prefigure their place within Lewis's inner 'enmity' and its contingency with his 'beast'.

In a letter to his parents, dated 18 June 1943, buoyed by a road journey that he called 'liberation [...] a colossal experience' of India's 'ordinary life', Lewis was prompted to reflect on his poetic development:

> Thinking back on my own writing, it all seemed to mature of a sudden – between the winter of 1939 and the following autumn. Can't make it out. Was it Gweno and the Army? What a combination!!! Beauty and the Beast!! [108]

The clichéd metaphor is characteristic of the ironic concealment of realities that Lewis at times achieved in his letters home, but the correlation of the Army and the 'Beast' provides an interesting resonance with its poetic configurations. This is all the more arresting in that, only fifteen days earlier, he had written more darkly to Gweno, 'am I plunged too soon into this mammoth jungular world of the East, will it rid me of my own-ness, my close absorption in my own love and being?' [109] Within a few lines of this he had posed a question, and its answer, heavily overlaid with the tone of the rhetorical: 'What else can I do? Perhaps I can break the intensely personal chain of anxieties and longings that binds me so often' [...]. The answer, however, is equally overlaid with uncertainty. The writer's 'own-ness' is interlaced with unrest, and one senses the proximity of the 'jungular world' and the troubled mind that conceives its presence. It is a mind tenuously conveying its hope of liberation from the entrapment of an anguished self. Indeed, the wilderness of the East would, if not 'rid' Lewis utterly of his vexed 'own-ness', become a journey through new modes of selfhood in his

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[108] Lewis, in *In The Green Tree*, pp. 42-43.
[109] *Ibid.,* p. 40.

attempt to apprehend his growing sense of otherness. The experience would emerge as a process of displacement from both the geographical and ideological worlds of Lewis's Western origins, expressed not only in 'The Jungle', but also in one of his finest stories, 'The Orange Grove' (1948).[110]

In 'Observation Post: Forward Area' (1943), the 'beast' was to manifest itself again, this time as the embodiment of an abject human condition perceived in India as external to the speaker, yet also sensed, through his empathy, as residing within him.[111] It yields a distinct echo of the epistolary 'anxieties' voiced to Gweno in the reference above:

> Some evil presence quenches
> The vagrant drunken theme
> Of the swart and skinny goatherd
> And the black goats of his dream.
>
> A darker beast than poverty
> Transfixed the crouching peasants there,
> And tore the votive tablets down
> And filled the children with such fear.

(ll. 9-16)

The poetic lens fixes on the externals of abject poverty but it is the 'evil presence', intensified in the trope of the 'darker beast' that transfixes the speaker's imagination and ours, as well as that of the Indian peasants in the presumed aridity of their existence. This 'beast', although defined only as an abstraction, is as implacable as Keith Douglas's, embodying the constitutive, terrifying negation and loss of hope embedded in the spiritual drought of war. The 'fear' is identified, not simply as the insidiously baleful gift war bestows, but is defined with more disturbing effect in its location in children, and in the intensifying simplicity of 'such'. Lewis's own internal enmity is discernible, flowing into and coalescing with the externalized image of humanity in the stasis of hopelessness.

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[110] Lewis, in *Collected* Poems, pp. 155-158, and Lewis, *Collected Stories*, pp. 213-225. Discussion of the story is reserved for later chapters of this thesis.
[111] Alun Lewis, *Collected Poems*, p. 145.

If Alun Lewis has here configured this 'darker beast' as an amalgam of fear and the desolation of the soul, it appears as a more reified entity in 'Post-Script for Gweno' (1941), written whilst he was in training at Longmoor.[112]   The poem is a poignant affirmation of love and a quiet plea for the beloved's assurance in this, but its initial tones of gentleness do not go uninterrupted: love and death here coalesce as oppositions, the former possessing the power to resist the dread of the latter.   Lewis opens on a gentle imperative in which, as the poem's title implies, it is surely facile not to equate the speaker with the poet himself:

> If I should go away,
> Beloved, do not say
> 'He has forgotten me'.
> For you abide,
> A singing rib within my dreaming side;
> You always stay.

> (ll. 1-6)

The repetitive emphases established between the biblically inflected 'abide' and ''stay' meld easily with the allusion that falls between them: the 'Beloved' is Eve to this Adam, the subjective 'I'.   However, the poem's trajectory arrives at a less soothing destination in which terror resides:

> And in the mad tormented valley
> Where blood and hunger rally
> And Death the wild beast is uncaught, untamed,
> Our soul withstands the terror
> And has its quiet honour
> Among the glittering stars your voices named.

> (ll. 7-12)

The trope of the 'beast' is an image of unrelenting savagery, feral and uncontrollable, a configuration that connotes the penetration of war, the 'valley' that casts the shadow of death on the speaker's inner being. The antepenultimate line delineates a union of souls, 'Our soul' which 'withstands' the beast, and which, in its acknowledgement of 'your voices', the poem's

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[112] Lewis, in *Collected Poems*, p. 54.

close honours as a strength and victory derived from the 'Beloved'. Yet this embodiment of certainty, I feel, is a deception. There is a vestigial uncertainty that subverts the acknowledgement of love's victory over Death. The terror has only been withstood, not excised, and one feels that the ghost of the opening presentiment of death, scarcely concealed in the conditional insecurity of 'If I should go away', has returned, or possibly never left. An echo of Douglas hovers in the speaker's uncertainty of his own destiny: perhaps 'the beast is winning' here, too.[113]

On 6 July 1941, Lewis married Gweno Ellis during his period of training at Gloucester, five days prior to his posting to Morecambe to undergo officer training. On arrival at the Officer Cadet Training Unit he wrote 'War Wedding', a lengthy poem in eight parts.[114] Other than its focus on love, it raises issues of direct relevance here to the trope of 'the beast' and the growing presence of Lewis's lack of fixity and, correlatively, his looming awareness of war and death. Accordingly, Part I of the poem is my primary focus at this juncture. The opening epigraph locates the speaker lying wakeful in his barrack room, fearing his beloved will not come to him, and the first three stanzas instantly conflate the agony of the loved one's absence with images of death:

> The vulture stabs his beak into the sun.
> The light falls bleeding from those beating wings.
> The heat is taken in the ruthless heart.
> The withered moon intones *She will not come*.
>
> And if you will not come, then stuff
> My wasted hours in a sack,
> Cast off the threadbare day from my stale eyes
> And like a hawthorn fling your beauty
> On the shambles of my love.
>
> Into the gutters of darkness I bleed and bleed.
> The moon has placed white pennies on my eyes.
> The wounded beast beneath my lids
> Hunched in a cave of broken myths

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[113] See Douglas, 'Note on Drawing for the Jacket of *Bête Noire*', in *The Complete Poems*, pp. 129-130 (p. 129).

[114] Lewis, in *Collected Poems*, pp. 62-67.

> Among the groping outworn gods,
> Strives for a straighter heaven
> Than any the laughing sun affords.[115]

In her examination of Lewis's evocations of love and the beloved, Carrie Jadud compellingly observes, 'the relation to the beloved in Lewis's work is fraught with fear and frustration'. Her position balances on her perception of the poet's construction of the figure of the 'beloved' not just as a manifestation of devotion and need, but as being founded on anxieties 'beyond the understood borders of self [...] continually distanced by the subject's sense of impending loss'.[116] Her argument is thus consonant with my own, namely that Lewis repeatedly reaches beyond the tensions of the self, seeking detachment from his fears and uncertainties.

The lines above reverberate with such anxiety, while images of the 'withered moon', 'wasted hours' and 'shambles of my love' release the speaker's sense of worthlessness, profound waste and contemptible torpor. Furthermore, they announce the deepening anguish of the poet's own already anguished temperament. However, it is the opening trope of '[t]he vulture' that casts the prevailing shadow, one that intensifies in the third stanza. The subjective 'I' is draining from substantiality, his life and identity leaching out into 'gutters of darkness'. The repetitious desperation of 'I bleed and bleed' echoes the strenuous cadence of 'fling your beauty' as the speaker's pain flows with gathering intensity into the image of impending death, the 'white pennies on my eyes'. Once again, the vision of the beast now raises its head, a compelling configuration of the poetic voice as the locus of internal striving and contestation. The speaker's mind becomes the site of pain and contortion, 'hunched' in darkness amongst its ruined false hopes and obsolete faith. 'The wounded beast beneath my lids' articulates a conscious recognition of inner pain and evokes the speaker's fragility.

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[115] Lewis, *Collected Poems*, p. 62, ll. 1-16.
[116] Jadud, 'Fragile Universe', p. 112.

In his letter to Gweno of November, 1942, Lewis declared, '[y]ou have the power of love and of the beloved over me'.[117] The resonance with 'War Wedding' and its particular image of the beast lies in the intimation that this 'power' can be both regenerative and destructive. Here it dislodges the speaker, the beloved's absence generating pain and visions of oblivion. In the next and final two stanzas of Part 1, it is impossible not to hear the gathering fear and the ominously reiterative 'Here' that locates the mind in a place devoid of name and fixity, identified only in the language of nightmare:

> And here the hiatus falls, the stammer,
> The black-lipped wound that mouths oblivion;
> Here children scream and blood is shed in vain
> In a dark eclipse where the shadowy mistral blinds
> Our daunted eyes and touches us to dust.
>
> Here, on this chasm where the stars
> Are splashed in powder in the reeling depths,
> I tremble in the nightmares of silence, calling your name.

<div align="right">(ll. 17-24)</div>

The 'hiatus' recalls the trope of 'black interim' discussed above, once again expressing the speaker's consciousness of his liminality. The rhythms and imagery conspire to convey a swirling, unconscious self, flung centrifugally from rootedness and safety. It is an enactment of psychic distress conceived through fear and conveyed in relentless tropes as 'a dark eclipse', 'reeling depths' and the precipitous danger of 'this chasm'. There is no identifiable place, only the haunting, emphatically deictic, '*this* chasm', as much in the speaker's mind as in the nightmare landscape where 'children scream' and human blood is shed in the futility of war (my emphasis).[118] The 'silence' of the final line is a deception, submerged in these screams, and the speaker is left confessing his fear and isolation, invoking the safe harbour of the beloved. Only here, in the emphatic 'I tremble' does he fully shed the partial

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[117] Lewis, in *Letters to My Wife*, p. 275.
[118] My emphasis.

concealment of self that has driven his focus outward to the screaming children and the futile waste of life.

Echoes of 'The Waste Land' linger in the image of the 'shadowy mistral' and the touch that turns humanity to 'dust', the 'powder in the reeling depths'. In Part 1, 'Burial of the Dead', Eliot wrote:

> (Come in under the shadow of this red rock),
> And I will show you something different from either
> Your shadow at morning striding behind you
> Or your shadow at evening rising to meet you;
> I will show you fear in a handful of dust.[119]

Lewis's words resonate with this 'fear': yet again, we sense his own anguish in the 'dark eclipse' of his mind, reminding us of Keith Douglas's 'Devils' (1942) in which the 'mind's silence', the 'deceptive quiet', imprisons its demons:

> Only within they make their noise;
> All night, against my sleep, their cries.[120]

> (ll. 9-10)

Lewis's silence is fraught with similar ambivalence: it resounds with the screams of nightmare. Here, however, the 'black-lipped wound' cannot bear to articulate what it constitutes, the 'hiatus' of the beloved's absence: instead, it voicelessly 'mouths oblivion', asseverating a deeply personal sense of absence and spatial otherness.

'War Wedding' balances on vulnerability, on what Lewis expresses in Part V as 'The fragile universe of self' (l. 96). Moreover, the fragility it articulates expresses a mind in flux between desired wholeness achieved in the beloved's imagined presence and its dissolution in her absence. The two words of its title constitute oppositions, configuring that which shatters fixity and that which affirms unity. Constantly, the speaker's imaginings balance precariously on his longing: they flow from the beloved's goddess-like presence in Part III,

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[119] See T. S. Eliot, in *Selected Poems* (London: Faber and Faber, 1954), pp. 41-42, ll. 26-30.
[120] Douglas, in 'Devils', *Complete Poems*, p. 92.

where she 'beckons in infinite space', envisaged '[I]n the void of heaven and hell' (ll. 52-53), to the sacramental marriage bed of Part V where '[W]e are the bread and wine who share the feast' (l. 104), and on to those in Part VII where images of desolating grief and a yearning for assuagement conflate with visions of death:

> Gripped in the boneless tentacles of grief
> The miracle I seek is peace.
>
> She said I made her fertile with a smile.
> But now the reaper shaves his head
> And goes to harvest with the dead
> Far from the pastures of fond desire
> While the War sets all her golden fields afire.

<div align="center">(ll. 134-140)</div>

Death pervades the poem as a haunting otherness, and the poetic voice dramatizes its own fear of fracture. Visions of war and of the beloved coalesce and presence and absence coexist: both death and the beloved, each manifesting as the speaker's other, in a sense become one. Moreover, this other configures internal struggle and conflict, and in these closing images of Part VII, the 'wounded beast' is still unequivocally present as the conflation of war and the absent beloved, still found '[I]n the void of heaven and hell'. The 'void' is redolent of, and perhaps provides a further layer of meaning to, those words earlier referred to that appear in Lewis's letter to Gweno in 1943:

> I'm more and more engrossed with the single poetic theme of Life and Death [...] quite unable to express at once the passion of Love, the coldness of Death [...]. In between the two I live [.][121]

'War Wedding' articulates the space in which both the poet and the speaking voice live and, in so doing, offers compelling evidence of the 'beast' as a figure of plurality in which the wound of the beloved's absence and the omnipresence of death cohabit to constitute an 'enmity within'.

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[121] Lewis, in *Letters to My Wife*, pp. 326-327.

Alun Lewis's final poem, 'The Jungle', written in January, 1944, testifies to the poet's internal conflict and estrangement from assured selfhood that form the fulcrum of this discussion.[122] No overtly articulated presence of anything that resembles a 'bête noire' resides in its lines. There is, however, a profound correlation with what the poet revealed to his wife in April, 1943, as 'the jungle of my mind',[123] a metaphor that resounds with John Pikoulis's own understanding of the poem as 'a narrative of the jungle, both as a place and a state of mind'.[124] Pikoulis cites Alun Lewis's letter to his wife, written in January , 1944, in which the poet defined the unreality that he detected in India as a 'dark foreboding',[125] a trope that surely prefigures a later reference in the same letter:

> And I've got a feeling that another phase of my life is ending now, and that the climacteric is near.[126]

It is a foreshadowing, a statement that disturbingly tolls his death on March 5th, just two months later. Whether one accepts this consummation of his life as accident, the Army's version, or suicide as one strongly suspects, the word 'climacteric' is a haunting choice, consonant with configurations of 'foreboding' and his 'enmity within'. 'The Jungle' is an evocation of a desire to dissolve this enmity, a quest for unity in and unification with the unknown. Consequently, certain configurations that form part of its trajectory demand attention in the context of Lewis's struggle to transcend his inner fracture and contestation.

In the poem's opening stanza, the language is immediately contaminated with connotations of decomposition and threat: the 'black swollen leaf' constitutes the vegetation that embodies 'Autumn rotting like an unfrocked priest' (ll. 3-4). An undefined guilt lies barely hidden in the simile as, in lines 9-11, the speaker voices the soldiers' mission:

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[122] Lewis, in *Collected Poems*, pp. 155-158.

[123] Lewis, *Letters to My Wife,* p. 322.

[124] John Pikoulis, '"Inwards where all the battle is": Alun Lewis's "The Jungle"', in *Moment of Earth: Poems & Essays in Honour of Jeremy Hooker*, ed. by Christopher Meredith (Aberystwyth: Celtic Studies Publications, 2007), pp. 84-100 (p.84). Pikoulis further defines the poem, in this same location, as 'a contest of the East and West, a personal confession and a description of the existential emptiness of life'. All other references to this text are cited as Pikoulis, *Moment of Earth*.

[125] Lewis, *In The Green Tree*, p. 64.

[126] Lewis, *In The Green Tree*, p. 66.

> To quench more than our thirst – our selves –
> Beneath this bamboo bridge, this mantled pool
> Where sleep exudes a sinister content[.]

The reflexive 'our selves' depersonalizes the speaker, but the desire to 'quench' betrays a need for absolution and, implicitly, dissolution of the known self, to become what, in line 72, is later expressed as an 'unknown, anonymous' existential state. The deictic exactness and asyndetic repetitions of 'this bamboo bridge, this bamboo pool' conspire to subvert any apparent depersonalized detachment, while 'quench' instantly establishes the ambivalence that permeates the poem, a need both to slake the thirst for renewal and to expunge the soldiers' spiritual burdens. The 'mantled pool' offers salvation but it is a place where 'sleep exudes a sinister content': even in this word 'content', menace cohabits with satisfaction, and, as the poem unfolds, sleep descends to envelop the men, seemingly dissolving all contraries:

> As though all strength of mind and limb must pass
> And all fidelities and doubts dissolve

> (ll. 12-13)

The sleep that is induced offers 'green indifference', a soothing distancing from the imperialist loyalties the soldiers' military obligations bring. The men have experienced a descent into ambivalent space, a transitory movement that Hendon calls 'an enlargement through descent'; their immersion in the ambivalent pool is a participation, 'perhaps willingly, in something destructive'.[127] These 'fidelities' are juxtaposed with 'doubts' in which are discernible the uncertainty that resides in the men and that lies deep within the poem. As John Pikoulis rightly asks,

> is the pool's kindness subversive, undermining the soldiers' will to fight, or does it only reactivate the men's awareness of the reality of death after years in which it has become blunted by army routine? [...] For the first but not the last time in the poem, kindness is confused with enmity, pleasure intermixed with danger.[128]

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[127] See Hendon, in *Mapping the Territory,* p. 150.
[128] See Pikoulis, in *Moment of Earth*, p. 86.

In answering his own question, Pikoulis has pinpointed the quality on which the text pivots throughout, the reiterative capacity of its language to perform uncertainties and convey contradictions. The speaker contains himself in the collective 'we who dream beside this jungle pool' (l. 37), but the poet's own voice and lack of fixity are audibly discerned. He asserts preference for the 'instinctive rightness' (l. 38) of the kingfisher over the 'banal rectitude of states' (l. 40) that represents the moral artifice of war and, implicitly, an imperialist discourse that is no longer meaningful.

In this admission resides what Hendon calls an 'enlargement', a growth in understanding. However, Part II ends with tropes that configure the speaker's persistent inner tension: the dreaming 'we' perceive, even in the jungle's threat, a beauty preferable to the human condition they bring:

> To the slow poison of a meaning lost
> And the vituperations of the just.

> (ll. 42-43)

The speaker's disquiet now escalates into images resonant with painful paradox:

> Cargoes of anguish in the holds of joy,
> The smooth deceitful stranger in the heart,
> The tangled wrack of motives drifting down

> (ll. 51-53)

The language suggests the speaker's complicity as a self-deceiving soldier of empire, estranged from the motives that have brought him here. It constitutes an expression of his internalized 'enmity', the war within and without, now articulated with palpable certainty:

> And though the state has enemies we know
> The greater enmity within ourselves.

> (ll. 55-56)

The last line expresses, perhaps, Lewis's alignment with his fellow soldiers and, therefore, an incipient desire to express a communal human condition rather than impending solipsism.

Yet, it is also heavy with confession, as it is with recognition of an undefined but known plurality of hostilities that reside in the speaker, discerned in the collective 'we'.

'The Jungle' mobilizes a sense of the speaker's increased otherness from the imperialist, unbounded 'oceanic tide of Wrong'. However, it also configures a haunting universe in which life and death move in a cosmic cycle, and in which a quest for renewal paradoxically leads to a place where 'night [...] is cold with space' (l. 92). It ends with the speaker's contemplation of death and the soul's corporeal imprisonment, and on questions that perhaps articulate the core of all Lewis's poetry:

> And if the mute pads on the sand should lift
> Annihilating paws and strike us down
> Then would some unimportant death resound
> With the imprisoned music of the soul?
> And we become the world we could not change?
> Or does the will's long struggle end
> With the last kindness of a foe or friend?

(ll. 93-99)

John Pikoulis believes that in these lines, '[T]he enemy within and enemy without confront each other, separate but conjoined'.[129] Implying that the conclusion brings some kind of resolution of conflict, he echoes Jeremy Hooker's assertion that the poem, amongst others, expresses Lewis's 'unfinished quest, not its negative conclusion'.[130] One feels the poet's quest did remain unfinished, that the 'mute pads' and 'annihilating paws' of death remained in his psyche as an ambivalent beast that could both liberate and destroy. Furthermore, it is not just death that is discerned here. The sinister, animalistic images cohabit in the speaker's psyche with the soul's anguished, 'imprisoned music', and his haunting uncertainty still overshadows. The 'enmity within' lingers in the poet-speaker's choice to leave cosmic yet deeply personal questions unanswered, the moment of closure unable to affirm the spirit's liberation. Instead, one is left feeling that Alun Lewis, just like Keith Douglas, could not

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[129] Pikoulis, *Moment of Earth*, p. 99.
[130] Hooker, 'Afterword', in *Selected Poems of Alun Lewis*, p. 107.

reach that point of affirmation in his journey where internal conflicts were utterly, and finally,

dissolved, but remained in that place he had identified in 1940 in his poem, 'Finale:'

> Locked in uneasy conflict with the unwinking
> Inscrutable demon of self knowledge.[131]

The poetry examined in this chapter represents a selection from the work of both Keith

Douglas and Alun Lewis which, I believe, testifies to a compelling connection between their

creative output and their personal psychic crises and internal conflicts. However, it is in the

poetry rather than in any biographical interlacing that my main focus remains, in poems that

seem to constitute an inescapable impulse which could both disrupt and stimulate the poets'

conscious attempts to articulate. Each of the texts examined unfolds an inner presence of

contestation, a prevailing sense of a speaker's burden or psychic struggle to shed or, at times,

transcend a form of otherness that either envelops or inhabits him. Repeatedly, the writers'

poetic configurations and strategies reveal the troubled core that underlies the poetic voice.

For Keith Douglas, this 'core' was what he called his 'bête noire', his beast which he both

reified in his imagery and sought with only partial success to define and to understand.

Remarkably, his attempts to express its meaning in 'the poem I can't write' and which had

yielded 'a sensation of physical combat' and 'resulted in failure',[132] are reflected in Alun

Lewis's words written to Gweno from India:

> Yesterday and the night before, I was enticed, seduced and destroyed by the long
> octopus arms of a shapeless poem that will never be written. [...] I've wrestled with it
> in the long battle of thoughts and words. [...[I felt spiritually bewildered and
> unnerved, as though the thoughts had battered and exhausted me.[133]

The coincidental mirroring of tension arising from a shared failure to fulfil a creative impulse

is striking. For Lewis, his was a dialectical tension that at times expresses itself in the trope

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[131] See Lewis, in *Collected* Poems, p. 36, ll. 11-12.
[132] Douglas, *The Complete Poems*, p. 129.
[133] Lewis, letter 15 dated 27 April 1943, in *In The Green Tree*, pp. 32-34 (p. 32).

of 'the beast' but which I believe is more profoundly discernible in what he termed 'the greater enmity within', also – as I believe - ultimately unresolved.

For both poets, the war that went on around them was profoundly affecting: it inevitably embodied death as a stark reality that haunted their consciousness and their poetry. Accordingly, in Chapter 3 of this thesis, it will be necessary to revisit some of the works discussed above where death has constituted an element of the inner contestations and external landscape of poets caught in both the clutch of war and their own seemingly innate predilections. I will examine the multivalent themes of death and darkness in greater depth as they emerge in the work of both poets. However, as already shown, these themes impinge upon that of the poet's inner contestations. In Lewis's configurations of darkness and of death itself, fear underlies so many of his images as uncertainty and foreboding, and yet it often cohabits with a desire for consummation in the beyond. Douglas's poetry enacts a similar duality: death and the act of killing frequently fascinate, perhaps even beckon enticingly, though beneath the cool detachment of a speaker we often detect a complex mix of compassion, guilt and fear. In his apparently distanced stance lies the deception of a poetic style in which impersonality plays ironically with a profound identification between poet and subject. Indeed, as this thesis ultimately seeks to demonstrate, the trajectory towards impersonality and what I have termed 'the extinction of Self' belongs to both poets in overlapping ways, though more gradually achieved in Lewis.

While Douglas and Lewis exhibit differences that mark their uniqueness, at the heart of this chapter has been an exploration of shared impulses and a common struggle with identity. As this chapter has demonstrated, self-division can breed ambivalence. Both sought consummation in terms of poetic creativity, but equally in purging inner contestation: in Keith Douglas it was his 'long pain', in Alun Lewis the 'enmity within'. The poems considered here have demonstrated their shared dialectical tensions, the self and its relation to

something 'other' seeming to undo identity. So often, the speaker's voice becomes the locus of disruption and inner contestation. Douglas's 'Bête Noire Fragments', or Lewis's 'Burma Casualty' discussed in part here and re-visited in the following chapter, are among examples in which one hears the flux and reflux of the dialogic voice, or within whose lines we detect the battle between a controlling malignity and a desire for release. The geographical and internal landscapes mapped in the work of both writers are fraught with contradiction and ambivalence, conspicuous testament to the profound test that war, Egypt, India and life in general presented to them. Images populate their work as sites of disturbing binary oppositions that enact the poets' respective dislocations, their iterative lack of fixity, their un-still centre. Material and abstract opposites appear as multiple configurations of the speakers' uncertainties or subliminal fears, or to convey a discernible ambivalence in the darkness in which they are complicit.

Keith Douglas expressed his commitment to 'sing / of what others never set eyes on': it was a declaration of intent to transmit, through poetry, the essence of an externally fought war.[134] However, it also iterates the desire to explore the inner war that others cannot always see. In a sense, it could therefore apply as a validation of Lewis's own journey through both his external conflict and his own battle to excise and exorcize 'the greater enmity within'.

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[134] Douglas, in 'Desert Flowers', *The Complete Poems*, p. 108, ll. 15-16.

Chapter 3
Death, Darkness and 'That Which IS'

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As the previous chapter has demonstrated, exploration of Keith Douglas's 'bête noire' exposes a fraught and fractured psyche engaged in a protracted struggle to discover and resolve a divided and multi-layered self. The Beast emerges as a figure delineating his alterity, an 'other' entity that embodies Douglas's own complex plurality and inter-layered fears, insecurities and disruptive tensions. It projects itself as an omnipresent, transformative burden that resists definition simply because it is transformative, a shifting, dark entity that oscillates between the speaker's internal and external worlds. Excavation of such complexity, however, unearths certain constants that characterize the man and his work, one of which is the inseparability of Douglas's inner dialectical tension from his omnipresent awareness of death and his hauntingly complex relationship to it.

In the work of Alun Lewis there resides a similar constituent within his self-division and vulnerability, namely the seemingly incessant desire to articulate death and a protean darkness that fills his inner and, progressively, outer world. As his life's journey took him to the place where it finally ended, the Indian sub-continent, the frontiers between death and darkness seemed to dominate his focus. As with Keith Douglas, the ontological and epistemological boundaries between life and death were to become the core of a desire to explore truth and meaning within his own and the wider human predicament in a war-torn world. In this chapter, therefore, I intend to examine how each of these men articulated the death and darkness that haunted their respective visions and, where possible, to identify those salient points at which those visions interconnect, both to express their shared and differing perceptions and creative impulse. Within this examination, I wish also to continue a thread already woven into the earlier stages of this thesis, namely the evidence for an organic but

deceptive stylistic impersonality in Douglas's work, and a more gradual growth of such objectivity and concealment or deflection of the subjective voice in that of Alun Lewis. In the poetry and prose of each, however, such qualities do not sacrifice contact with the pulse of humanity.

Part 1: Keith Douglas's Inseparable Modes of Being

For a poet inhabiting the destructive landscape of war, the abiding awareness of imminent death, in simple terms, seems inevitable. For Douglas, however, this consciousness and its concomitant pervasion of both his prose and poetry together constitute a frequently dominating element of a wider and far more encompassing epistemological and ontological confrontation, namely with the crises of life and death as intertwined modes of being. The confrontation with death, paradoxically, repeatedly provides the animus for his poetry while simultaneously exposing his confrontation with life. His textual itinerary, therefore, even from his pre-war boyhood, often manifests as a kind of double telling in which insistently recurring configurations seem to demand our complicity as witnesses to the speaker's real or imagined confrontations with death in the midst of life and, indeed, life in death. There is, repeatedly, an unmistakable sense of the imperative for us to grasp, with the poet-speaker, the points at which these modes intersect, to involve ourselves in his physical and metaphysical perception of the correlations between being the observer of the dead and the observed corpse, between killer and the void inhabited by those killed, between that which survives and that which decays. Indeed, for Keith Douglas, the act of writing becomes more than testimony to the image of death: it extends to the articulation of his confrontation with the self in terms of one's own mortality and, furthermore, embraces the need to grasp the boundaries or bridges between being and non-being. Compellingly, it is an act which, in its predominantly calm objectivity and often deceptive impersonality, challenges us to share in its implicit ethical significance and to assimilate both death and life as inseparable modes of being.

In all his poetry, as he himself acknowledged of his efforts to write 'Bête Noire', Douglas was constantly striving towards a style and a language that articulated the irreducible dichotomies of his experience, the inner tensions that arise from the burden of self-division

and growing sense of his own psychic fracture and plurality. His early confrontation with death could only intensify that desire to express in terms that came closest to his avowal to write of 'true things'.[1] The desert war was to be the arena in which elemental facts and the visceral power of human debris would assault the imagination and demand of the poet the ability to articulate the pain of death and lift it out of its privacy, in terms of the dead, the witness and the perpetrator, these latter two often being the same, the poet-speaker himself. Elaine Scarry posits that such pain (and this is read to include the pain of witnessing) presents the one who speaks of it with a dilemma:

> one of two things is true of pain. Either it remains inarticulate or else the moment it first becomes articulate it silences all else: the moment language bodies forth the reality of pain, it makes all further statements and interpretations seem ludicrous and inappropriate.[2]

Keith Douglas's articulation of death and, implicitly, of the soldier-killer's complicity in this, – so often a reminder of his own mortality – would suggest that he was aware of such a dilemma. Accordingly, his more mature work reveals a stylistic detachment and meticulously controlled, recursive distancing strategies that sought to 'body forth the reality' without reducing it to the 'ludicrous and inappropriate', and, furthermore, investing it with the power to articulate what is voiced *and* what is unsaid, that which resides in the liminal silence. It is this capacity to articulate effectively that Sarah Cole acknowledges in her discussion of Scarry's theory in *The Body in Pain*:

> Scarry's central paradox is a structural one: the body in pain entails a fundamental inexpressibility, and to change that situation, if such is even possible, requires a large-scale commitment to constructing forms of language appropriate to pain, and devoted to its alleviation.[3]

In Keith Douglas's case, I believe that commitment to have been intrinsic to his personal make-up and embedded in his poetic impulse. Death is itself present in him and his work in

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[1] Douglas, in *The Letters*, p. 295.

[2] Elaine Scarry, *The Body In Pain*: *The Making and Unmaking of the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 60.

[3] Sarah Cole, 'The Poetry of Pain', in *The Oxford Handbook of British & Irish War Poetry*, ed. Tim Kendall (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 485.

diverse forms and, far from being inexpressible, constantly seems to dominate the foreground

of his consciousness or peek through the interstices of language as something he both *can*

express and *needs* to express. The strategy of what appears often to be a stance of calm

detachment is just that, a strategy for conveying truth, unmediated by sentimentality or what

he termed 'useless pity'. [4] His language, so strikingly and aptly objective in the desert poems,

is chosen and constructed accordingly, precisely testifying to his unflinching effort to

articulate that which would be otherwise inexpressible, the truth of death, and killing, as he

perceived it to be. In a sense, confrontation with death as both an internal and external

experience was a fundamental stimulus that demanded of him his own 'negative capability',

his willingness to expose his mind fully to the extremes of experience and the coexistence of

life and death, exhilaration and nothingness, agony and ecstasy.

Throughout Keith Douglas's writings, be it in letters to friends, lovers, or family, his

poetry and stories, or his prose diary of his desert experience, there is an overwhelming sense

of desire to engage in all that came his way. It is this openness and capacity to assimilate the

fullness of experience that surely frames Ted Hughes's verdict on Douglas's poetic corpus:

> In a sense, war was his ideal subject: the burning away of all human pretensions in the
> ray cast by death. This was the vision, the unifying generalization that shed the
> meaning and urgency into all his observations and particulars.[5]

For Keith Douglas, overt pity was a redundant interposition between himself and his subject

and between language and the reader, speaker and listener. This, and its inability to change

the truth, thus made it 'useless', perhaps what Hughes perceives as a 'pretension' and

conveying a counterstatement to Wilfred Owen's declared judgement of his own work, that

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[4] Douglas, *Alamein to Zem Zem*, p. 51. Douglas, as discussed more fully later in this chapter, here records his discovery of a dead German shrouded in 'a great concourse of flies'. The image registered an indelible impression and profoundly significant response: 'It filled me with useless pity'.
[5] Hughes, in 'Introduction' [1964] to *Selected Poems*, p. 13.

which he expressed in 1918 as 'the poetry is in the pity'.[6] However, it may also be prudent to view Hughes's remark with some degree of caution, despite its penetrative relevance: his contention that it was death's ray that unified the poet's vision perhaps does not fully express what he terms the 'meaning and urgency'. I believe that Douglas's preoccupation with and presentation of death must be read in conjunction with his coexistent desire to configure it in its relation to the broader scope of humanity, and that his repeated testimony to death's finality does not preclude his profound awareness of what remains for the living.

In the same introduction to Douglas's poems in 1964, Ted Hughes remarks, 'The truth of a man is the doomed man in him or his dead body. Poem after poem circles this idea, as if his mind were tethered'.[7] In the revised 1987 'Introduction', penetrating more searchingly into Douglas's ambivalent grasp on life as detected both in his poetry and in Desmond Graham's authoritative biography, he perceives

> the frailty of his equilibrium, and his fatalism [..] something tenuous, even provisional, in his attachment to life: in spite of the energetic appetite for it, [...] he seems to have been ready, at any moment, to leave it.[8]

This judgement embraces Douglas's earliest poetic forays into the interconnection of life and death, his 'songs of innocence' as it were, as well as those emanating from his experience of war. Furthermore, it is the word 'ready' that resounds most emphatically here: it highlights a preparation for death that coexists inseparably with the soldier-poet's desire to immerse himself in life. As previously considered in the context of Douglas's 'Beast', this intimates what may therefore be discerned as the presence of a latent death drive. Certainly, a remarkable, chillingly precocious consciousness of death is even evident in poetry that, somewhat ironically, one would normally term 'juvenilia'. '·303', believed to have been written by Douglas in 1935, when he was only fifteen, offers unmistakable evidence of this:

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[6] Wilfred Owen, in his 'Draft Preface', written at Ripon in May, 1918, intended for inclusion in his collected poems which he had hoped to publish in 1919. He died in 1918, prior to fulfilling this hope. See *Poems of Wilfred Owen*, ed. by C. Day Lewis (London: Chatto & Windus, 1963), p. 31.

[7] Hughes, in 'Introduction' [1964] to *Selected Poems*, p. 13.

[8] Hughes, revised 'Introduction' [1987], in *The Complete Poems*, p. xxi.

I have looked through the pine trees
Cooling their sun-warmed needles in the night,
I saw the moon's face, white,
    Beautiful as the breeze.

Yet you have seen the boughs sway with the night's breath,
Wave like dead arms, repudiating the stars
And the moon, circular and useless, pass
    Pock-marked with death.

Through a machine-gun's sights
I saw men curse, weep, cough, sprawl in their entrails;
You did not know The Gardener in the vales,
    Only efficiency delights you.[9]

Desmond Graham has placed this clearly in the context of the young poet's stylistic maturation, turning away from his earlier Arcadian lyricism and predilection to valorize and idealize the heroic 'rejected past'.[10] The young mind was seemingly now in collision with a more adult world and, despite the traces of romantic inclination in 'sun-warmed' and 'Beautiful as the breeze' in lines 2 and 4 respectively, one detects a darkening cynicism and an embryonic, proleptic vision of what was to come in his desert poems. There is, too, an interesting interplay in the shift of the subjective 'I' to the 'You' of stanza 2 before the reversion to the subjective final stanza, a movement that arguably connotes the speaker's duality, an address to the self as other, as if to convey that self, passing between two planes of experience. The speaker's vision of beauty perceived through the pine trees undergoes a sinister transformation in stanza 2 in which the voltaic 'Yet', itself prefiguring the device that characterizes so much of Douglas's mature work, introduces the addressee, the 'You' that may constitute the alter ego. Throughout this shift, the prevailing constant is the configuration of each observer, subjective and the nominally objective, as a spectator, a role that was to become a dominant feature of Douglas's poetic persona, the eye of the witness whose words become testimony.

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[9] Douglas, in *The Complete Poems*, p. 6.
[10] Graham, in *Keith Douglas*, p. 42.

Perhaps '·303' therefore expresses a latent, remarkably prescient implicit recognition by the speaker of his own eventual confrontation with death, both as complicit spectator and as one engaging with his own destiny. From the opening line, an admission freighted with the voice of darkly contemplated experience, the poem seems to enact a young mind's incipient grasp of Freud's observation:

> Our own death is, indeed, unimaginable, and whenever we make the attempt to imagine it we perceive that we really survive as a spectator.[11]

Whether it constitutes an address to an imagined fellow combatant, ignorant of 'The Gardener' – ambivalently the one who tends and takes away life – or an articulation of a divided self, '·303' offers a foretaste of the desert poems as much in its formative attempt to merge objective detachment with personal confession as in its haunting perception of life in death, and the converse. The mediating 'pine trees' (l. 1) are the webbed lens through which the 'I' first perceives living beauty: by the final stanza, the vision of visceral death is observed 'Through a machine-gun's sights', incontestably prefiguring the trope that so frequently mediates between observer and the littered dead in Douglas's later work, borne out of actuality rather than the precocious imaginings of youth. Stanza 2 has prepared us for this, configuring boughs that 'Wave like dead arms' (l. 6) and 'the moon, circular and useless' which passes above, 'pock-marked with death' (ll. 7-8). The word 'useless' weighs heavily in the image, a faint foreshadowing, I suggest, of Douglas's subsequent regard for 'useless pity'.

Structurally, too, this early work offers a notable pointer towards the mature poet. The poem testifies to a growing control over form as a vehicle for meaning: the indented end

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[11] Freud, *Thoughts for the Times on War and Death* [1915], in *Standard Edition*, (1957), XIV (1914-1916), pp. 289-300 (p. 289). Paul Fussell, in *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 192, refers to Freud's essay and comments on the survivor's confrontation with the dead as an encounter with something 'theatrical', rather as Douglas's images of the dead suggest in his 'Landscape with Figures, 1, 2 and 3', discussed earlier in Chapter 2 of this thesis. Fussell states, 'it is impossible for a participant to believe that he is taking part in such murderous proceedings in his own character. The whole thing is too grossly farcical, perverse, cruel, and absurd to be credited as a form of "real life"'. His conclusion is that 'seeing warfare as theater [sic] provides a psychic escape for the participant'.

lines to each stanza establish and draw attention to skilful correlations and ironic interplay. The moon's beauty transfigures to the pock-marked face of death in the space of four lines, while the final line of the poem thrusts the ultimate cynical truth to the foreground, 'Only efficiency delights you'. Here, it is the efficiency of killing that is held in what Ted Hughes termed 'the ray cast by death' and, as the word 'only' denotes with almost deictic exactitude, the precision of the act itself is the only reward. Once again, one detects in the verb 'delights' a prefiguring of line 13 of '*Vergissmeinnicht*' (1943), discussed later, though not yet modified by that critical word 'almost' that signifies another subliminal layer of thought as the speaker demands that we, too, share what he sees: 'We see him *almost* with content' (my emphasis).[12] Despite its achievements far in advance of the poet's years, its disturbingly probing vision and its subtly controlled rhymes in which , for instance, 'breath (l.5) and 'death' (l 8) form a most striking coalescence of polarities, '·303' was not yet a song of experience.

Desmond Graham's assertion that Douglas's life and work testify to the poet's 'terror of perishing into an ordinary existence' highlights, even in its choice of participle, an inescapable ambivalence that is demonstrably present in so much of the poetry, as it is in *Alamein to Zem Zem* and Douglas's letters.[13] As his oeuvre grew, so emerged a clearly pervasive dual awareness of his need for a purposeful, even extraordinary life whilst facing the probable imminence of his death, though rarely expressing overt fear: on the contrary, rather than conveying the poet-speaker's desire to withdraw from witnessing or contemplating death, the desert poems are invariably weighted with an urgency to see and to give testimony. Any detectable fear for his own fate is sensed as a hovering uncertainty rather than voiced as an admission: such directness is only openly conspicuous in his last

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[12] See Douglas, *The Complete Poems*, p. 118, l. 18.
[13] Graham, in *Keith Douglas*, p. 95.

work with the confession, 'I fear what I shall find',[14] and even here, that fear is multi-layered and multivalent, rather than of death alone. Nevertheless, of the 105 poems that constitute his final collected output, no fewer than 30 specifically place death and the dead in the foreground, or at least locate death's presence as a visible constituent element of the poem's landscape. In a number of others, it remains implicitly discernible as a spectral presence, still sensed in the silences that exist between the utterances. Close scrutiny of a selection of these poems is therefore central to an understanding of Douglas's trajectory and stylistic development. As '·303' reveals, that journey and predilection had significantly early beginnings.

In such a short life as Keith Douglas's, it seems almost redundant to speak of an 'early' poetic output. However, the premature curtailment of the life and gift of the artist is a virtual expectation that accompanies the generic term 'War Poet', itself an oxymoron in its conflation of destruction and creativity. Unavoidably, therefore, consideration of some of Douglas's earlier work becomes germane to his increasing preoccupation with death and his articulation of its balance with life. As '·303' shows, Douglas was thinking about death as early as 1935, and not just in an isolated moment of creativity: 'Famous Men', written in the same year, projects death in its skeletal essence, foreshadowing later work such as 'Simplify Me When I'm Dead' (1941) or 'Dead Men' (1943), and already demonstrating a metaphysical inclination to straddle interconnected modes of being, the worlds of the living and the dead. Here, however, the subject is the correlation of artistic legacy (which was also to emerge as intrinsic to Douglas's poetic impulse) and death. William Scammell aptly expresses this fusion as 'the nexus of fame and creativity and death that takes all Douglas's

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[14] Douglas, 'On a Return From Egypt', *The Complete Poems*, p. 132, l. 24.

attention', demonstrating the power of art to mediate between the two existential modes as

the young poet offers reverence to those who have gone before, now forgotten:[15]

> And now no longer sung,
> not mourning, not remembered
> more under the sun,
>
> not enough their deserved
> praise. The quick movement of dactyls
> does not compensate them.
>
> The air is advertised of seas
> they smote, from green to copper.
> These were merciful men.
>
> And think, like plates lie deep
> licked clean their skulls,
> rest beautifully, staring.[16]

Interestingly, the poem opens 'in medias res', voicing a continuation of thought, as

though other facets of these 'famous men' have been dwelt upon before the speaker reaches

his conclusion. It is a quietly expressed sadness that we detect, somewhat paradoxically, in

the repetitions of 'not mourning, not remembered '(l. 2) which flows unpunctuated into the

third line, 'more under the sun', and reaches a powerfully simple and controlled recognition

in lines 4 and 5, 'not enough their deserved / praise'. One feels the presence here of self-

reflexivity: that the speaker whose 'dactyls' swiftly articulate thought, himself acknowledges

the inadequacy of his own words of remembrance, an intimation reinforced in the words

'does not compensate them' (l. 6). Nominally juvenile and faintly romanticized though the

poem may be, such lines are an embryonic foretaste of Douglas's capacity for the submersion

of guilt or conscience beneath controlled and distancing objectivity. Ironically, 'Simplify Me

When I'm Dead' would later express a desire to be remembered, but as 'simpler than at birth'

(l. 6), not overtly revered, but recalled as though those who survive him 'arrive leisurely at an

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[15] Scammell, in *Keith Douglas: A Study*, p. 67.
[16] Douglas, 'Famous Men', *The Complete Poems*, p. 10.

opinion' (l. 26).[17] As yet, the poet had not reached the more mature capacity for inward reflection that imbues this later work, a poem that constitutes his own headstone epitaph which stands, today, in Normandy. However, as he speaks of these 'merciful men' and intimates their heroic verse in the 'seas they smote' (ll.8-9), despite what Scammell justifiably regards as a 'pared down' compactness of imagery and structure that impedes easy interpretation, one may still discern a skilfully prepared reciprocity between the fame of the ostensibly un-mourned and the cleansed bones, a construction that resonates proleptically with Douglas's later recursive configurations.[18]

The final stanza presents a remarkable, concentrated coalescence of beauty and the disturbing recognition of death's finality. The poem's closure enacts this finality, reinforced in the punctuation: a pre-located comma isolates the word, 'staring', heightening its unsettling ability to connote the perpetuation of the moment of death, a frozen instant that was soon to become a preoccupying, haunting concern as Douglas moved closer towards his own destiny. Moreover, there is an indelibly surreal paradox in the image of skulls that 'rest beautifully': the punctuation here, too, slightly destabilizes ease of interpretation, offering ambivalent understanding of these words as a gentle, prayer-like imperative, or as a descriptive observation. However, if we accept that the implicit 'beauty' encompasses the creative art and the lives of the dead, then the poem offers testament that Douglas was already exploring the balance between death-in-life and life-in-death. Beauty disintegrates, but as it mutates into the transfixed mask of death, the 'staring' remains, proof of an ontological inclusivity.

'Famous Men', in focusing on death, attests to Douglas's increasing awareness of Time and of its capacity to render the flesh 'licked clean' (l.11): it consumes, yet if it is the body's enemy, it is also a necessary element of our growth and fulfilment. So often in his

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[17] Douglas, *The Complete Poems*, pp. 74-75.
[18] Scammell, in *Keith Douglas: A Study*, p. 66.

short life, Douglas's urgency to engage himself, even in the rigours of battle, would reinforce the impression of one impatient to fulfil ambition before time ran out. Less than a year later, in 1936, in his poem, 'Dejection', Douglas's speaker configures himself as one of the collective 'we' who 'have reached the boundary' (l. 3) between life and death, continuing with a distinct tone of resignation to observe:

> [...] The autumn clothes
> Are on. Death is the season and we the living
> Are hailed by the solitary to join their regiment,
> To leave the sea and the horses and march away
> Endlessly. The spheres speak with persuasive voices.[19]
>
>   (ll. 3-7)

Once more, the words articulate a preoccupation with the encroaching reality of death, here expressed partly in militaristic terms stimulated by Douglas's family upbringing and consuming interest, but more significantly configuring a sense of the interdependence of death with Time's irrevocable presence. The speaker is already dressed in 'autumn clothes', located in death's 'season' (ll. 3-4), and death seems to beckon him to its infinitude, to 'march away / endlessly' (ll. 6-7), a distinct echo of Hardy's 'Men Who March Away' (1914) though devoid of his patriotic emphasis on 'the faith and fire within us'.[20] In Douglas's lines, one detects an intriguing foreshadowing: three years later and only three days after war with Germany had been declared on September 3rd, 1939, Douglas pledged to enrol as a combatant with the remark, noted earlier in this thesis, that he would 'bloody well make my mark in this war. For I will not come back'.[21] The latter sentence carries a terseness and conviction that arguably conveys a disturbing coalescence of certainty and intention, admittedly invested with the rancour that followed his rejection by his fiancée, Yingcheng, as Desmond Graham

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[19] Douglas, *The Complete Poems*, p. 13.

[20] Thomas Hardy, 'Men Who March Away' [1914], in *The Oxford Book of War Poetry*, ed. Jon Stallworthy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), pp. 160-161 (p. 160, l. 6).

[21] See Graham, *Keith Douglas*, p. 79. The remark, with its mid-point end stop, is - strictly speaking - ungrammatical. However, the unorthodox punctuation isolates and emphasises the tone of certainty that he would not return.

records.[22]   However, in what appears within Douglas's oeuvre to be a rare indication of hopefulness that there is something that at least provides succour if not regeneration, the closing couplet of 'Dejection', with its italicized final emphasis, offers a caveat.   It is expressive of a faint optimism, but in the 'tomorrow' that 'hovers and cries' there is a prevailing shadow: the dominating connotation surely relates to death:

> Only tomorrow like a seagull hovers and cries:
> *The windows will be open and hearts behind them.*
>
> <div align="right">(ll. 8-9)</div>

Such early work does not confine its foreshadowing of the poet's maturity to subject matter alone.   Even at the age of sixteen, within his shaping fascination with Death and Time, 'Dejection' reveals his nascent predilection for the mediating, distancing trope of the window that offers a sense of detachment or separation between speaker and subject that would become a dominating feature of his output.   However, it is not yet freighted with the psychic fracture and uncertainty that, in 1944, would close and reverberate in his final poem:

> The next month, then, is a window
> and with a crash I'll split the glass.
> [...]
> I fear what I shall find.[23]
>
> <div align="right">(ll. 19-20, l. 24)</div>

By that time, such 'fear', complex and not solely defined by death though clearly inclusive of it, could only be confessed in the aftermath of a battle which, in 1936, had not yet been experienced.   By the Spring of 1944, however, these closing lines of his final poem carry the weight and fatigue of battles waged both internally and externally, voiced as an almost acquiescent admission of 'depleted fury' (l. 6).   The poetic voice is expressed in the first person, eschewing the apparent detachment that characterises Douglas's mature work and, for once, at least, one senses that it is the poet himself who speaks out of a need to confess.

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[22] *Ibid.*   Graham further states here that 'the force of his [Douglas's] conviction was further renewed when, passing a Great War memorial, he casually commented that his name would be on the next one'.
[23] Douglas, 'On A Return from Egypt', *The Complete Poems*, p. 132.

Death is surely a constituent of that fear, but here, in the poet's brief interlude before returning to combat and his own fate, unlike in line 4 of 'Dejection' in which a young mind envisages it through the lens of imagination, the 'juvenile' declaration that 'Death is the season' has become actuality and, moreover, an ironic presentiment.

The poetry of Douglas's teenage and student years continued to reiterate his awareness of death. For Ted Hughes, 'The Deceased' (1940) represents, 'quite suddenly', a new maturity, a 'burning exploratory freshness of mind – partly impatience, partly exhilaration at speaking the forbidden thing'.[24] One may question this attribution of suddenness to this observed development, but there is a conspicuous candour in the sonnet's intonation and attestation of what conceivably constitutes Douglas's excursion into epitaph. Once again, however, there is a developing detachment as the speaker deflects our attention to his third person subject, framed clearly as a poet, now descended into penury and moral profligacy:

> His hair depended in a noose from
> his pale brow. His eyes were dumb;
> like prisoners in their cavernous slots, were
> settled in attitudes of despair.
> You who God bless you never sunk so low
> censure and pray for him that he was so;
> and with his failings you regret the verses
> the fellow made, probably between curses,
> probably in the extremes of moral decay,
> but he wrote them in a sincere way:

(ll. 3-12)

There is a self-deprecatory, self-effacing inclination concealed in this, one feels, and the deflection to 'You' (l. 7) heightens the self-reflexive irony as the speaker speculates on the anonymous subject's 'moral decay'. However, it is the concluding rhyming couplet that seems to stand alone, resonant with quiet, understated emphasis:

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[24] Hughes, in 'Introduction' [1964] to *Selected Poems*, pp. 12-13. 'The Deceased' appears in Douglas, *The Complete Poems*, p. 46.

> and seems to have felt a sort of pain
> to which your imagination cannot attain.

<div align="right">(ll. 13-14)</div>

The impression is not of some sonorously sententious verdict but of an insight that yet again prefigures the 'long pain' that Douglas imagined the world might deduce from his life in 'Simplify Me When I'm Dead', written only one year later. The death of a poet and the painful burden of sincerity in the effort to survive and not to 'regret the verses' (l. 9) cohabit in the poem as they become increasingly embedded in Douglas's psyche. One senses that the final reference to 'your imagination' reflexively addresses the speaker himself, as well as the reader, in his acknowledgement of the struggle to conceive and articulate. What Hughes conceives as 'impatience' and 'exhilaration' are the poem's implicit adumbrations of its creator's fascination with the impulse for truthful exploration of that pain and what remains after death, surely foreshadowing Douglas's expressed commitment to speak inclusively and solely of 'true things' of which 'the forbidden thing' – death itself – is articulated here.

The work that predates his army and desert years signifies the intensifying urgency of this impulse. Repeatedly, we see an emerging clear-sightedness in Douglas's contemplation of death which, as Vernon Scannell observes, configures a 'vastly different condition' from the fear of random death: in relatively little time it would, says Scannell, become 'his private muse, not a romantic symbol of danger and temptation, but the plain foreknowledge of his own rapidly-approaching end'. To designate death as his muse and to accord it 'true principality' within Douglas's work, however, perhaps fails to recognise that it does not stand alone as the impulse that mobilizes his work but constitutes an element, though deeply significant, within a more inclusive Self, inseparable from its pluralistic 'bête noire'.[25] Furthermore, the emergent capacity to foresee death would increasingly conflate with a contingent fore-suffering, though not as histrionic self-disclosure but in controlled and calmly

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[25] Scannell, in *Not Without Glory*, p. 38.

intimated awareness of death's relationship to the living. Poems such as 'John Anderson' (1940) in which death seems to constitute liberation, or the bleaker and more cynical 'Russians' (1940), continue this predilection, while 'Canoe' (1940) further confirms this period as one of fateful speculation and liminal uncertainty.[26] In the opening lines of the latter poem, the speaker begins in tones of muted anticipation of his own departure, not simply from the indolence of student days, but from life as he contemplates the imminence of the call of war. He begins:

> Well, I am thinking this may be my last
> summer, but cannot lose even a part of
> pleasure in the old-fashioned art of
> idleness. I cannot stand aghast
>
> at whatever doom hovers in the background;[27]

<div align="center">(ll. 1-5)</div>

The lines testify to the poet-speaker's ambivalence in the implicit acceptance of what, by this time, could be his true 'sudden fearful fate' (l. 9), and simultaneously to his love of life and of the beloved on whom the speaker's farewell words close: 'it is my spirit that kisses your mouth lightly'. That lightness and the emphasis upon 'my spirit' not only express tenderness but also a sense of one aware of the self in a more final departure.

Towards the end of his Oxford years, and during his first experience of army training in England, Douglas was, in fact, increasingly aware of both time and death as inseparable constants in his life, intensified by his fragile experiences of love and a deepening consciousness of the mutability of existence. 'Time Eating' (1941) expresses his darkening sense of Time and Love as embodiments of paradox, each embracing life and death: Time is configured as 'Ravenous' (l.1) and 'while he makes he eats' (l. 9).[28] As the poem closes, that

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[26] The three poems appear in Douglas, *The Complete Poems*, on p. 56, p. 37, and p. 40, respectively.

[27] Douglas wrote 'Canoe' as he was about to leave Oxford University, departing from a life gently described here as one of 'idleness', sharing his time with the then object of his affections, Yingcheng Sze.

[28] Douglas, *The Complete Poems*, p. 71.

capacity to consume life darkens even further: 'you can make no more of me, only destroy' (l. 22). The 'me' resonates with intimations of the speaker's own mortality, while the final word utterly negates any sense of regeneration.

Written in the same period, 'Simplify Me When I'm Dead' (1941) looks beyond the present to envisage time beyond the speaker's death. [29] As such, it constitutes not only a preoccupation with death and its meaning for the living, but also an articulation of presence in absence. It is for this reason that it is reserved for further discussion in Chapter 4 where the place of Love and its relation to Douglas's expression of mutability and loss are more germane. However, what this period seems to suggest is the deepening presence of death in the poet's psyche and poetic vision, that preoccupation which arguably intimates what may be termed Douglas's 'Death Drive'. During his mechanized cavalry training at Sandhurst, oscillating between boredom and anticipation, he declared in a letter to his friend, Jean Turner:

> I can see nothing more attractive than active service and final oblivion, to which I quite look forward [...] I am trying to get East as soon as possible: and when I get there I shall make for the nearest harem and leave the rest to Allah.[30]

The combined effect of the prospect of 'final oblivion' and the trust in Allah reverberate with a resignation that borders on desire not wholly attributable to ennui and romantic disillusion. Indeed, his words may feasibly connect with Cathy Caruth's analysis of Freud's theories discussed earlier in Chapter 2. She believes that what lies 'at the heart of Freud's formulation of the death drive' is conceivably 'not the incomprehensibility of one's near death, but the very incomprehensibility of one's own survival'.[31] Douglas's letter predates any experience

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[29] Douglas, *The Complete Poems*, pp. 74-75.

[30] Douglas, letter 155 in *The Letters*, p. 152. Written in December 1940, it dwells on Douglas's broken heart following a failed affair with Betty Sze (Yingcheng) and carries his apology to Turner for his morbidity: 'what a horrible letter this is'. Significantly, he also expresses that his imminent completion of training might 'eventually be a final exit' and a little further on admits, 'I am just about at the end of my hopes'. The prevailing shadow may well be that of love's disappointment, but it unequivocally frames the reference to 'desired final oblivion'. The remarks arguably seem congruent with those quoted earlier, and commented on in footnotes 21 and 22 to this chapter.

[31] Caruth, 'Traumatic Departures', *Unclaimed Experience*, p. 64.

he was to have of 'near death', of course, but it conceivably offers evidence of a mind, tested by its own fragility and vulnerability, already balancing tenuously between thoughts of death and survival. The reality of that dialectic would emerge more fully and absorbingly as he entered the desert landscape where the internal challenge to comprehend death and what it means to kill would define his creative impulse.

It is in the desert poems that one feels Douglas comes yet closer to Caruth's understanding of Freud's definition of the interconnection of life and death, of life as 'an awakening out of death',[32] as from a nightmare, as she interprets it. Repeatedly, the desert poems articulate the voice of one witnessing or responsible for death, always expressing overt or hinted complicity. Increasingly masked in calm detachment and penetrating objectivity, the poetry reads as the testimony of one who survives in the midst of death, close, perhaps, to Caruth's persuasive analysis of Freud's concept of trauma as something recursive, not just as one confronting another's death but as one surprised to survive:

> Repetition, in other words, is not simply the attempt to grasp that one has almost died but, more fundamentally and enigmatically, the very attempt *to claim one's survival.*

Viewed in this light, Douglas's poetic voice often articulates the epistemological journey of one struggling both to describe death and the moment in which being ends, while simultaneously and faintly conveying not exactly surprise, perhaps, but a palpable recognition that one retains a fragile connection with life in the midst of death, that one's 'claim' on survival is at best tenuous in a mutable world.

The desert experience would undoubtedly mobilize Douglas's finest work, his most strenuous attempts to convey truth while grappling with meaning. As he says in *Alamein to Zem Zem* (1946), war brings a curiously 'exciting and amazing' recognition of a 'not wholly terrible world' characterized by the paradoxical reality of

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[32] *Ibid.*

having to kill and be killed, and yet at intervals moved by a feeling of comradeship with the men who kill them and whom they kill, because they are enduring the same things. It is tremendously illogical – to read about it cannot convey the impression of having walked through the looking-glass which touches a man entering a battle.[33]

The resonating word here is 'illogical', profoundly reflecting something related to but even deeper and possibly more ambivalent than what Freud terms 'surprise': even in its coolly rational tones the diary extract is inescapably imbued with the coexistence of conscience and compassion and yet, with the fascination, rather than fear, of one who can accept one's own relationship to death, having seen in it his own reflection. The emphatic adverbial phrase, 'tremendously illogical', seems almost to register tones of surprise, perhaps echoing Douglas's brief undergraduate essay, 'On The Nature of Poetry', where, with remarkably precocious insight into the impersonality of true poetry, he had written of its capacity to surprise the artist such that it discovered 'something outside' his 'bounds', like a man confronting himself 'in such a posture that for a moment you can hardly believe it a position of the limbs you know'.[34] The remark could feasibly reflect the fascination and surprise of self-recognition in confronting those in whose death the soldier-poet is complicit. Even as corpses 'dispose themselves companionably'[35] in the littered camaraderie of death, the living – to whom Douglas's poetic persona ostensibly belongs – affirm themselves to be, in the words of Ted Hughes, 'hardly more than deluded variants of the dead'.[36] To witness and to articulate the mutual inclusivity of life and death is thus a moment in which one's Otherness

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[33] Douglas, *Alamein to Zem Zem*, p. 16. In his 'Introduction' [1992] to this text, Desmond Graham draws attention to the relationship between the prose accounts and Douglas's desert poetry. He states, '*Alamein to Zem Zem* is in a sense full of poems Douglas never chose to write', and that the prose journal highlights a key difference between the two literary forms: 'these descriptions reveal how for him a poem only came into existence when observation shelved off into some more extensive and intense significance'. While this may astutely pinpoint the deeper significance of the poetry when placed alongside what Graham identifies as 'the flurry of impressions' and 'directionless progress' in the prose, I believe Graham's more valuable observation to be upon the 'wider sensory awareness' and the Douglas's exactness of observation that 'looks for meanings, significances'. These are the qualities that highlight the contiguity between Douglas's prose account and his desert poetry in particular. See Douglas, *Alamein to Zem Zem*, pp. ix-xvi (xii-xiii).

[34] Douglas contributed this essay to a symposium, 'On the Nature of Poetry', published under this same title in *Augury: An Oxford Miscellany of Verse and Prose*, 1940. It is reproduced as one of 'Two Statements on Poetry' in Douglas, *The Complete Poems*, pp. 133-135 (p. 133).

[35] Douglas, 'Aristocrats', *The Complete Poems*, p. 117.

[36] See Hughes, 'Introduction' [1987] to *The Complete Poems*, p. xxiii.

proclaims itself and in which, therefore, the observing eyes become, as configured in 'Bête Noire', 'lenses through which the brain explores / constellations of feeling' (ll. 1-2).[37] Douglas's impulse for such inclusive exploration affirms what is surely his negative capability to assimilate such experience while withdrawing from the tug of drowning compassion or redundant sentiment. He is thus able to express what seems detached, 'outside [his] bounds', voiced as what Scannell calls an apparent 'suspension of involvement', though we detect in this his underlying humanity. He further posits that the deeper into war and his own psyche that Douglas probes, 'he finds that it is experience which is seeking him out and demanding from him the ability to transcribe it'.[38]

'Gallantry', written while Douglas lay injured in El Ballah General Hospital in 1943, is not typical of his penetratingly observant desert poems: it represents his aptitude for keen irony, reflected upon after the event of death, rather than a response in the moment of witnessing.[39] The opening voice recollects 'The Colonel', who, in a 'casual voice' attempted to broadcast a weak joke 'into the ears of a doomed race' (ll. 1-4). The heavy assonance of 'doomed', perhaps consciously echoing Wilfred Owen's 'Anthem for Doomed Youth' [1917],[40] is reiterated a line later as the irony deepens:

> Into the ears of the doomed boy, the fool
> whose perfectly mannered flesh fell
> in opening the door for a shell
> as he had learned to do at school.

> (ll. 5-8)

The Colonel is as human and flawed as the 'fool' whose death mocks his public school manners but, more importantly, the lines clearly delineate compassion for the wider human significance of such death, not as heavily evocative pity but as a constituent of irony itself.

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[37] Douglas, 'Bête Noire, Fragment D', *The Complete Poems*, p. 128.
[38] Scannell, in *Not Without Glory*, pp. 26-29.
[39] Douglas, *The Complete Poems*, p. 104.
[40] See Wilfred Owen, 'Anthem for Doomed Youth', in *The Complete Poems and Fragments*, Vol. 1, ed. by Jon Stallworthy, 2 Vols. (London: Chatto & Windus, First Edition, 1983), p. 96.

Perhaps the even greater irony lies in the third stanza's description of Conrad who 'luckily survived the winter' (l. 9), but who met a fate that unsettlingly constitutes an uncanny presentiment of Douglas's own death a year later:

> he wrote a letter to welcome
> the auspicious spring: only his silken
> intentions severed with a single splinter.

(ll. 10-12)

The sustained sibilance heightens the juxtaposed contrasting images, a pattern that continues throughout the poem as it progresses to the gently restrained rhetorical questions of stanza 4:

> Was George fond of little boys?
> We always suspected it,
> but who will say: since George was hit
> we never mention our surmise.

(ll. 13-16)

The collective 'We' carries no condemnation, only the intimated capacity of the poet-speaker to see experiences of death from a wider human perspective. Tears or cynicism would obfuscate the greater truth and the skilful irony does not seek to mask the poet's awareness of the indivisible correlatives of life and death. The closing stanzas voice this coalescence, together with the ultimate irony, expressed with a characteristic calm:

> It was a brave thing the colonel said,
> but the whole sky turned too hot
> and the three heroes never heard what
> it was, gone deaf with steel and lead.
>
> But the bullets cried with laughter,
> the shells were overcome with mirth,
> plunging their heads in steel and earth –
> (the air commented in a whisper).

(ll. 17-24)

The fusion of the animate and inanimate in the closing personifications express a cynicism rarely detected in the desert poems, but also, while affirming the callous indifference of the tools of war, implies human complicity in their triumphant exultancy in the act of killing.

While 'Gallantry' embodies reflective irony in the aftermath of death, it is the poetry located in the detritus of battle that most acutely configures what it is to be the witness, the seeing eye, whether or not mediated through a gunsight. Often that vision is expressed through the voice of the killer himself, or at least one whose complicity is felt in the interstices of articulation. It is this attention to death that no doubt engenders the response of R.P. Draper who, speaking of 'Cairo Jag' (1943),[41] states:

> This is war poetry enforcing a disquietingly new perspective on things, an initiation into the workings of an imagination which is not necessarily humane.[42]

This could not be further from the truth: Douglas certainly offers a 'new perspective' but his imagination encompasses the wider backcloth to the configurations of the dead, namely the residual aftermath and implications of loss or guilt for those who survive. It is an aftermath or realization embedded in the voice of the speaker that frequently lies between words rather than audible in them, but it attests to humanity as much as death's finality, as becomes compellingly evident in, for example, '*Vergissmeinnicht*' (1943).[43] As the speaker returns to that place where three weeks earlier he had himself been under threat of death from anti-tank fire, he discovers the dead body of the soldier who might have been his killer. In so doing, his words convey the effort to grasp and balance these two realities of death and survival: the indignity of death is captured in a single participle as the soldier is found 'sprawling in the sun' (l.3), but it is the urgent imperative that follows in stanza 3 which suddenly dominates both the speaker's and our attention:

Look. Here in the gunpit spoil

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[41] Douglas, *The Complete Poems*, p. 102.

[42] R.P. Draper, *An Introduction to Twentieth-Century Poetry in English* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1999), p. 92.

[43] Douglas, *The Complete Poems*, p. 118.

> the dishonoured picture of his girl
> who has put: *Steffi. Vergissmeinnicht*
> in a copybook gothic script.

<div align="right">(ll. 9-12)</div>

The sense of indignity is intensified in the deftly ambivalent 'spoil' and 'dishonoured', conflating both the inanimate weapon and the picture with the soldier who can no longer honour her love. Moreover, as Tim Kendall argues so astutely, there are – as here – 'ethical challenges' in Douglas's recursive configurations of dead bodies.[44] The weighted imperative to 'Look' may convey an apparent detached voyeurism, but this is a deception: the eye zooms in to the photo and the lovingly executed calligraphy as testaments to death's severance from the living and to the irony of the word '*Vergissmeinnicht*'.[45] The poet, through his speaker, thus makes us share in the act of witnessing, so denying any chance of his or our moral neutrality while conveying death as a means of heightening our awareness of the living. It is exactly what Charles Tomlinson wrote of Douglas's poetic impulse:

> to focus, clarifying and concentrating what would otherwise dissipate or elude [...] [T]he ethic of sight [...] and the moral entailment it brings.[46]

To attribute moral indifference as a constituent of Douglas's stylistic detachment and controlled impersonality is simply to fail to hear the ethical intonation that lies within language.

The heightened visual awareness of stanza 3 that forces us to see with the collective 'We' is sustained in the final three stanzas. The images of abasement and erotically intonated 'equipment' conflate love and death:

> We see him almost with content,
> abased, and seeming to have paid
> and mocked at by his own equipment

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[44] Kendall, in *Modern English War Poetry*, p. 151.

[45] Interestingly, in *Camera Lucida*, trans. by Richard Howard (London: Jonathan Cape, 1982), p. 32, Roland Barthes argues that all photographs are corpses, 'a figuration of the motionless and made-up face beneath which we see the dead'.

[46] Charles Tomlinson, *The Listener*, 9 January 1975, 13-17 (p. 13), quoted in Kendall, *Modern English War Poetry*, p. 152, and in Scammell, *Keith Douglas: A Study*, p. 211. Tomlinson writes, 'The ethic of sight – the effort towards clear-sightedness and the moral entailment it brings – demanded much of Douglas from early on'.

that's hard and good when he's decayed.

<div align="right">(ll. 13-16)</div>

However, the urgent command to witness brings the eye even closer, both to see with him and to hear the emphasis in the voltaic turn:

> But she would weep to see today
> how on his skin the swart flies move;
> the dust upon the paper eye
> and the burst stomach like a cave.

<div align="right">(ll. 17–20)</div>

In *Alamein to Zem Zem* Douglas provides several graphic accounts of desert corpses, one of which relates his confrontation with a dead Libyan soldier: 'As I looked at him a fly crawled up his cheek' [...] a pocket of dust had collected in the trough of the lower lid.[47] The images remained indelibly, reconstituted here in the poem where they convey almost forensic scrutiny, not to serve a voyeur's fascination, but rather to move us, and the speaker, to his final observation:

> For here the lover and killer are mingled
> who had one body and one heart.
> And death who had the soldier singled
> has done the lover mortal hurt.

<div align="right">(ll. 21-24)</div>

The shift from what seemingly constitutes a physiological inventory of the dead to restrained, metaphysically inflected contemplation, submerses rather than removes the undercurrent of guilt for an act of abasement: it invests the 'mortal hurt' with a deeper significance. The 'one body and one heart' undeniably intertwine the dead soldier and the lover who survives, but there is a detectable undertow in which we also feel the speaker's own inseparability from the 'hurt' that tellingly half-rhymes with the living 'heart'. Death and life coexist interdependently, and the testimony of the witness conflates the finality of death with the wider issue of what is lost by those whose lives are enmeshed with the dead.

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[47] Douglas, *Alamein to Zem Zem*, p. 38.

The calm that imbues the speaker's resignation to a perceived truth is far from indifference: it affirms what Tim Kendall rightly considers an inalienable connection between Douglas's poetically reconceived experience as witness / recorder, here framed in the collective 'We', and his self-designated extrospective style, arguably a means of managing and holding the pain of complicity at a distance.[48] However, in this resides a central paradox signalled in line 13, 'But she would weep to see today': just as in the previous command to 'Look', for both himself and us to keep the gaze, he now demands our more profound response, our recognition of human cost. If, as Tim Kendall posits, Douglas's soldier 'visually loots the decaying corpse', in so doing he does not extinguish the implicit trace of guilt but rather articulates his need for us to share in his complicity.[49] Dawn Bellamy's verdict on the poem's final stanza is that

> [i]nstead of mourning [...] and finding consolation in thoughts of similarity between the observer and the observed, Douglas's persona reaches a more pragmatic and infinitely less comforting conclusion.[...] The degradation of the dead soldier, despite his lover's attempts at idealized permanence, is presented with the emphasis on the visual, as photographic evidence.[50]

Evidence of degradation is surely there, as palpable as the absence of consolation, but her judgement pays scant regard to what one hears in the interstices, the residual mourning that inhabits guilt.

While '*Vergissmeinnicht*' inventories death's physical aftermath and the personal effects of the dead set against the backcloth of the living, 'How To Kill' (1943), in its more oblique treatment, is an instruction manual, constructed in the living moment of killing, freighted with the ambivalent fascination of he who both perpetrates the act and testifies to his own 'sorcery' in tones of detached observation.[51] Even as the speaker turns from child to

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[48] Kendall, *Modern English War Poetry*, p. 151.

[49] *Ibid.,* p. 156.

[50] Dawn Bellamy, "'Others have come before you": The Influence of Great War Poetry on Second World War Poets', in *British and Irish War Poetry*, pp. 299-314 (p. 313).

[51] Douglas, *The Complete Poems*, p. 119.

man of war, seemingly facing his own near death, the opening stanza addresses us

dialogically:

> Under the parabola of a ball,
> a child turning into a man,
> I looked into the air too long.
> The ball fell in my hand, it sang
> in the closed fist: *Open Open*
> *Behold a gift designed to kill.*

(ll. 1-6)

In a depersonalizing shift of voice, it is the weapon that sings and urges us to witness its '*gift*'

of death, not the subjective 'I', before the sense of detachment hardens as the sniper's

intended victim is observed and targeted through the mediating gunsight:

> Now in my dial of glass appears
> the soldier who is going to die.
> He smiles, and moves about in ways
> his mother knows, habits of his.

(ll. 7-10)

The absence of emotion which seemingly distances the speaker from the act of killing and

deflects emotion to the reader, constitutes a poetic impulse that could only partially conceal,

not eradicate Douglas's inner burden, his complex 'beast'. The victim's fate is unequivocally

predetermined in a declaration that is laced almost with a marksman's pride in his own

efficiency: the target '*is* going to die' (my emphasis), confirmed in a tone of cold certainty.

That inevitability, however, cannot go un-witnessed. The ensuing cry of 'Now' (l. 12) carries

the immediacy of the killer's self-injunction and embodies the imperative for us to share the

moment of killing. Once more the poetry enacts the desire to make us complicit.

However, it is in the remaining two stanzas that the speaker articulates Douglas's

deeper consciousness, his intensifying need to explore the nature of life and death as a

unification of forces, a 'lightness of being'.[52] Again, the wider cosmic significance is voiced

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[52] Frank Wilczek, 2004 winner of the Nobel Prize for Physics, probably intentionally uses this term in oblique reference to the title of Milan Kundera's novel, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* (New York: Harper and

as the speaker acknowledges his own Faustian power, even echoing the 'almost with content' of '*Vergissmeinnicht*':

> This sorcery
> I do. Being damned, I am amused
> to see the centre of love diffused
> and the waves of love travel into vacancy.
> How easy it is to make a ghost.

(ll. 14-18)

The lines succinctly express the synergy of killer and victim, the intonations of confession of a personal crime, yet paradoxically framed in the oblique impersonality of metaphysical speculation. The 'amused' fascination of the self-proclaimed sorcerer is overshadowed by the acknowledged damnation, the self-recrimination of the survivor-killer who is enriched by his expertise only insofar as he is metaphysically enlightened in an epistemological epiphany. As the 'weightless mosquito' (l. 19) falls as the shadow of death, the speaker voices with almost child-like surprise,

> with how like, how infinite
> a lightness, man and shadow meet.
> They fuse. A shadow is a man
> when the mosquito death approaches.

(ll. 21-24)

There is no consolatory gesture offered here – Douglas regards sentiment as 'useless pity' after all; there is only an ambivalent guilt that hints at the detached amusement of a spectator who is also the perpetrator. In a sense, the speaker is the mosquito and the 'ghost' which haunts his psyche. Furthermore, in his admission, 'I have a beast on my back', we sense that the aforementioned 'lightness of being' was not easily bearable, yet paradoxically an

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Rees, 1984; London: Faber & Faber, 1984). Wilczek adopts the expression in relation to his study of what he believed to be the unification of forces between mass, or matter, and the insubstantial, the ether. He provides a detailed exposition of this in his work, *The Lightness of Being: Mass, Ether and the Unification of Forces* (New York: Basic Books, 2008). I have used the term metaphorically as a cognomen for Douglas's awareness of Life and Death as coexistent and, in this context, unified modes of being.

inescapably compulsive ontological challenge.[53] Douglas's apparent detachment and forensic

eye do not constitute indifference for, as Kendall observes:

> The courage of Douglas's extrospective art lies in its willingness to attempt dispassion without detachment, autopsy without intrusion.[54]

Nor does such courage imply an abnegation of responsibility: the testimony of the witness as

Douglas conceives it in fact embodies the dual responsibility of the speaker and of ourselves,

we who must share the relived experience.

Unquestionably, the compulsion to look into the face of death intensified as Douglas's

war experience darkened, but it was there even during his Sandhurst training in 1940. While

recovering from a severe kick from a horse at Boars Hill he had written a short story called

'Death of a Horse' (1940) in which a clinically dispassionate vet, with alarming suddenness,

kills an injured horse and proceeds with an autopsy.[55] The cadet spectators include Simon,

whose response as witness becomes the dominant focus. As the animal's stomach is flapped

open, the language takes on the form of free indirect discourse, graphic and visceral:

> The stench was unbelievable. Simon began to feel sick. [...] He looked firmly at the wreck of the horse [...] The horrible casualness of the vet's voice grew more and more apparent [...] the wreck of the horse lay in a flurry of colours, the stench cemented them into one chaos. He knew it was useless. His one thought, as he felt himself falling, was that he had let the horse down.[56]

The contrasting reactions of the vet and Simon resonate in the descriptions: the repeated

phrase, 'the wreck of the horse', the palpable emphasis on the 'stench', and the all-embracing

'chaos', convey the ambivalence of the fixation to see and express the carnage of death and

yet to articulate the ultimate sense of guilt, the spectator's complicity as onlooker. As in the

poems discussed, the guilt is not ours as readers, except inasmuch as we share through our

common humanity. There is, however, no consolation, nothing regenerative in this death:

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[53] My use of the word 'bearable' is a conscious, antonymic nod towards the title and theme of Milan Kundera's existential novel, The Unbearable Lightness of Being.
[54] Kendall, *Modern English War Poetry*, p. 163.
[55] Keith Douglas, 'Death of a Horse' ([1940] first published in *Lilliput* in 1944), in *Prose Miscellany*, pp. 137-139 (p. 138).
[56] *Ibid.*, p. 138.

with incontestable certainty it is final, and pity is un-restorative, 'useless'. Moreover,

Douglas's prose expresses the same sense of degradation and abasement that was to invest

'*Vergissmeinnicht*'. If this constitutes a traumatic narrative, as I believe it does, it therefore

echoes Caruth's observation:

> The crisis at the core of many traumatic narratives [...] often emerges, indeed, as an
> urgent question: is the trauma the encounter with death, or the ongoing experience of
> having survived it?[57]

So much of Douglas's writing emerges as traumatic narrative in this sense, constantly

configuring the dialectical tension that Caruth defines and conveying in the reiterative

imagery of death a need both to meet the almost calcified stare of the dead and to verify the

nature of death and the moment of its happening. It is as if the eye of the observer, and the

transfixed gaze of the body that fixes the moment in which life becomes death, form the

nexus of proof for the witness. That desire for proof is so frequently recursive, the

compulsion of the disciple Thomas to dispel doubt that, as discussed in the previous chapter,

is articulated in 'Landscape with Figures 1'[58] and as the 'little finger [that] could trace the

maquillage' of the theatrically posed dead in 'Landscape With Figures 2'.[59] It is there, too, in

the prose diary in which death and life are so entwined that they defy ease of distinction. The

death mask of a German soldier had conveyed to Douglas an 'expression of agony [...] so

acute and urgent' and a 'stare so wild and despairing that for a moment I thought him alive'.[60]

Repeatedly, as Amitava Banerjee states, Douglas's imagery is 'shot through with insights into

the victim's agony', but in the urgency and exactitude of such language as is expressed here

we share the speaker's palpable response, together with its hinterland of humane empathy

that belies any accusation of callous detachment.[61] The response is itself an attestation of the

coexistence of the living with the dead. Objectivity, as in 'How to Kill', may be at the

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[57] Caruth, in *Unclaimed Experience*, p. 7.
[58] See Douglas, *The Complete Poems*, p. 109, ll. 9-10.
[59] Douglas, *The Complete Poems,* p. 110, ll. 12-13.
[60] See Douglas, *Alamein to Zem Zem*, p.50.
[61] A. Banerjee, in *Spirit Above Wars*, p. 128.

expense of warmth, but the awareness of agony and despair brings the experience into contact with the wider reaches of humanity.

The analysis of Douglas's 'bête noire' that precedes this chapter necessarily demanded scrutiny of the presence of death as an intrinsic element of his burdened sense of divided identity. That burden persisted, along with Douglas's need both to understand its nature and to expunge it from his consciousness, in effect to achieve an extinction of Self masquerading as Otherness. His stylistic detachment may be construed as a parallel creative effort to control this multifaceted Otherness, this inner dialectical contestation. While it is redundant here to revisit in detail poems already addressed in the context of Douglas's 'beast', what does require re-emphasis, however, is the confrontation with death as it is represented in 'Landscape with Figures', a trilogy of poems in which the speaker views the cosmic drama of human life on a theatrically configured stage, littered with the contortions of the dead. The images that emerge affirm the vision of one who sees the Self in terms of heaven and hell.

Paradoxically, this set of landscapes, expressive of a protracted haunting, portrays an act of witnessing in which Douglas had almost grasped his true Self in its relation to his 'beast'. Inescapably, it seems, he carried death with him to the extent that he could see his own reflection in the dead, though as a witness speaking in the living present. Tim Kendall comments on this as an imaginative experience of death, 'a congruence between the writing of poetry and the death of the poet [...] a spectral figure speaking from the grave'.[62] It is as though the poetic voice is that of one who is dead already, an intimation that was surely prefigured in 'The Poets' (1940) where, with overt self-deprecation, the poetic voice – condemning himself in the collective utterance 'our words are bad / currency' (ll. 8-9) – declares in the penultimate stanza:

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[62] Kendall, in *Modern English War Poetry,* p. 173.

> But we ourselves are already phantoms;
> boneless, substanceless, wanderers;[63]

the cynicism is voluble, but equally heard is that recurrent predilection for configuring oneself as spectral, caught in the lightness of being. It is audible, too, in 'Mersa' (1942), which, in its closing stanza, once more lends credence to Kendall's insight quoted above:

> I see my feet like stones
> underwater. The logical little fish
> converge and nip the flesh
> imagining I am one of the dead.[64]

>   (ll. 21-24)

One senses a deft linguistic trick in the image of convergence, a fusion in which the fish and the subjective 'I' share in the 'imagining' and in which, as in the earlier poem, the speaker seems compelled to envisage, if not his ghostly metamorphosis, the inexorable logic of his own death and the process of exposure of the hard bone beneath the flesh.

For Keith Douglas, the urge to imagine the dead and his own relation to them surely constitutes a desire to express the inexpressible. Writing thus becomes testimony, a persistent desire to find meaning in correlative modes of being, a compulsion far more profound than a voyeur's morbid fascination. The constant urge to touch the dead or to meet their fixed, vacuously startled stare could not seemingly escape his consciousness, while even the earliest poetry precociously foreshadows a growing presentiment of his own destiny. To foresee is therefore to foresuffer, not in the sense of tangible fear but, as I have tried to show, in placing death within the wider context of humanity, not solely as the detritus of war's landscape. As Sarah Cole persuasively argues in her essay, 'The Poetry of Pain', dead bodies are not entirely conceived as skeletal symbols of finality within Douglas's corpus.[65] His link to past traditions of war poetry remains, at least insofar as his ontological concern with the coexistence of life and death brings him into contact with the loss to humanity, the vacuum

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[63] Douglas, 'The Poets', *The Complete Poems*, p. 50.
[64] Douglas, in *The Complete Poems*, p. 99.
[65] Cole, in *British and Irish War Poetry*, pp. 483-503.

that remains. His objectivity in his frequent focus on the hard bone beneath the flesh does not imply indifference to 'modes of grief'. As Cole observes, in such instances as '*Vergissmeinnicht*' portrays, the dead body becomes 'a precious site, the very ground of memorialization', though eschewing any temptation to 'embalm the corpse with empathy'.[66] However, while the connection with human loss may be subtly deflected from the speaker to a surviving lover seen in a mediating photograph, the moral impact and the imprint on humanity, as in the love that 'travel[s] into vacancy' (l. 17) in 'How To Kill', implicitly relate, too, to the witness who testifies.

Throughout his work, Douglas conceptualizes death in diverse forms but the dominating image is of its mutual inclusivity with life and the inseparability of the observer and observed, however mediated through the lens of impersonality. His fusions of the organic and inorganic, the animate and the inanimate, articulate an ontological oneness: images of metallic débris as in the 'gun barrels split like celery' of 'Cairo Jag',[67] or the bodies conceived as 'waxworks' in 'Russians',[68] all appear to counterfeit life. Ostensibly, there is no regeneration in this: in 'John Anderson'(1940), 'the last moment of his gaze' (l. 13) is the dead man's stare locked in perpetuity as in so many of Douglas's poetic and prose configurations. The image invariably delineates such vacuity without any note of consolation, while 'Dead Men' (1943)[69] confirms Douglas's existential cynicism as integral to his seemingly compulsive, eschatological survey of the dead and the bones that survive them. There, as the speaker dwells upon a wild dog exhuming and stripping the flesh from dismembered bodies, he is aware of 'his own mind burning' (l. 22), but is prompted to conclude

> Then leave the dead in the earth, an organism
> not capable of resurrection, like mines,

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[66] *Ibid.,* p. 498.
[67] Douglas, *The Complete Poems*, p. 102.
[68] *Ibid.*, p. 37.
[69] *Ibid.*, pp. 100-101.

less durable than the metal of a gun,
a casual meal for a dog, nothing but the bone
so soon.

(ll. 25-29)

The conflation of the inanimate weaponry and the bone is a compelling image of death's finality, beyond 'resurrection' except through the scavenging dog. However, in the emphatic 'so soon' the cold cynicism is detectably subverted by faintly heard anguish. As the poetic voice closes on the 'prudent mind' (l. 35) who should live in the present, this subversion lingers: the dead are too soon departed.

Cynicism and the speaker's 'own mind burning' cohabit in this poem as testament to the duality that resides in the speaker, and to the ambivalent imprint of death on the living. Repeatedly, therefore, one is being reminded that humanity is present not only as witness to death but as intrinsic to intertwined existential modes. Death-in-life and life-in-death are correlatives that, like Douglas's beast, his 'black care', infused his vision with a corrosive burden and a perpetual creative impulse. The words of T. S. Eliot therefore seem temptingly apt:

Webster was much possessed by death
And saw the soul beneath the skin.[70]

(ll. 25-29)

Keith Douglas may not have dwelt upon the soul of the dead, but he undoubtedly saw 'beneath the skin' to both himself and the wider landscape of humanity in which lay the survivor's pain.

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[70] T. S. Eliot, 'Whispers of Immortality' (1918) in *T. S. Eliot: The Complete Poems and Plays* (London: Faber, 1969), p. 52, ll. 1-2.

<u>Part 2:</u>

<u>Alun Lewis: Death, Darkness, and the Frontiers Between</u>

Keith Douglas's absorption with death constituted his impulse to explore its nature both as a cessation of being and, simultaneously, its relation to life. He held in focus the speaking-self as perpetrator, the survivor complicit in death, and in its aftermath, the wider imprint on humanity. His work testifies to a compulsion, perhaps obligation, to offer objective testimony as witness while also demanding that we share in the responsibility to grasp and understand that death coexists with life. In short, his poetry often constitutes the struggle to express the inexpressible, not only the nature and moment of death, but the paradoxical fascination and guilt of the subjective self that administers it and the legacy of loss it leaves behind. Unlike Keith Douglas, Alun Lewis's war located him largely on the periphery of combat: confrontation with the visceral debris of the battlefield or the frozen stare of the dead caught in perpetuity do not therefore dominate his poetic imagination. Nor do the act of killing and the desire to comprehend it relentlessly permeate his thinking or the poetic persona. However, his poetry and, indeed, prose works, ceaselessly iterate an unequivocally real presence of death and a multi-layered image of darkness that both feeds his creativity and intensifies his inner fracture.

Like Douglas, Alun Lewis embodied inseparable yet contesting modes of being, the impulse to live and to die. As John Pikoulis posits, in Lewis the 'death-wish and life-wish' are 'inextricably wedded'.[71] For Lewis, the moment of death is not itself an epistemological fixation as it is for Douglas, but death stalks his consciousness and infiltrates his work just as unflinchingly, though arguably in more diverse metonymic configurations, at the heart of which is a recursive and pluralistic darkness that demands examination here. Indeed, one

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[71] John Pikoulis, 'The Way Back', *The Critical Quarterly*, Vol. 14, No.2 (Summer 1972), 145-166 (p.150). Pikoulis expresses this in the context of Lewis's poem, 'The Way Back', but it is apposite here and throughout Lewis's writings. Subsequent references will be cited as Pikoulis, 'The Way Back'.

discerns in his oeuvre many constituents of that plurality, many forms of darkness that are, in a sense, submersed forms of death within the poet's psyche. Isolation and separation haunt those at war, but war only intensified these dark elements that seemed to feed the self-division already in him. Lewis's writings repeatedly attest to this, including his letters which, as Pikoulis observes, 'reveal him to be alienated both from the world he had left and the one he was adrift in'.[72] The poet's trajectory reveals the growing darkness of liminality, his sense of displacement and landlessness, of uncertainty set ambivalently within an intensifying awareness of death's inevitability. Even the aridity and poverty of India emerge as a kind of death, and the continent itself as an exilic place whose darkness evinces what Jacqueline Banerjee identifies in the poet as 'the will's long struggle against it'.[73] The struggle, however, offers only uncertain peace and consummation. Lewis's world is a tenebrous place in which he increasingly confronts not only his own mortality but also the dark voids of life, and seeks the means whereby one may bridge being and non-being, thus unifying the fragile Self.

Perhaps it is germane here to refer to one of Lewis' epistolary confessions. Writing to Richard Mills in October, 1943, having read Richard Hillary's *The Last Enemy* in which the author, a pilot, shot down in a dogfight, movingly records his experiences while in hospital recovering from reconstructive facial surgery, Lewis drew a parallel between himself and the author.[74] He observed that for each of them, life involved 'interludes of dying' and that 'Death prompts [...] and dramatizes life – that is, puts it on the stage and spotlights it.'[75] That 'Death' must surely include his metonymic darkness. For him, as for Keith Douglas, death and darkness are constantly in inter-flux and perpetually near: together, they constitute an

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[72] Pikoulis, 'Afterword', in Lewis, *In The Green Tree*, pp. 179-186 (p. 180).
[73] J. Banerjee, 'Seeking and Still Seeking: Alun Lewis in India', in *Poetry Wales*, 10.3 (1975), 99-117 (p. 107).
[74] Richard Hillary, *The Last Enemy* (London: Macmillan, 1952).
[75] Alun Lewis, 'A Sheaf of Letters from Alun Lewis 1941-43: First Selection / One Modern Poet at War', *Poetry Wales*, Vol. 7, No. 28 (February – March 1948), 410-431 (p. 426).

instrument for investigating life and one's place in it. In essence, they stimulate his quest for meaning.

The Manichean oppositions of Death and Life are cohabitants which mobilized Lewis's epistemological quest, generating both his psychic fracture, hinted at in his 'mad feud', and his creative impulse to find inner resolution and synthesis.[76] In April, 1942, in a letter written to his wife from Felixstowe just before departing for Battle School at Aldeburgh, Lewis stated:

> It's a simple process, death: much simpler than birth or living. But it makes living more complicated and hard – for those who are touched by death but not taken. [...]. I feel a kind of negation of life in me [...] and that is my enemy, my living Mr Death. He carries a hypodermic syringe with him and squeezes into my skull: and I am aware of nothingness. And nothing else.[77]

The text is fraught with his characteristic ambivalence, on the one hand attesting to death as a 'simple process' and on the other its capacity to complicate life. The confinement of that complication to those who survive its clutches offers a dark significance: the language that follows gathers in intensity in the personification of death whose 'syringe [...] squeezes into my skull', inducing only 'nothingness'. Death's simplicity is a deception, as its recurrent, haunting presence throughout the poetry clearly affirms. As Gordon Symes posits, its omnipresence, either overtly or submersed in Lewis's equally pervasive trope of 'darkness', persuades us that his 'spirit's natural orientation' was towards his 'dark reconnaissance', his inalienable quest to penetrate the dark, to find meaning and a synthesis of Self.[78] As such, however simple the 'process' of death appeared to him at this bleak moment cited above, his poetry configures the many, increasingly complex forms in which its shadow stalked him, stimulating both anguish and the creative desire to comprehend. He was to admit to Robert Graves not long before his death in 1944 that he lived in '[p]eriods of spiritual death' in which a wonderful and powerful ability moves upwards in me', a paradoxically creative

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[76] Lewis, 'Threnody for a Starry Night', *Collected Poems*, p. 47, l. 142.
[77] Lewis, in *Letters to My Wife*, p. 206.
[78] Symes, 'The Muse In India', p. 191

impulse.[79] The words written earlier to Gweno surely emerged out of a less uplifting moment

of 'spiritual death', one which he confesses is repetitively patterned in his life and which

later, in 1943, looking beyond India to the legacy war would offer soldiers, he perceived in

these terms:

> Some of us will get good jobs, others disability pensions, others unemployment relief,
> others road labour, others nothing at all except darkness.[80]

It is a desultory vision and one in which one senses the writer himself included in the

'darkness', rather than in the alternatives, bleak though they are.

This pattern of interplay between death and darkness, with its metonymic diversity,

permeates Lewis's work. Lewis's 'Mr Death' and his predilection for the image of darkness

seem to have been with him from his beginning in their variant forms. Several of his earlier

writings – including some considered in the context of Chapter 1 – therefore deserve to be

readdressed here, before moving on to consider a range of poetry and prose mainly written in

transit to, or during his immersion in, the Indian sub-continent.

In May, 1940, whilst Lewis was in training and having recently expressed his deep

aversion to the thought of killing, he wrote the poem, 'Raiders' Dawn'.[81] That aversion

would still underlie his thoughts only months later in October 1940, in 'All Day It Has

Rained', in his image of 'the quiet dead', the victims of 'slaughter'.[82] In the former poem,

however, he appears in the opening stanza to have deflected any personal anxiety, instead

focusing outwards in gentle detachment upon war's imprint and transformative power:

> Softly the civilized
> Centuries fall,
> Paper on paper,
> Peter on Paul.[83]

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[79] Taken from Lewis's letter to Robert Graves, dated 23 January, 1944, reproduced in *Lewis: A Miscellany,* pp. 147-149 (p. 148).
[80] Lewis, in *Letters to My Wife*, p. 357.
[81] Lewis, *Collected Poems*, p. 22.
[82] See Lewis, *Collected Poems*, p. 23, ll. 18-19.
[83] *Ibid.,* ll. 1-4

The detachment is, however, a fleeting deception: the underlying tones are elegiac, rhythmically grieving the collapse of history and civilization, voicing the speaker's sense of a vast, cultural loss.

As the poem moves on, images of death and the pitiful waste of innocence unfurl: lovers lie dead, a nation's youth drift like ghosts and the poetic gaze finally shifts to an interior, configuring the hauntingly metaphysical juxtaposition of 'Beauty' and a woman's necklace:

> The drifting white
> Fall of small faces
> In pits of lime.
>
> Blue necklace left
> On a charred chair
> Tells that Beauty
> Was startled there.

(ll. 10-16)

The valediction closes on what, for Lewis, is a rare image of perpetuation of the instant in which death comes unannounced, a moment caught and held, without sentimentality, in the word 'startled'. It is an expression that could almost be fitting in Keith Douglas's re-creation of such moments. Roland Mathias argues that 'Beauty' expresses Lewis's conception of 'human perfectability', the ultimate state of human love and wholeness for which one strives.[84] If we accept this, then 'startled' suggests a moment of suspension in which the dream of 'perfectability' is traumatised by war and death. This is arguably why John Pikoulis posits that '[t]he poem emphasises the more sinister conjunction of Beauty and Death', a coalescence that he has traced almost exhaustively in Lewis's work.[85] If Beauty is not actually destroyed, it is at least shocked and threatened, while the image of the 'charred chair' lingers in the suspended present as a sinister reminder of that which is now absent.

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[84] Mathias, in 'The Black Spot in the Focus' [1980], p. 49.
[85] Pikoulis, *A Life*, p. 80.

In 'Threnody for a Starry Night' (1940), Alun Lewis expresses, even at this relatively early stage and in the safety and boredom of initial army training, what seems to define the essence of his own predilection, his ineradicable commitment to find meaning in the darkness that haunts him:

> The white brain crossing
> The frontiers of darkness
> To darkness and always darkness pursuing,
> Finds asylum in a dreamless
> Traumatic anguish where the planets
> Stay at the stations where they gathered
> In darkness of Creation.[86]

The poem will be revisited later in Chapter 4 in its relation to Love, but it seems to attest to something inescapably and permanently with him, a multivalent, entropic yet paradoxically constant presence battened to him, or his speaker. In the opening stanza, death is configured in specific terms of 'frozen soldiers' (l. 10) who lie in the hoary, enduring silence of the 'arch of night' (l. 5), but Lewis explores beyond its physical manifestations to the legacy it bestows. The speaker, framed in his aural isolation, in the silence that, as Carrie Jadud acknowledges, is itself a variant of darkness,[87] moves through attenuated asseverations of death's unending divisiveness:

> All sons, all lovers
> Death divides for ever, ever...
> Only the lilies of the field
> And this glittering tree endure
> This silence ever

(ll. 17-21)

The 'lilies' are the symbol of the dead who, paradoxically, 'endure' alongside 'this glittering tree', a deictically placed, silent monument, while a presentiment of the poet's own death and separation from the beloved lies barely submersed in the hinterland of language. Nor does

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[86] Lewis, *Collected Poems,* pp. 43-47 (p. 46, ll. 107-114).
[87] Jadud, in 'Fragile Universe', p. 94.

the poem consign itself solely to the elegiac. In section III, a note of communal confession emerges:

> By the mutilated smile,
> By milk teeth smashed,
> Love is outcast.
> We choose the vast
> Of dereliction which we fill
> With grey affliction that shall spill
> Out of our private parts like sawdust
> From broken dolls.

(ll. 47-54)

The poetic voice consciously spurns dissociation from its subject to announce complicity in the collective 'We' that mutilates innocence and universal love in an image of surreal sexuality resonating with guilt for the desecration and disease that war brings. It is an admission, an affirmation of the choice made in favour of 'dereliction' and the taint of 'grey affliction' that feasibly prefigures the imperialistically inflected 'dark inherited disease' of his later poem, 'Home Thoughts From Abroad' (1943).[88]

As the poem progresses, it articulates darkness and death in other configurations: the 'boy' whose 'soul was rifled' and whose body 'Suffers in khaki' (ll. 22-28); the communal suffering and the poetic-self's disaffiliation from its past – 'We cannot return there' (l. 46); the silence and lassitude of waiting for 'mass martyrdom' (l. 63); the iconoclastic visions of war's desecration of 'Mother Church' (l. 71) and the soldiers' boots that 'smash' the sacred 'mosaics' (l. 77); the shared, communal anguish in 'crowded deadly places' (l. 104). The litany continues as the speaker navigates through these and other forms of darkness before returning to the sightless frozen dead at the poem's close. Together, the objects of lamentation comprise an expression of the dialectical tension between dawn and dark, between creation and destruction, a dialectic that pervades Lewis's poetry.

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[88] See Lewis, *Collected Poems*, p. 139, l. 21.

To return now to the lines taken from section IX of the poem with which this discussion began, it becomes clear how they embody Lewis's inescapable impulse to draw meaning from his omnipresent, pluralistic dark:

> The white brain crossing
> The frontiers of darkness
> To darkness and always darkness pursuing,
> Finds asylum in a dreamless
> Traumatic anguish where the planets
> Stay at the stations where they gathered
> In darkness of Creation.

(ll. 107-114)

They articulate in their repetitious, unpunctuated continuum, the ceaseless journey of the poet-speaker across the frontiers of his inner and outer void. The 'darkness' pursues unstintingly, 'always', perhaps an intimation of the apocalyptic horsemen. Moreover, as the 'white brain' finds 'asylum' in the dark stasis, there is a hint, too, of the Freudian death drive as a return to the inanimate state in the image of the dark moment of 'Creation', the darkness in which resided the inorganic mass before its transformation to the organic.[89] However, as Roland Mathias has pointed out, these lines are also set in the context of a challenge to darkness.[90] They voice a desire to rise from the dark, paradoxically 'burning' chaos, into creative fulfilment:

> And in the dark the sensitive blind hands
> Fashion the burning pitch of night
> In lovely images of dawn.

(ll. 118-120)

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[89] Freud, *Beyond The Pleasure Principle* [1920], in *Standard Edition,* XVIII ([1920-1922] 1955), pp. 7-64. Freud identifies the death instinct as a desire to 'restore an earlier state of things [...] the most universal endeavour of all living substance – namely to return to the quiescence of the inorganic world': it thus stands in opposition to the life instinct in a perpetual struggle. Moreover, he claims that the instinct for death 'was brought into being by the coming to life of inorganic substances' (p. 63). This expresses the coexistence of life and death and the dialectical tension implicit in this principle. Lewis's allusion to the 'darkness of Creation' provides a discernible hint of this.
[90] Mathias, 'The Black Spot in the Focus' [1980], p. 47.

Mathias further argues that this image resonates with that of God standing alone on the brink of creating man out of the void.[91] Such a reading is persuasive, but it invites a caveat: the closing lines of the poem arguably undermine any certainty that the 'dawn' has prevailed. Instead, they offer an ambivalent fulfilment:

> The soldiers' frozen sightless eyes
> End the mad feud. The worm is love.

(ll. 119-120)

The vacancy of the dead is correlated with release from the darkness of existence and contestation as an act of love, perhaps prefiguring the 'last kindness' of 'The Jungle', but the 'worm' is, nevertheless, an associate of death, a subversive inflection within the speaker's consolatory gesture and final appeasement.[92] Furthermore, the word 'frozen' perpetuates the sightlessness: the subjective voice has indeed crossed the 'frontiers of darkness', only to find there is no respite from the darkness that relentlessly pursues. In the poem's conclusion, as Mathias says, darkness as configured here and elsewhere in Lewis's canon 'may therefore imply the non-apprehension of immediate meaning', a darkness that must be penetrated and which suggests a more inclusive kind of death than the physical cessation of life.[93] Like Lewis's 'enmity within', of which death and darkness are interconnected constituents, 'Threnody for a Starry Night' testifies to an encompassing, uneasy inter-flux between life and death, meaning and non-meaning, and the poet's inherent realisation that, as Mathias expresses it, 'the battle was always where one was'.[94]

John Davies remarks in his relatively brief but searching examination of Lewis's poetry that in its 'all-pervasive imagery' it constitutes 'a testament of darkness', and that in India, in a fusion of poetic style and content, 'the darkness was to become integral to Lewis's world'. He further posits that the darkness, whether in its literal configuration as night or as a

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[91] *Ibid*., p. 50.
[92] Lewis, *Collected Poems*, p.158, l. 99.
[93] *Ibid*., p. 52.
[94] *Ibid*., p. 44.

metaphor for death, fear, uncertainty or – by implication – any other layer of experience, 'has a presence of its own'.[95] It is a convincing argument, albeit confined mainly and, I feel, slightly misleadingly, to poetry borne out of the Indian experience. Notwithstanding this qualifying reservation, he also makes a judgement that I believe applies virtually to Lewis's entire poetic output, namely that the poems are

> frequently charged with deep-rooted apprehension at, and fascinated expectancy of, a death which is an immediate, not a comfortably distant, possibility.

 He adds that Lewis was

> fully engaged with the implications of that possibility, integral to which is his concept of a death of one's own which grows organically from a man's character and experience.[96]

Both statements could equally apply to Keith Douglas. However, to this I would add that it is not just an apprehension of physical death that, alongside his inescapable ambivalence, 'grows organically' in both Lewis and his work, but the other, diverse variants of death that are layered in his multivalent 'darkness'. In his last letter to Gweno in February, 1944, he wrote that '[T]he darkness and threats are from another part of ourselves'.[97] It is a statement, framed in the consolatory hope of ultimate reunion with his wife, in which he recognized his own Otherness, his own divided Self of which an equally multifaceted darkness was part.

Lewis's configurations of death do not simply constitute an expression of fear of his own mortality, of course, and to illustrate this I wish to return briefly to 'The Sentry' (1940).[98] Earlier, in Chapter 2, this poem was discussed in relation to Keith Douglas's beast, his 'black care'. In this present examination, I point out other forms of darkness that occupy the interplay between life and death and which are embodied within the language from the outset. The opening lines reverberate with layers of meaning that belie the surface calm of the speaker's simple declaration:

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[95] Davies, *Anglo-Welsh Review*, 19.43, p. 177.
[96] *Ibid*., p. 180.
[97] Lewis, *In The Green Tree',* p. 80.
[98] Lewis, *Collected Poems*, p. 28.

> I have begun to die.
> For now at last I know
> That there is no escape
> From night.

<div align="right">(ll. 1-4)</div>

The lines proceed, still calmly, but resonating with a sense of separation, to articulate a loss that while seemingly alluding to lovers outside the speaking self is, in reality, a recollection of another self of the past, locked in his sleepless 'cold shore of thought' (l. 16). As Lewis moves through repetition of his first sentence towards his 'black interim' (l. 19) and closure on the lone word, 'Night' (l. 21), the opening lines above unfold their complexity more clearly. The poem, a dramatic monologue which deceptively invests the subjective 'I' with poetic impersonality, iterates a profound displacement of soul in which 'Night' is surely inclusive of death itself, but also of a darkness that connotes selfhood sliding into liminality and a loss of its bearings. It is rich in ambivalence, itself a recursive element of Lewis's metonymic darkness. Death as mortality is held in the speaker's focus, but the darkness of the 'Night', the isolated word that constitutes the final line, is the nexus of separation, aloneness, and of the loss of existential and universal meaning. In a deceptively simple unification of form and content, its heavy cadence and its position enact the solitude that death and darkness, in their material and non-material forms, bring. Lewis's focus on death thus yields a paradox: the quest for meaning involved his confrontation with and penetration of darkness and death in order to cast a 'spotlight' on and thus reaffirm life. 'The Sentry' expresses the sacrifice of love, beauty and inner meaning to the darkness that is inclusive of rather than confined solely to death itself, but in so doing it articulates the profound worth of that which is being lost.

The poetry of these early war years configures death in so many instances, and the ache of loss resounds throughout, nowhere more plangent than in 'Odi et Amo' (1940).[99] Here, death is first conceived as Christ's ultimate sacrifice, now repeating itself in the human waste of war:

> Did the anxious eyes of pain
> Bravely bear the stigmata
> Of the christ in us, the livid
> Weal of history bleeding in us again?

<div align="right">(ll. 6-9)</div>

The sacrifice, an act of love, is expressed in tones of uncertainty: mankind bleeds within, surely from the eponymous hate that war engenders, and love's triumph must be hard-won. Birth and death coalesce in the fifth stanza, still framed as a continuation of the speaker's questions, to express the paradox of Christ's beginning and end:

> The terrible anguish of the birth
> That could not be prevented and the death
> That must die, and the peace
> That was dreamed of in the beginning?

<div align="right">(ll. 18-21)</div>

The lines embrace a palpable ambivalence, connoting also history's repetition of death and the shattered dream of hoped-for peace.

In Section II, the speaker identifies himself, yet somehow, despite the repetitive, emphatic use of 'my', intimates an unassimilated persona, the self almost apprehended in detachment, as acknowledged earlier in Chapter 1:

> My body does not seem my own
> Now. These hands are not my own
> That touch the hair-spring trigger, nor my eyes
> Fixed on a human target, nor my cheek
> Stroking the rifle butt; my loins
> Are flat and closed like a child's.

<div align="right">(ll. 22-27)</div>

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[99] Lewis, *Collected Poems*, pp. 31-32.

Keith Douglas could accommodate his role as killer through ostensibly detached objectivity and submersion of guilt and complicity: Lewis, by contrast, articulates the speaker's self-division, his apprehension of his otherness as an agent of death, and his impotence to create. In the final two stanzas of the last section, the poetic voice declares its pain in anguished repetitions, the pain of love for the beautiful dead:

> Love cries and cries in me.
> And summer blossoms break above my head
> With all the unbearable beauty of the dead.
>
> (ll. 40-42)

Love has its voice here, but so does the speaker's self-division in the aching energy of the lines. Death's imprint and the 'terrible anguish' cannot dissolve, while death and beauty form an 'unbearable' perpetuity.

So many echoes of 'Odi et Amo' reverberate through the poems written prior to 1943. They are there in the bitter irony that infiltrates 'After Dunkirk' (1940) in which the speaker utters his displacement 'As a refugee' (l. 4), only to add his confession, his darkness of complicity: 'But inwardly I have wept' (l.5).[100] The anathema of killing and politicians' dubious love for humanity converge, breeding a self-loathing that surely implicates the poet-speaker whose faith in mankind lies broken,

> Haggard with thoughts that complicate
> What statesmen's speeches try to simplify:
> Horror of war, the ear half-catching
> Rumours of rape in crumbling towns;
> Love of mankind, impelling men
> To murder and to mutilate; and then
> Despair of man that nurtures self-contempt
> And makes men toss their careless lives away.
>
> (ll. 19-26)

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[100] Lewis, *Collected Poems,* pp. 39-40 (p. 39).

In this one hears a chord that chimes with 'From a Play' (1940) in which confession is couched in terms of the collective 'We'.[101] It is a deflection of emphasis in which the speaker's personal guilt is still legible:

> We are the little men grown huge with death.
> Stolid in squads or grumbling on fatigues,
> We held the honour of the regiment
> And stifled our antipathies.
> Stiff-backed and parrot-wise with pamphlet learning,
> We officiated at the slaughter of the riverine peoples
> In butcheries beyond the scope of our pamphlets.
> We had certain authority for this;
> Not ours, but Another's;
> Our innocence remained with us.

(ll. 1-10)

The language resonates audibly with irony, exposing the condemnation of the received wisdom of government discourse and heightening the underlying darkness of guilt and complicity in the butchery perpetrated in the name of the State. The opening testifies to a paradox: diminished humanity is figuratively 'huge with death', while the officialese of 'certain authority', and the capitalized 'Another's', further accentuate the irony concentrated in 'Our innocence'.

The speaker now voices a dual recognition: though he stands in the 'shadows' (l. 15) cast by his inner and outer darkness, he simultaneously experiences an epiphany, a sudden awareness that

> some fantastic longing took us
> With love for people of another world.

(ll. 16-17)

It is a moment suffused with compassion but one which leads to his divination of 'our lonely destiny' (l. 26). Furthermore, the italicized line that follows harbours a presentiment of death for the speaker, too. Its isolation as its own stanza darkens its foreboding.

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[101] Lewis, *Collected Poems,* pp. 41-42.

> *And no returning.*

<div align="right">(l. 27)</div>

As he finally reflects on the unfailing vision of his homeland, the speaker once more expresses his diminished selfhood. His words reiterate the complicity of those who bring death while perhaps foreshadowing the taint of imperialism that permeates the 'dark inherited disease' Lewis would discern in India.[102]. The weight of responsibility is heavy and unrelenting, though shared:

> And now, on moonlit nights, we keep on seeing
> Our faint familiar homeland
> In a rainbow of disease,
>
> And all the good lads there that died for luck.

<div align="right">(ll. 31-34)</div>

Ironically, it was in India that Alun Lewis's quest for meaning in all his darkness would find new direction, and in which he would find a new dimension to his compassion for the living, the dead, and those who carried death with them in the poverty of their existence. In 'The Jungle', Lewis discerns 'the black spot in the focus' as a darkness that 'grows and grows':[103] it is an image that surely encapsulates the multiple configurations and inclusivity of the darkness in which the poet sought both meaning and something like peace in self-unification. Nor was that quest confined solely to his poetic journey. His prose, too, repeatedly visits the interplay of life and death and in his exquisite story, 'The Orange Grove' (1943), he offers us an intimation of death as both a physical end and a promise of new life, new meaning. The narrative conveys consummation through death, both real and metaphorical, in which the protagonist, Beale, in the course of being driven deep into dark terrain, is forced to examine himself and either to seek a hold on identity or surrender it. His driver having died, he unintentionally stalls his truck in a 'deep and wide' river, almost

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[102] Lewis, 'Home Thoughts from Abroad', *Collected Poems*, p. 139, l. 21.
[103] Lewis, 'The Jungle', in *Collected Poems*, pp. 155-158 (p. 156, l. 46).

Stygian in its darkness and threat.[104] As he faces his dilemma and freighted with the burden of carrying his dead companion, Beale meets and finds ultimate salvation and apparent renewal in the gypsies to whom he surrenders the body. In turn, he surrenders himself and joins them in their nomadic journey.

Pikoulis, commenting on the story, speaks of the central character's divestation of his former self as he seeks a reformation of selfhood in the jungle.[105] It is the moment, a symbolic one, in which the officer, Beale, yields the body of his dead driver to the gypsies whose life represents, for him, a nomadic and cosmic liberation in a journey to some indeterminate place, 'perhaps to some pasture, some well'.[106] As Ian Hamilton has observed, that moment can be seen as Beale handing over the corpse as 'a figure of Beale's own mortality [...] as he clings to his own doomed life'.[107] The judgement is surely accurate, substantiated as I believe in an earlier moment in the story where, in a subtly controlled passage of free indirect discourse, the narrative reads:

> He carried the deadweight back up the road, sweating and bitched by the awkward corpse, stumbling and trying in vain to straighten himself. What a bloody mess, he kept saying; I told him not to go and get eggs; did he have to get eggs for supper? It became a struggle between himself and the corpse, who was trying to slide down off his back and stay lying on the road. He had half a mind to let it have its way.[108]

The prose articulates more than Beale's physical burden: the struggle is between coexistent life and death, between the implicit interplay of 'himself', the living consciousness, and the dead that is carried both within and without.

Just as with Keith Douglas, therefore, Lewis also reveals a profound grasp of the coexistence and inter-flux of opposite modes of being. Furthermore, the passage above indicates that India, if not war alone, opened his mind to another form of darkness, not dissimilar to that which is also present, sometimes implicitly, in Douglas's work. In its heavy

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[104] Lewis, 'The Orange Grove', in *Collected Stories*, pp. 213-225 (p. 223).
[105] Pikoulis, 'The Way Back', p. 162.
[106] Lewis, *Collected Stories*, p. 225.
[107] Hamilton, 'Biographical Introduction', p. 54.
[108] Lewis, *Collected Stories,* p. 219.

tonality, the passage is a testimony to the guilt and complicity Beale feels in the driver's death, a burden expressed earlier as the narrator voices the officer's thoughts:

> He felt guilty. Guilty of neglect and duty, having slept at his post? [...] What could he have done about it? The driver had been murdered. What did they expect him to do?[109]

The guilt is also interlaced with the complicity of colonialism and the adoption of the officer's responsibility that sat so uneasily with Lewis himself. Furthermore, the uncertainty that resides in 'half a mind' above foreshadows the ultimate moment of letting go in which Beale himself reaches a new state of identity amongst the gypsies, a moment in which, as Pikoulis expresses it, 'death became rebirth, the isolate self found a community, a context in which to ground itself'.[110] The act of handing over the dead body is for Beale a redemptive relinquishing of his other self and, ostensibly, an act of compassion, but the narrator's words resonate with profound ambiguity: 'He would be all right now, even if they burned him.'[111] It is detectable in the predicative 'He', and in the objective 'him' that these pronouns can stand both for the dead driver and the speaker, so justifying Hamilton's judgement. Thus, Beale's surrender of his burden enacts the ambivalence of abandonment or extinction of one's known self in favour of another less burdened, free self, in a future cast in uncertainty. However uncertain, it is nevertheless for him a consummation, an emotional and existential synthesis. Ambivalently, what seems a selfish act is, by intention, an act of selflessness and, notwithstanding the expressed uncertainty, a desired discovery of meaning in the darkness of death and the shedding of burdens.

Earlier, in Chapter 2, I have argued that 'Burma Casualty' (1943), in its delineation of 'The Beast' (l. 22), presents us with an image tantalisingly redolent of Keith Douglas's 'bête noire', and offers shifting though arguably intertwined connotations.[112] It is also a poem that

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[109] Lewis, *Collected Stories*, p. 220.
[110] Pikoulis, in 'The Way Back', p. 163.
[111] Lewis, *Collected Stories*, p. 225.
[112] Lewis, *Collected* Poems, pp. 146-148.

in the interplay of form and content enacts the dialectical relationship between life and death and the epistemological interchange between death and darkness. Arguably, more than any other of Lewis's poems, it constitutes and enacts an exploration of the shifting frontiers between death and darkness, of the consciousness seeking to dissolve blurred distinctions and confirm meaning:

> Lying in hospital he often thought
> Of that darkness, whence it came
> And how it played the enchantress in a grain
> Of morphia or a nodding of the head
> Late in the night and offered to release
> The Beast that breathed with pain and ran with pus
> Among the jumping fibres of the flesh.[113]

(ll. 17-23)

If these lines convey a wish for the annealing power of darkness, be it in 'morphia' (l. 20) or death, as the poem progresses it is the trope of 'darkness' that takes over, haunting the speaker's shifting attention as he places himself in the stricken man's pain. Its relation to Lewis's beast and inner battle cannot be overlooked here, precisely because of the fluidity of its presence and signification. As we proceed to stanza 4 the beast is unequivocally present as death, but unlike stanza 3 where one senses an anaesthetic repose, these lines now also express fear, all the more palpable because of the placement of dread within the framework of stoical direct speech juxtaposed with parenthetic free indirect discourse:

> 'Your leg must go. Okay?' the surgeon said.
> 'Take it' he said. 'I hate the bloody thing.'
> Yet he was terrified – not of the knives
> Nor losing] that green leg (he'd often wished
> He'd had a gun to shoot the damned thing off)
> But of the darkness that he knew would come
> And bid him enter its deep gates alone.

(ll. 26-32)

The prevailing pulse of these lines is found in the word 'terrified' (l. 28) and its epistemological source in the certainty of the darkness that is unmistakably death, 'the

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[113] Lewis, *Collected Poems,* p. 146.

darkness he knew would come' (l. 31), now only thinly veiled as the sleep of anaesthesia.

Moreover, the final word of the stanza hangs heavily, 'alone': the fear imbricates oblivion

and solitude, so often recursively present in Lewis's poetry.

As the speaker moves into the fifth stanza, the context of medically-induced darkness

recovers its privileged place, though still interlaced with death's presence:

> The nurse would help him and the orderlies.
> But did they know? And could a rubber tube
> Suck all that darkness out of lungs and heart?

(ll. 33-35)

This darkness is ominously modified by 'all', denoting its profundity and multiple presence.

Furthermore, the poetic voice pivots on two questions that are implicitly rhetorical, almost

conveying a dialogic mode. They stand as expressions of the uncertainty that besets the pre-

operative patient and, more palpably, as intimations of answers already known. Beneath the

interrogative gesture lies the implicit suspicion that those in whose hands he is placed cannot

'know' the inner pain and enmity, the 'darkness' that suffuses his being. It is unquestionably

a configuration of a malignity far more profound and complex than the gangrene that

suppurates. Almost unobtrusively, the 'Beast' of stanza 3 has gradually fused with the dark

enchantress and the latter has drawn all the pain and shadow of death into herself.[114] As the

rest of stanza 5 unfolds, the darkness is framed against 'whitewashed walls' and 'a brilliant

light above his head' (ll. 38-39), the polarities coalescing into an angelic vision that

metamorphoses '[t]he nurse' (l. 33) into his wife, momentarily offering epiphanic relief from

the void:

> Here was the light, the promise hard and pure,
> His wife's sweet body and her wilful eyes.
> Her timeless love stooped down to raise him up.

(ll. 40-42)

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[114] This may reflect what Poole had in mind but which, as I have indicated earlier, he reads pre-emptively, locating this coalescence, wrongly in my opinion, in ll. 17-23 of the poem.

Presence and absence, material and abstract, fuse in the patient's gathering delirium, but what dominates is the configuration of light as 'the promise' (l. 40). Its ambivalence interlaces the imagined salve of the beloved's regenerative embrace with the darkness that now brings self-extinction:

> Then through the warped interstices of life
> The darkness swept like water through a boat
> In gouts and waves of softness, claiming him...

(ll. 47-49)

This is a magnificent evocation of the clinically induced moment, captured as 'the needle pricked' (l. 41), in which consciousness crosses the boundary to the unconscious, but it also presents the speaker's intimation of a more lasting departure. The fear of darkness is anaesthetized, not extinguished. The two elided, declarative lines that follow, a discrete stanza that separates induced sleep from the speaker's post-operative waking, reiterate the word 'alone':

> He went alone: knew nothing: and returned
> Retching and blind with pain, and yet Alive.

(ll. 50-51)

The journey from consciousness to unconsciousness is swift and insentient: the return to consciousness fraught with pain. Time is elided, as is the speaker's declaration, 'knew nothing', while the moment of agonised, blind' waking is redolent of a birth, its realization intensified in the capitalized final word 'Alive', a haunting half-echo of 'alone'. In this one senses a deception: the darkness still hovers in the renewal of the conscious self. The speaker's language thus functions as an oppositional mechanism, shifting between and differentiating its significations, destabilizing the positive affirmation in 'yet Alive'.

The poem moves towards closure in its fourth section, beginning in the penultimate stanza with the speaker's recollection of the patient's gradual restoration:

> Mending, with books and papers and a fan

> Sunlight on parquet floors and bowls of flame
> He heard quite casually that his friends were dead,
> His regiment too butchered to reform.
> And he lay in the lightness of the ward
> Thinking of all the lads the dark enfolds
> So secretly.

<div align="right">(ll. 52-58)</div>

Ian Hamilton posits that 'Lewis's stand against the futility of war can often be hysterical and trite'.[115] If this is at all justifiable elsewhere, it is certainly not validated here. The sense of futility is implicit, muted yet tangible. Even the directness of 'butchered' avoids hysteria: it is an apt declaration of fact in which triteness is only conspicuous by its absence. Furthermore, despite the conversational tone and casual framing of the announcement, the sibilance and the isolation of the last two words offer no anodyne concealment to the speaker's quiet reaffirmation of the darkness of death, of war that butchers and the 'dark' that enfolds. This darkness has become a soldier's incipient, lurking familiar.

In his remarkable poem, 'How to Kill' (1943), Keith Douglas identifies his 'familiar' as he kills his enemy, expressing the moment with almost excited, startled detachment:

> The wires touch his face: I cry
> NOW. Death, like a familiar, hears
>
> and look, has made a man of dust
> of a man of flesh. This sorcery
> I do.[116]

The killer speaks as fascinated witness rather than perpetrator, almost proud of his discovery, urging us in the imperative 'look' to share the fascination, but this, too, is a deception: the tension between pride and guilt lies within the language, subverting its ostensible testimony to jubilation and setting the speaker's language against itself. The 'familiar' is here construed as a demon and, furthermore, servant to its master who has learned how to kill and exercise

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[115] Hamilton, 'The Forties', *Poetry Chronicle,* p. 63.
[116] Douglas, *The Complete Poems*, p. 119, ll. 11-14.

his power to turn men to dust.[117] Lewis, too, had conceptualized death in these terms whilst undergoing officer training: in a letter to Richard Mills written two weeks before graduation he had stated:

> Now why, with such a prospect [...] should I feel this presentiment of nothingness? [...] Because I see things going ineluctably the wrong way? Because I feel the proximity of that familiar of men, Death?[118]

The enfolding dark of 'Burma Casualty' is an enactment of that nihilistic 'proximity', no less demonic than Douglas's 'familiar'. It is, too, a constituent of Lewis's 'enmity within' that constitutes the nexus of inner and outer conflict. The trope of 'darkness' is now an annihilating power, cruelly claiming lives. The ward's material 'lightness' cannot combat the casualty's confrontation with abstract darkness, the insidiously secret familiar that butchers comrades beyond reconstitution. War invests all soldiers with the power to call up that darkness, either as killer or victim, and one senses that the 'Mending' that opens the stanza has offered only a deceptive and temporary respite and that to be alive now adds the spectre of guilt to consciousness and recovery. It is the same incipient sense of shame at one's own continued existence that we discern in the character of Brownlow-Grace in Lewis's story, 'Ward "O"3(b)' (1943), though there it is framed within the injured patient's sense of his distortion and transformation as an amputee while those who have died retain their selfhood in death.[119] As the narrator says of Brownlow-Grace's maiming experience of Burma, 'He was the only officer to come out alive. He felt ashamed of that sometimes'.[120] In the poem, however, the experience of shame is presented within a darker complexity: the hitherto discussed relevance of the 'Beast' remains. It has unequivocal being, having 'breathed' with

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[117] In this context the term 'familiar' reflects its medieval derivation as a bonded demon servant (then in animal form), granted by the devil to its master to assist in his sorcery. The online *Oxford English Dictionary* defines 'familiar' as 'a demon supposed to be in association with or under the power of a man', while *Roget's Thesaurus* links the word to terms such as 'devil', 'imp of Satan', 'power of darkness' and 'damned spirit'. These connotations clearly resonate with Douglas's configuration in 'How to Kill'.

[118] Hamilton, 'Biographical Introduction', pp. 33-34.

[119] Lewis, *Collected Stories*, pp. 197-212.

[120] *Ibid.*, p. 199.

a pain that has conflated physical agony and fear, both of the known and the unknown. Now, that pain is inclusive of yet another burden, another darkness, namely the speaker's own conscience; not the guilt of complicity which can haunt the killer combatant, but of the survivor in the midst of death.

It is here, as he articulates contemplation of the gap between life and death in the remaining lines of the poem, that Lewis, in a strategy noted earlier in Chapter 1, more conspicuously seems to fuse speaker and the objective 'he' as one: identities coalesce and discourse moves freely and indirectly into the following realization:

> And yet a man may walk
> Into and through it, and return alive.

(ll. 59-60)

'Into and through' defines the nature of this darkness as external and enfolding, now grasped as if by one imagination speaking for two, even more clearly felt in the next lines:

> Why had his friends all stayed there, then?
> He knew.
> The dark is a beautiful singing sexless angel
> Her hands so soft you scarcely feel her touch
> Gentle, eternally gentle, round your heart.
> She flatters and unsexes every man.

(ll. 61-66)

Here one must return to the subject of Lewis's 'Beast'. The genitive 'his' and the impersonality of 'every man' in the lines above do not deceive: as Richard Poole aptly states, 'Lewis [...] is not only giving the reaction of his soldier to the beast but his own response within the terms the poem explores'.[121] Despite Poole's earlier misplaced connection between 'Beast' and 'enchantress, here they *have* seemingly conflated, now framed in the configuration of the dark as 'it' and confirming the increasingly discernible shifts of connotation in the trope. A parallel coalescence is also perceptible as the dialogic voice of

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[121] Poole, *Welsh Connection*, p. 157

speaker and soldier articulates both question and answer as expressions of one mind, as Poole's reading implies. However, this apparent contiguity of beast and darkness is now subverted in a further shift: the speaker ends with an unequivocal declaration that signifies his 'Beast' remains with him and his casualty in the precariousness of their continuum.

It is in the closing couplet that the poem's trajectory achieves its ultimate clarity. The certainty asseverated in 'He knew' is unmistakable, a declaration that surely melds the third person 'He' and the speaker himself. Moreover, this 'dark' now reiterates that which earlier was the 'enchantress', clearly configuring death once again as feminised: the genderless 'it' that men may both enter and emerge from has changed to 'she', though paradoxically configured as a 'sexless angel'. Lewis's dark siren, as Richard Poole says, 'promises a kind of sensuous extinction' to the survivor who 'cannot feel that he has held on to something superior to that to which his comrades have succumbed'.[122] This is an enticing verdict and one which seems strongly validated in the poem's closing couplet:

> And Life is only a crude, pigheaded churl
> Frowsy and starving, daring to suffer alone.

(11. 66-67)

The heavy toll of the last word once more reiterates the speaker's pain of solitude: survival means 'daring' to confront one's burden 'alone' and those who 'stayed there' in the darkness have seemingly made the better journey. Thus, a further signification emerges, now destabilizing any potential perception of beast and darkness as one. The speaker's 'Beast' has finally survived the 'darkness' that provides the ultimate, alluring alternative to solitary suffering, death itself. Only this can dissolve enmity and the mind's dark compression. It brings release while 'Life' embodies the speaker's final conception of himself as lowly and ill-smelling, obstinately held in the anathema of existence. The preference for extinction is profoundly implicit, and he is left with a pain that imbricates loss, guilt and solitude. In

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[122] Poole, *Welsh Connection,* p. 156.

short, he is left with 'Life' as his beast. In its diffraction from speaker to the casualty, the poem achieves a degree of impersonality, but the shifting significations that are detected in the tropes of 'Beast' and 'darkness' culminate in the powerful intimation that Lewis's own poetic journey is here leading him towards embracing the unknown, the seductive beyond in which the doomed soldiers have 'stayed', and which offers something that transcends a self, locked in its own dark enmity. The 'Beast' thus remains in the textual reality of the speaker's consciousness.

If 'Burma Casualty' leaves us with a sense of Lewis's own susceptibility to the seductiveness of death, it also communicates unresolved conflicts that reverberate sonorously in its final, suspended word, 'alone'. The poetic voice may acknowledge continuation as 'daring to suffer', but cannot hide the underlying ethical crisis, what Cathy Caruth, referring to Lacan's reading of Freudian theory of trauma, describes as the 'ethical burden of survival'.[123] The speaker's survival has intersected with the moment of discovery of the butchery of his regiment, thus mobilizing his own desire for death. Moreover, the burden emanates from this as a psychic shock, the realisation that while war implies the perpetual threat of death, his survival delays this fate. As Caruth posits in her analysis of Freud's examination of war neurosis, '[t]he shock of the mind's relation to the threat of death is [...] not the direct experience of the threat, but precisely the *missing* of this experience'.[124] Lewis's speaker articulates that shock, discernible through the 'casual' disclosure of death, the experience he has missed. His closing personification of 'Life' as a 'pigheaded churl' is thus more than a condemnation of the world conjoined with an affirmation of the preferred Unknown: it tacitly articulates the guilt that interlaces survival with a failed responsibility to others, recognised in what Caruth calls the 'foundational moment of consciousness', that

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[123] Cathy Caruth, 'Traumatic Awakenings (Freud, Lacan and the Ethics of Memory)', in *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), pp. 91-112 (p. 109).
[124] Caruth, in 'Traumatic Departures', *Unclaimed Experience*, p. 62. The comment is made in reference to Freud's work, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* [1920], and seems particularly pertinent to my reading of Lewis's poem.

instant in which the 'conscious self' imagines its relationship to the death of others.[125] Furthermore, the image intimates that this is a responsibility that might be construed ambivalently: it adumbrates the soldier's duty to remain with his men but entails, too, the speaker's failed and more profound obligation to have 'stayed' in the darkness and succumbed to the emasculating 'sexless angel'. The poem is thus performative of the struggle within the poet to resolve the contestation between the burden of survival and the allure of death, and its closing stanza is the most articulate site of this interaction.

Just as Keith Douglas felt his 'beast [was] winning,' so also does Lewis's inner contestation discussed earlier as his 'enmity within' remain lingeringly unresolved here.[126] The poem's conclusion is an evocation of one suspended in isolation and insecurity, in the prevailing image of his own alienation from the Otherness for which he longs. John Glover has stated, that 'war involved the individual and yet it was often an alienating, looking glass world'.[127] Lewis's speaker remains apart in his self-reflexive world, estranged from his dead comrades, and his final declaration, despite its tone of detached judgement, cannot conceal the poet's self-identification as one caught in the nexus of his own inner dialectic and in the gap that separates him from the unifying Otherness of death. The poet-speaker confronts his own predicament, thus expressing both an ethical and an ontological lack of fixity. The words of Emmanuel Levinas surely echo this predicament:

> The Other becomes my neighbour precisely through the way the face summons me, calls for me, begs for me, and in so doing recalls my responsibility and calls me into question.[128]

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[125] *Ibid.,* p. 143. Caruth uses this term in relation to her discussion of Lacan's interpretation of Freud's analogy of the dream of the burning child and its significance to the father's trauma as helpless witness, an event which manifests as an awakening from a recursive dream, re-enacting trauma. She thus explains this story, taken from Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams*, as 'the story of an impossible responsibility of consciousness in its own originating relation to others, and specifically to the deaths of others' (p. 104). See Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams* [1900], in *Standard Edition*, V ([1900-1901] 1953), pp. 339-632.

[126] Douglas, *The Complete Poems*, p. 129.

[127] Glover, in *Poetry Nation*, p. 69.

[128] Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being: or, Beyond Essence*, trans, by Alphonso Lingis (Boston: Kluwer Academic, 1981), p. 83.

Death, in the speaker's final realization, is a transcendent 'Other' that leaves the survivor divided: he endures, desiring 'eternally gentle', sublime extinction, yet trapped between the haunting consciousness of responsibility to have 'stayed' and the burden of continued existence. Jacqueline Banerjee sees this moment as a confirmation of death and the beyond as 'enticing peace'.[129] In terms of liberation from guilt, this is a feasible reading. However, in the poem's closing lines there lingers an ambivalence that subverts the peace that she discerns. Survival affirms life, but it perpetuates a sense of failure to cross the frontier to what is sensed as an ethical obligation and 'preternatural responsibility', a darkness shared.[130]

To confront death seems increasingly to have become a means of enlightenment for Alun Lewis, and, as identified earlier, it is in the work that he produced in transit to or in India that this emerges with an increasing emphasis upon compassion for the living in whom death and darkness reside, both literally and metaphorically. 'Burma Casualty', in both form and subject, performs the struggle to extract meaning from shifting and interchanging levels of darkness; as such, it acts as a bridge towards that compassion and enlightenment, an epistemological and spiritual enlargement that his prose also articulates. Lewis's stories exemplify this new dimension of understanding with vivid realism combined with figurative and emotional power. It therefore seems opportune to turn again briefly to some of them now, firstly to 'The Earth is a Syllable' (1943), in which, describing the wounded protagonist's final effort to rise above his pain, the narrator states 'he wanted to get up and enter the darkness' [...].[131] The words express more than the delirium and the vision of reunion with the man's beloved that their context defines; they suggest, too, a consummation

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[129] J. Banerjee, in 'Seeking and Still Seeking', p. 114.

[130] Pikoulis, in 'The Way Back', p. 146. The author here focuses on Lewis's response to war and on the 'ceaseless attention' on death and life, or 'rather their shadows', that it 'commanded' in him. The poem voices that responsibility as more than an obligation to the living.

[131] Lewis, *Collected Stories*, pp. 192-196 (p. 196).

of meaning 'in the common ground of humanity',[132] perhaps akin to the calm the wounded

Weston experiences as he dips his hand into the hospital lily-pond in 'Ward "O"3(b)' (1943):

> And he felt glad to-night, feeling some small salient gained when for many reasons the men whom he was with were losing ground along the whole front to the darkness that there is.[133]

The latter, particularly, is both a symbolic and an epistemological moment that voices

Lewis's own challenge to darkness and the emptiness of death, a struggle that intensified

throughout his journey, as his later works testify. One senses in the narrative above both

Weston's and Lewis's own increasing awareness of a cosmic darkness that has being,

particular and universal, one that emerges even more as Lewis penetrated the depths of

India's inescapable poverty, uncovering both his own inner disquiet and his intensifying

awareness of 'the slow poison of a meaning lost'.[134] The story embodies this quest for

meaning in 'darkness'. The pond's ripples 'surging against [...] the inmost ledges of his

being, like a series of temptations in the wilderness' are reminders both of Weston's mortality

and his temporary triumph over it, but – in the accompanying compassion he feels for his

friend, the dying Moncrieff, – there resides the insecurity of that triumph: '[a]nd then he

looked away again, not willing to consider those empty, inarticulate eyes'.[135] Unlike the eyes

of the staring dead that inhabit Keith Douglas's imagery, this is the converse, the vacant gaze

of the damaged living. It is the vacancy, the darkness of lost meaning as well as of death that

Weston shrinks from in his compassion.

The way to India was increasingly to become for Lewis a preparation for his dark

awakening to a world further displaced than he had imagined, but in which he envisaged the

hope expressed in 'To Rilke' (1943), a poem completed on his arrival in Bombay and which

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[132] *Ibid.*, p. 195.

[133] *Ibid.*, pp. 197-212 (p. 212).

[134] Lewis, in 'The Jungle', *Collected Poems*, p. 156, l. 42. As discussed in Chapter 2 of this thesis, the metaphor articulates Lewis's implicit sense of guilt and complicity in what he clearly perceives as the unjustified moral rectitude of colonialism.

[135] Lewis, 'Ward "O"3(b)', *Collected Stories*, p. 212.

he had begun in transit whilst he was ill.[136] He had just experienced a dream in which, returning to Wales to Gweno, he discovered her beyond his reach: it was a vision that magnified his sense of estrangement, prompting his realization that 'I had gone back there in the only way possible, the spiritual way, having first passed through the spiritual experience of death'.[137] Separation ambivalently held both fear and mordant understanding for him, yet on completing the poem, his contemplation on Rilke gave him some creative optimism. His persona states:

> I knew that unknown lands
> Were near and real, like an act of birth.

(ll. 23-24)

At this time, Lewis could not yet have fully grasped the implicit irony that, in the unknown, he would experience, through the creative matrix of darkness, the birth of widened understanding and compassion, a further intensity of being that is expressed in this poem as 'that which IS' (l. 30). The journey undertaken was to be to new epistemological and ontological states of awareness which, I believe, confirm John Pikoulis's view, one framed in the context of the 'act of birth' above and his discussion of 'The Orange Grove', that Lewis 'chose to die into the imagination'.[138] In 'The Way Back' (1943), the speaker voices a self-abnegating, all-consuming need that is unmistakably Lewis's own: it is to shed that which the poet himself abhorred, the depersonalizing legacy of soldiery and estrangement:

> But now the iron beasts deploy
> And all my effort is my fate
> With gladiators and levies
> All laconic disciplined men[139]

(ll. 26-29)

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[136] Lewis, *Collected Poems*, pp. 124-125.
[137] The remark is made in Lewis's unpublished journals and quoted in Hamilton, 'Biographical Introduction', p. 44.
[138] Pikoulis, in 'The Way Back', p. 162.
[139] Lewis, *Collected Poems*, pp. 127-128.

Couched in the poem's articulation of the erotic longing of the subjective 'I', it is an admission of the desire for the self to die metaphysically into the beloved, but it also intimates the role of the killer-soldier as a form of death in itself, from which he must be unburdened.[140] Art and the artist surely converge in this. Before any 'birth' of meaning and emotional synthesis could take place for Alun Lewis, yet more profound confrontation with the darkness and death-in-life was to come in a land that harboured malevolence as well as enlightenment in its poverty and its coexistent aridity and 'jungular' wilderness.[141]

In the opening pages of this section I emphasized that Lewis's exploration of death and darkness held the paradox that was intrinsic to his creativity: it simultaneously cast life in its spotlight and illuminated his understanding of the self in its relation to the wider compass of humanity. It was in India that he was to experience this enlargement of vision and awareness most profoundly, where his innate compassion and vexed sense of identity together emerge as increasingly co-existent elements in Lewis's creative response. That response augmented his outward focus upon the visible hardship of a landscape and a people seemingly locked in physical aridity and spiritual indifference. The confrontation with such realities demanded of him a willingness to foreground the world beyond the self and to expose a new dimension to his negative capability. As this chapter draws to a close, therefore, I want to address two of the 'Indian' poems that, for me, express with profound depth the compassion, insight, and even personal guilt and hinted self-recrimination that Lewis discovered in the stark, nihilistic darkness of the sub-continent. In its un-redemptive fusion of indifference and suffering he found an empathetic and epistemological enlargement.

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[140] Carrie Jadud sees in this poem the danger that is posed by the proximity of the beloved 'Burning in the stubborn bone' (l. 10) and the speaker's exultant final desire to be reunited with her. See Jadud, 'Fragile Universe', p. 134.

[141] Lewis, in *Letters To My Wife*, p. 361. On 3 June 1943, Lewis wrote to Gweno, 'am I plunged too soon into this mammoth jungular world of the East, will it rid me of my own-ness, my close absorption in my own love and being?'.

Paradoxically, he simultaneously travelled closer to an extinction of Self, not only in terms of stylistic impersonality, but in his desire to shed his burden of fractured identity.

An element of Lewis's burden, as has earlier been identified, is an implicit guilt that one increasingly detects in the poetic persona. In 'Home Thoughts from Abroad' (1943), the speaker voices his anguished apostrophe to the imperialist Western world of which he is part, words in which we hear his own complicity and his displacement:

> Oh West, your blue nostalgic moods
> Confuse the troubled continents.[142]

<div align="right">(ll. 6-7)</div>

Simultaneously, the language balances tones of compassion with a collective conscience as the observer embraces the stricken prisoners held captive, barely differentiated from his own comrades:

> And boys with dead hands on their knees
> Lie stricken in your scattered tents.

<div align="right">(ll. 10-11)</div>

The 'hands' embody the spiritual lifelessness of the living, soldiers and captives alike, and in the opening of the next stanza, the Manichean symbol of darkness deepens as the speaker, audibly implicated in the collective 'we', augments his admission of complicity and the proximity of death:

> And we who feel the darkness twitch
> With death among the orange trees

<div align="right">(ll. 12-13)</div>

The closing stanza at first seems to voice a longing for the homeland, mixed with a sense of enforced exile, the alienation that becomes the soldiers' obligation and burden, but the final couplet shifts and darkens the focus to confess responsibility for a kind of death, other than the physical, the slow disease of imperialism.

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[142] Lewis, *Collected Poems*, p. 139.

> We surely were not hard to please
> And yet you cast us out. And in this land
> We bear the dark inherited disease
> Bred in the itching warmness of your hand.

<div align="right">(ll. 19-22)</div>

The death that lives in the 'the orange trees' is 'the dark inherited disease' of Western hegemony, poisoning both their fruit and those who are bearers of its legacy. As stated earlier in this thesis, it is intrinsic to Lewis's 'enmity within'. Amitava Banerjee states that in India, Lewis 'was not imaginatively haunted, as Douglas was, with his "bête noire"'.[143] This seems to overlook the diverse forms in which Lewis's psychic fracture manifests itself, not least in his recurrent lack of fixity in the midst of a troubled quest for meaning. Banerjee's view that the poem above is one of Lewis's 'nostalgic reveries'[144] surely fails to grasp its epistemological significance. The poem is etched with a fusion of compassion and guilt in which, too, comes new understanding, a growth of meaning in the speaker's placement of himself within a wider human condition.

'Karanje Village' (1943) further exemplifies this enlargement in Lewis's experience: the opening lines emphasize the elements of existence that evince death and elicit both disgust and human compassion. From the outset, as we are taken, in medias res, to this holy village, the speaker subverts the beauty he had been told to expect:

> The sweeper said Karanje had a temple
> A roof of gold in the gaon:
> But I saw only the long-nosed swine and the vultures
> Groping the refuse for carrion,
> And the burial cairns on the hill with its spout of dust
> Where the mules stamp and graze,
> The naked children begging, the elders in poverty,
> The sun's dry beat and glaze[145]

<div align="right">(ll. 1-8)</div>

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[143] A. Banerjee, *Spirit Above Wars,* p. 162.
[144] *Ibid.,* p. 163.
[145] Lewis, *Collected Poems*, pp. 129-130. The term, 'gaon' is a Hindi word meaning 'village'. See www.irfca.org/docs/place-names.html.

It is a configuration of death-in-life, of the coalescence of beauty and death that progressively descends further into consciousness of 'crumbling hovels' (l. 9), 'monkeys loping obscenely round our smell' (l. 12) (an image that surely links the smell of death with the sweaty stink of soldiery), and the burden of the speaker's corporeality, the inescapability of mortality,

> warning me of the flesh
> That catches and limes the singing birds of the soul
> And holds their wings in mesh.

<div align="right">(ll. 21-24)</div>

The anguish of pity resonates in the final stanza as the speaker deflects from 'me' to the villagers who, in their 'wasted land' (l. 27), are themselves unable to show love to the strangers of whom he is one. It is a subtly disguised moment of impersonality in which their predicament is seemingly seen as something other, outside the speaker's own domain, but this is only a momentary deception:

> But the people are hard and hungry and have no love
> Diverse and alien, uncertain in their hate,
> Hard stones flung out of Creation's silent matrix[.]

<div align="right">(ll. 25-26)</div>

Their lack of love is an amalgam of indifference and uncertainty, of non-understanding perhaps, but in his ability to perceive their uncertain 'hate' one detects a note of sympathetic understanding. These people are 'uncertain' of their own feelings for those whose colonialist presence is cloaked in ambivalence, threatening their independence while posturing as liberators. The lines above are an articulation of new understanding of the self's relationship to the death-in-life witnessed in the obscenity of squalor and the illusory truths of the temple that promised something better.

The closing lines of 'Karanje Village' constitute a question in which thoughts of the speaker's beloved bring to the surface what is surely a confession couched in the

interrogative. It barely conceals an admission of Lewis's own quest for meaning in the hope that she will understand what he has learned:

> And when my sweetheart calls me shall I tell her
> That I am seeking less and less of world?
> And will she understand?

<div align="right">(ll. 28-30)</div>

The words are arguably freighted with the Freudian death wish, but I believe they unfold a further layer of understanding in Lewis's own epistemological quest. His journey constantly testifies to the inseparability of his self-division from the darkness and sense of death he carries within him.

In the darkness and nihilism of India's landscape, Lewis confronted the abjection and life-denying poverty that constitute variants of death. As his poetry testifies, along with his prose, the experience paradoxically intensified his sense of isolation and displacement while mobilizing his emotional synthesis with, and compassion for, the suffering he witnessed. The self-confessed urge to seek less of the world, to shed the burden of the known self and of the dark shadow of complicity in an imperialist war, does not solely intimate an escape in death but a unification in some greater, perhaps transcendental beyond, a self-extinction that he conceived as meaningful peace. Lewis's tenebrous world is one in which the frontiers between death and darkness were gradually fading into meaning.

In this chapter, my aim has been to explore a central, pervasive impulse in the work of both Keith Douglas and Alun Lewis. That impulse is their shared epistemological and ontological quest, their predilection to confront what they perceived as the inter-flux of death, darkness and life. Ceaselessly, their work conveys the compulsion to speak of these elements as they exist around or within them. In the course of this examination, salient similarities and differences emerge. Amongst the former is a shared sense of complicity and self-immersion

in the death in which, as soldier-poets in the clutch of war, they each played a part. Also shared is their mutual desire to understand, to excavate the darkness of death-in-life and find meaning, to complete an epistemological journey and even gain ontological oneness.

For Douglas, to face death was the stimulus to give testimony as witness and to demand that we are all implicated in the act of witnessing. Accordingly, his language resonates with imperatives and the urgency for us to look into the eyes of the dead, to re-enact in language the stare that perpetuates the exact moment in which life dissolves in finality. Alun Lewis's quest does not involve such an imperative, though it is no less enveloping of both his and our consciousness. By contrast with Douglas, his trajectory reveals an unfolding inner as well as outer landscape in which darkness is challenged and some meaning beyond death's finality is sought. The trope of 'darkness' therefore dominates his work with greater density, frequency and polysemy than in Douglas's oeuvre, while the latter configures the physical detritus of war in terms that constantly articulate the complicity of the killer. Indeed, for Douglas, the role of killer is one that fascinates and one with which he identifies. In so doing, his stylistic impulse is to convey death through the mediating lens of detachment − a gunsight, a window or a disembodied eye. For Lewis, there is no mediating lens, nor a desire to confront us with the visceral debris of the battlefield. He is not compelled to dwell on or understand the act of killing and the moment of death. Rather, he expresses a deeper concern to voice the relationship between death and beauty, or to articulate the darkness of the spiritual condition in the landscape through which he travels. It is an internal as well as external exploration of meaning, an epistemological *and* spiritual journey.[146]

To say this does not entirely separate these writers' predilections: each, in his respective differences, reveals a commonality of self-division, of inner burden that threatens

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[146] My emphasis is to underline this spiritual element that, I believe, differentiates Lewis's impulse from that of Keith Douglas.

psychic fracture and, perhaps above all, expresses the capacity to place death and internal darkness in the wider context of the human condition. Keith Douglas also does so, expressed in the undertow of human loss and residual pain for those who survive rather than in the foreground of his vision. It is there in the implicit layers of meaning. For both, death, or darkness, expresses inclusivity, and finds expression in diverse configurations. In Lewis we perhaps sense the inflection of self-elegy more palpably than in Douglas but in the work of each lies the imaginative struggle with the coalescence of life and death both in the inner self and in the external landscape they inhabit.

In overlapping ways, their darker explorations sprang from a quest to express more meaningfully what is so resistant to meaningful articulation: for Douglas, the skeletal reality and finality of death rather than its promise of consolation; for Lewis the deepening sense of an extinction of the self as a movement outwards towards unification, conciliation and inner resolution. In the journey through his multi-layered darkness came a greater selflessness and universal compassion as well as a quest for peaceful release from the pain of survival in an imperfect world. Perhaps in this lies the most pronounced difference in these poets' articulations of death or darkness: each *felt* the survivor's pain, but in Douglas the impulse to submerge it beneath the stance of poetic detachment came naturally, almost from the start. For Lewis, despite a gradual stylistic movement outwards towards greater objectivity, the pain of the inner self, and a deepening compassion for the world he occupied, still remained audible and therefore more clearly palpable. Lewis saw and therefore more openly and audibly chose to express the underlying death and darkness of human suffering, and its cosmic implications. The lingering irony is that, while both, in their respective manifestations of ambivalence, expressed the guilt of the survivor, neither of them did survive the war in which each produced his greatest work. It is, of course, the work that survives and in which, perhaps, they both achieved some sort of triumphant consummation.

Chapter 4

The Exilic Self and "What Survives"

In 1986, Julia Kristeva posited her theory of the exilic nature of writing, expressing it thus:

> Writing is impossible without some kind of exile. Exile is already in itself a form of dissidence, since it involves uprooting oneself from a family, a country or a language.[1]

This concept rests on her belief that the writer necessarily enacts what Roberta Wondrich terms an 'interior, self-imposed exile', an estrangement from those elements of living that arguably constitute normality.[2] In essence, Kristeva's viewpoint defines writing as what Wondrich describes as 'a kind of continuous and deferred homecoming and a practice of displacement', contrasting it with 'the Adornian stance that writing becomes the home of the homeless man'.[3] The following discussion is predicated on my belief that these apparently conflicting arguments emerge, nevertheless, as complementary. Together, they are consonant with the sense of estrangement and displacement that characterizes the exilic experience of both Keith Douglas and Alun Lewis in the defamiliarizing landscapes of the Middle East and the Indian sub-continent, respectively.

To some extent, this sense of separation and dislocation, as acknowledged earlier, pervaded the lives of both men before their wartime exile: Lewis, in the Welsh valleys which sporadically evinced in him a sense both of belonging and self-distance, Douglas within a dysfunctional family background that equally fed his ambivalence and individualism.

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[1] Julia Kristeva, 'A new Type of Intellectual: The Dissident', in *The Kristeva Reader,* trans. Sean Hand and Leon S. Roudiez, ed. Toril Moi (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), p. 298. The original French publication of this essay was in *Tel Quel*, 74, (Winter, 1977), 3-8 as 'Un nouveau type d'intellectuel: le dissident'.

[2] Roberta Gefter Wondrich, 'Exilic Returns: Self and History outside Ireland in Recent Irish Fiction', *Irish University Review,* 30.1, Special issue: Contemporary Irish Fiction, (Spring–Summer, 2000), 1-16, (p. 3), http:www.jstor.org/stable/25517122, accessed 07/12/2013.

[3] Wondrich, *Irish University Review*. The reference to Theodor Adorno's view derives from his work, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from a Damaged Life* (London: Verso, 2005), p. 5. The work is a translation by E. F. N. Jephcott from the German edition, *Reflexionem aus dem Beschädigten Leben* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1951).

Moreover, Kristeva's acknowledgement of exile as being manifest in terms of 'language' seems germane to this thesis. In the writings of both Lewis and Douglas, the language resonates with the struggle to resolve self-division and inner fracture, or to expunge the pain felt in separation from those one loves or has loved. It expresses, too, a profound awareness of spatial, temporal and even ontological dislocations in hostile physical landscapes that intensify a sense of one's vulnerability and that challenge certainties, both in terms of identity and ethical or ideological rectitude.

This chapter thus seeks to examine the place of the 'exilic self' in relation to both Douglas and Lewis. Their respective experiences of exile are inseparably interwoven, not only with the topographical displacement that wartime service thrust upon them, but with their internal landscapes. Furthermore, the dislocations war demanded of both men are bound up in their creative journeys. Such dislocations bear significantly upon the writers' stylistic evolutions and their respective quests for poetic registers that remained truthful to their experience of the external world they lived in. Moreover, Alun Lewis's question, 'what survives of all the beloved[?],' is a self-directed one that is surely intensified in the 'exilic self', the soldier-poet encountering changed realities, dislocated from his own historicity and his private and emotional homeland.[4] The 'beloved' are not only those one has left behind: the word also constitutes a reflexive reference to what 'survives' of the speaking self, what – if anything – remains of the self as once known. The writings remain, of course, but for both Douglas and Lewis, the question of how far identity has changed, how far one's 'fragile universe' has held its centre, is intensified by the exilic journey.[5]

Lewis's passage to and location in India mobilized a deepening of an already compassionate nature and an accompanying outward vision and stylistic objectivity. It also mobilized an ontological journey, a movement towards a transcendental extinction of Self,

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[4] See Lewis, letter to Gweno Lewis, April 1943, in *In the Green Tree*, pp. 29-32 (p. 30).
[5] Lewis, in 'War Wedding', *Collected Poems*, pp. 62-67 (p. 65, l. 96).

however incomplete. Arguably, his actual death was the ironic, possibly deliberate, physical enactment of this. In Douglas's case, a comparable awareness of self-extinction emerges, though not as a metaphysical desire to shed and transcend the known self. Rather, it presents itself in his previously discussed contestation with his recursive and protean 'bête noire', his battle to find unity of identity, to balance life and death, and his deceptive stylistic impersonality that suppresses the subjective voice, though does not obliterate the residual perpetrator conscience or sense of humanity that reside in the spaces and hinterland of language. This chapter, focusing on an analysis of the two poets' treatment of themes of place, love and absence, will seek to demonstrate Kristeva's view that writing is itself performative of exile, at least in its capacity to reflect and enact the intersections, continuities and discontinuities arising from displacement and estrangement.

Part 1: Keith Douglas and Changed Realities

Edward Said has commented that 'Exiles cross borders, break barriers of thought and experience'. Though his context here is specific to those who are conscious of their exilic predicament as one in which 'homes are always provisional', his remark might also be seen to highlight the changed realities that confront an itinerant soldier-poet, far from home.[6] To 'cross borders' implies more than the physical journey, therefore. To do so can challenge one's grasp of identity, disrupt what the mind has held as certainties, or can expose and intensify inner tension, division and vulnerabilities. In Keith Douglas's case, his desert experience, one which he actually sought with both passion and a sense of need, precipitated all these elements of experience as a confrontation with his Otherness, his 'black beast', thereby exposing his own complexity and plurality, as confessed in the words of 'Landscape With Figures 3':

> I am the figure burning in hell
> and the figure of the grave priest
> observing everyone who passed
> and that of the lover. I am all
> the aimless pilgrims, the pedants and courtiers
> more easily you believe me a pioneer
> and a murdering villain without fear
> without remorse hacking at the throat. Yes
> I am all these and I am the craven
> the remorseful the distressed
> penitent.[7]

The lines echo his statement in 1940, in which he likens poetry to

> a man, whom thinking you know all his movements and appearance you will presently come upon in such a posture that for a moment you can hardly believe it a position of the limbs you know. So thinking you have set bounds to the nature of poetry, you shall as soon discover something outside your bounds which they should evidently contain.[8]

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[6] Edward W. Said, in *Reflections on Exile* (London: Granta Books, 2001), p. 185.
[7] Douglas, *The Complete Poems,* p. 111, ll. 1-11.
[8] Douglas, first of 'Two Statements on Poetry', given at an Oxford symposium and originally published in 'On the Nature of Poetry', in *Augury: An Oxford Miscellany of Verse,* (First Edition), A. M. Hardie and Keith Douglas, eds (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1940), pp. 33-37. The extract is reproduced in *Complete Poems*, p. 133.

The comment above gives an indication of Douglas's insight into the transformative nature of poetry, and a hint towards the power of poetic impersonality to expose truths in new ways. It also defines the Otherness and changed reality that confronts the exilic soldier-poet, he who kills and yet loves, who creates and destroys, both epistemologically and ontologically. As Wondrich states, in conditions of exile, place or space become 'a continual reminder of [...] exilic separation and displacement'.[9] The memory of homeland is juxtaposed with the difference and changed reality of the present predicament, thus constituting a transgression of 'barriers of thought and experience', to use Said's terms. Such moments, as in Douglas's case, expose the equation between disruption and creativity, disclosing inner tensions yet feeding the impulse to present the truth of 'significant things'.[10] Moreover, for Douglas, place is configured as the locus of memory, of associated love and loss, of newly discovered meaning, of the fascination with death and killing intermingled with guilt, with hinted fear, or with the quest for purpose, artistic fulfilment and wholeness. It is therefore appropriate to examine, now, some of Douglas's poems that provide insight into such complex responses, and their relevance to the notion of 'the exilic self'.

Douglas's talent developed in tandem with his sense of isolation, albeit accompanied by the desert's divisive challenge to his identity. He contributed to the periodical, *Personal Landscape*, a project whose contributors, as John Press records, 'were acutely conscious of being travellers and exiles'.[11] Yet the sense of isolation one often detects in Douglas's work reaches far more deeply than the characteristic impulse of the 'Personal Landscape Poets' to chart journeys and the mix of beauty, amorality and complex history of an unfamiliar, distant land. In 'Syria' (1942), Douglas establishes a precise topography, but it is instantly configured as the locus of deception, a place of concealed, viperous hostility, masked in a paradoxical beauty:

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[9] Wondrich, *Irish University Review*, p. 7.

[10] See Douglas, letter to J. C. Hall, 10 August 1943, in *The Letters*, pp. 294-295 (p. 295).

[11] John Press, *A Map of Modern English Verse* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 232.

> These grasses, ancient enemies
> waiting at the edge of towns
> conceal a movement of live stones,
> the lizards with hooded eyes
> of hostile miraculous age.[12]

<div align="right">(ll. 1-5)</div>

The towns are peopled with girls of 'velvet beauty' (l. 9), yet what dominates the speaker's consciousness is an extreme sense of his alterity, and of his utter vulnerability to the threat occasioned by his difference, his presence as a soldier exile:

> Here I am a stranger clothed
> in the separative glass cloak
> of strangeness. The dark eyes, the bright-mouthed
> smiles, glance on the glass and break
> falling like fine strange insects.

<div align="right">(ll. 11-15)</div>

Furthermore, it is not only the native girls and the Syrian 'grasses' that embody concealment. The speaker's awareness of estrangement expresses the unique intensity of the exile's perception of antinomies: the beauty of native girls segues into an image of the fragility of his own 'glass' mask of friendship in this place. Correspondingly, the deictically emphatic 'Here' harbours 'the inexorable lizard, / the dart of hatred for all strangers' (ll. 16-17), a presence that penetrates beneath his mask, relentlessly seeking to leave its sting, perhaps even fatally. Images of beauty coalesce with a sense of reciprocal danger, namely that which is felt by the 'stranger', alongside the intimated threat he represents to the native onlookers. Thus, the 'dart' probes the speaker's mask, and

>   finds
> in this armour, proof only against friends,
> breach after breach, and like the gnat is busy
> wounding the skin, leaving poison there.[13]

<div align="right">(ll. 17-20)</div>

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[12] Douglas, *The Complete Poems*, p. 89.

[13] This image arguably prefigures the closing lines of 'How to Kill' in which 'the mosquito death approaches'. See Douglas, *The Complete Poems,* p. 119, l. 24.

The poem articulates a paradox, that of the soldier-exile as a threatening presence to those whose 'bright-mouthed smiles' (l. 13) conceal their own discomfort, even fear, coupled with his own insecurities, what Said expresses as 'the solitude experienced outside the group: the deprivation felt at not being with others in the communal habitation'.[14] In short, it is a poem of un-belonging.

When read in tandem with Douglas's poem, 'These Grasses, Ancient Enemies' (1941),[15] 'Syria', written slightly later, perhaps even more clearly discloses its undercurrent of guilt, that the poet-speaker is aware of the threat inherent in his own presence, despite what Desmond Graham calls Douglas's ostensible 'barrier of indifference'.[16] The earlier poem, alternatively titled 'Syria 1', more overtly configures Syria as a 'hard land' (l. 10), its vegetation only 'vicious scrub' (l. 12), in which

> you think you see a devil stand
> fronting a creature of good intention[17]

<div align="right">(ll. 14-15)</div>

Douglas explicitly constructs the poem around images of ambivalence, the binary oppositions of 'devil and angel' (l. 21) expressing a sense both of the country's duality and perhaps his own as the 'murderer with a lover's face' (l. 19). The country is perceived as a place of antinomies and deceptions in which, with implicit Satanic ambivalence, 'the snake plays' (l. 16), prompting Douglas's characteristic voltaic turn that demands we share in his defining realization:

> But devil and angel do not fight,
> they are the classic Gemini
> for whom it's vital to agree
> whose interdependent state

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[14] See Said, *Exile*, 2001, p. 177.

[15] Douglas, *The Complete Poems*, pp. 87-88.

[16] Graham, *Keith Douglas*, p. 140.

[17] In his biography of Douglas, Desmond Graham indicates that the two poems discussed above should be read together, alternatively titled 'Syria 1' and 'Syria 2'. Somewhat confusingly, it is the later poem, the second of these, termed 'Syria' above, that Graham regards as 'Syria 1' and which, he states, represented a re-imagining of the first, in which rather than focus predominantly on the country's duality as in 'These Grasses, Ancient Enemies', he chose to reveal 'a deeper and more personal response'. See Graham, *Keith Douglas,* p. 140.

this two-faced country reflects.

(ll. 21-25)

That both the speaker and Syria are embodied in 'the classic Gemini' becomes more explicit in the poem's fine closing lines:

> we surely shall
> prove this background's complement
> the kindly visitors who meant
> so well all winter but at last fell
> unaccountably to killing in the spring.

(ll. 26-30)

Within the collective 'we' lies the substantiation of the speaker's own complicity in the guilt of war: exiled from his homeland, he is one of the 'kindly visitors', the soldiers for whom the poem speaks and who, as stated in 'Syria', leave their own 'poison there'. This latter poem thus emerges more clearly, as Graham posits, as a deliberate rewriting of the earlier poem, 'These Grasses, Ancient Enemies', and, as he suggests, a 'more deeply personal response' to exilic space than its precursor.[18]

Robin Fedden, himself a poet and, along with Bernard Spencer and Lawrence Durrell, a co-editor of *Personal Landscape*, has acknowledged that exile in Egypt during wartime was like no other exilic experience. He records that, for the soldier, the absence of winter, whilst otherwise attractive to the tourist, now becomes almost desensitizing, lacking the stimuli of seasonal change: the landscape is 'boneless and unarticulated', other than in the deserts where the debris of war relieves an otherwise 'flat [...] spineless' topography.[19] Yet it is this very lack of definition and change that demands articulation for Douglas, and which intensifies his awareness of, and quest to find meaning in, life and death. As Tim Kendall observes, Douglas perceives the desert as a canvas littered with death, but even more acutely as the locus of his own 'way of looking', unshared except insofar as his desert poetry demands *our*

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[18] Graham, *Keith Douglas*, pp. 139-140.
[19] Robin Fedden, 'An Anatomy of Exile', from the introduction to *Personal Landscape: An Anthology of Exile*, R. Fedden, B. Spencer, L. Durrell, eds (London: Editions Poetry, 1945), pp. 7-11.

complicity as witnesses.[20] In 'Desert Flowers' (1943), it is almost as if only he, in his exilic isolation 'within a wide landscape' (l. 1), can 'see men as trees suffering' (l. 13).[21] This biblical allusion constitutes a moment of spiritual vision, enabling Douglas to 'sing / of what the others never set eyes on' (l. 16).[22] Ironically, this exposes both the fallacy of his earlier remark and homage to his poetic forebear, 'Rosenberg I only repeat what you were saying' (l. 2), and of what so many have construed as Douglas's lack of empathy, so failing to penetrate beyond his impersonality and excavate his awareness of human loss. The eponymous 'flowers' are both the sparse flora and the dead of the desert in which violence attacks the body and mind, a landscape where

> the shell and the hawk every hour
> are slaying men and jerboas, slaying
>
> the mind.

> (ll. 3-4)

The only resurrection possible in this place of death is expressed in ambivalent terms:

> but the body can fill
> the hungry flowers and the dogs who cry words
> at nights, the most hostile things of all.

> (ll. 5-7)

The syntax and punctuation here are subtly deceptive, suggesting perhaps that the only material resurrection possible is that which is processed through the sparse vegetation and the scavenging dogs that devour physical remains. However, alongside this, the dogs 'cry', their howls constituting a hostile language, forming 'words' that slay the poet-speaker's mind in this strange landscape. Moreover, the isolated comma in line 7 may imply that the 'nights', too, can be construed as 'hostile things', the ambiguity surely an enrichment rather than an impediment to meaning. The speaker seems to say that it is here, in this spatial and nocturnal

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[20] Kendall, *Modern English War Poetry*, p. 165.
[21] Douglas, *The Complete Poems*, p. 108.
[22] Mark 8. 22-23.

dislocation, that the only resurrection for the slain mind can be found. It resides in the speaker's power to look beyond death and, in poetry, to reveal 'the secret I shall not keep' (l. 12), to 'sing' of the truth others cannot perceive. Kendall posits that 'only death can provide the ultimate vision', but this observation does not go far enough: if all that survives of the 'mind' is the poetic truth the speaker pledges to sing, it is the desert, its dead, *and* his exilic predicament, that bring about clarity and a synergy of seeing and knowing.[23] There is no conventional elegiac mourning here. Instead, Douglas gives voice to an epistemological insight that the conflation of death and exilic space engenders.

Theodor Adorno wrote that 'for a man who no longer has a homeland, writing becomes a place to live'.[24] While his context relates, not to the exiled soldier-poet but to his view of modern, private life as insubstantial and, for him, rootless, his argument that distance and estrangement generate greater insight and understanding for any exile seems to correlate with Douglas's experiences in the desert. For him, as both his poetry and his prose journal express, such space heightened his consciousness of the reciprocal relationship between the dead and the living, and of the need to apprehend realities in what he so often configures as a place of deceptions. In *Alamein to Zem Zem* (1946), Douglas encounters the dead and the location so often as a kind of mirage, prompting his effort to comprehend, to prove realities. The desert is a place where the dead appear to be alive, where enemy tanks are mistaken for trees, or reality and perceptions are transformed:

> In the half light the tanks seemed to crouch, still, but alive, like toads. I touched the cold metal shell of my own tank, my fingers amazed for a moment at its hardness. [...] Out of each turret, like the voices of dwarfs, thin and cracked and bodiless, the voices of the operators and of the control set come.[25]

Desmond Graham suggests that such experiences for Douglas 'represent the ultimate dislocation of appearance and reality' in a landscape, 'barren [...], almost neutral to man',

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[23] Kendall, *Modern English War Poetry*, p. 166.
[24] Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, p. 87.
[25] Douglas, *Alamein to Zem Zem*, p. 26.

thereby intensifying the exilic predicament.[26]   In Adornian terms, therefore, Douglas's

writing, in prose and in poetry, becomes the 'home' of his exilic imagination.

As Douglas's desert experience progressed, so he grappled more acutely with moral

and metaphysical concerns, including a continuous challenge to his sense of identity. Said's

words seem pertinent here, namely that, in a condition of displacement and estrangement, one

feels the need 'to reassemble' any fractured identity 'out of the refractions and discontinuities

of exile'.[27]   In essence, Douglas's exile allowed him the 'space' in which to express his

ontological and epistemological curiosity, as well as to hone his poetic gift for balancing

stylistic impersonality with his strong sense of humanity. Sometimes, however, his quest to

find truth and meaning is expressed, not in deceptive detachment, but in terms that are deeply

personal, in which the mind's spatial dislocation objectifies the desert and the detritus of war

in almost nightmarishly forensic exactitude. A return to a poem discussed in Chapter 2 seems

appropriate to exemplify this.

In 'Landscape with Figures 2' (1943), one feels that desert space prompts the speaker-

witness to articulate 'what others never set eyes on', so uniquely individualized is his voice.[28]

The intensity of the landscape's 'significance' invades the speaker's mind, represented as a

surreal space littered with the dead. Human and inanimate debris commingle in 'a terrible

tracery' (l. 8), while lifeless bodies are configured as

> mimes
> who express silence and futile aims
> enacting this prone and motionless struggle
> at a queer angle to the scenery

(ll. 2-5)

Place and its features become an extended theatrical metaphor, and the poet-speaker the

witness who, with his 'little finger' must 'trace the maquillage of these stony actors' (ll. 12-

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[26] Douglas, *Alamein to Zem Zem*, pp. xii-xiii.
[27] See Said, *Exile*, 2001, p. 178.
[28] Douglas, *The Complete Poems*, p. 110.

13) in a tactile attempt to differentiate reality from unreality. In so doing, this Daliesque landscape brings new but desperate understanding in a tortured confession: 'I am the figure writhing on the backcloth' (l. 14). The theatrical imaging of the landscape now extends to the speaking persona, the 'I' who is divested of human substance as a 'figure', agonizingly merging with a surreal stage 'backcloth'. The words, though strenuously subjective in tone, define a transformation that amounts to a form of dehumanizing impersonality which, as Said argues, can manifest as identity displacement in circumstances of exile. However, as he also posits, such an experience 'objectifies [...] an anguish [that is] like death but without death's ultimate mercy'.[29] In Douglas's poem, surrounded by the dead, the speaker is transformed into a mere 'figure' that writhes alone in exilic space, a predicament in which place and humankind are rendered unreal, except that the implied agony of guilt that remains *is* real, and the poetry that utters it. In the eponymous terms of this chapter, this is 'what survives'.

Douglas's desert poetry repeatedly articulates a sense of a deep need to scrutinize place as a site of memorialization, and the dead as the stimulus for his own ontological and epistemological curiosity. As he states in his prose journal, the battlefield fascinates him: 'it is there that the interesting things happen'.[30] In this belief lie both his impulse to demand that we witness with him, and his implicit awareness that, however 'extrospective' he may seek to be, the desert can deceive, and his own perceptions can be flawed. As a camouflage officer, he knew that realities can be hidden, and equally that his desire for poetic truth demanded his exploration of alternative ways of seeing in order to keep things responsibly in perspective. Nor does this sense of responsibility lack spiritual significance As he had told Margaret Stanley Wrench in 1943, Douglas was aware that Egypt could be the locus of profound spiritual revelation: 'I have an idea it's somewhere around here St Paul made one of his

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[29] See Said, in *Exile*, 2001, p. 174.
[30] Douglas, *Alamein to Zem Zem,* p. 15.

journeys'.[31]   The apparent tonal objectivity of the remark is misleading, for soon after,

Douglas produced a version of 'Cairo Jag' that differs significantly from the published

version (1943).[32] In the former he voices the power of this place, where

> your mind will extend new hands. In a moment
> will fall down like St. Paul in a blinding light
> the soul suffers a miraculous change
> you become a true inheritor of this altered planet.
>
> I know, I see these men return
> wandering like lost sounds in our dirty streets.[33]

That these lines, so clearly imbued with spiritually subjective insight, did not appear in the

final version, was his artistic choice in the interest of greater stylistic objectivity, but, as

already discussed, their essence was to emerge in 'Desert Flowers'. Moreover, they testify to

Douglas's consciousness of the transformative nature of exilic war, of the power of place and

of battle to render men 'lost', disembodied as ghostly 'sounds'. The consolation in this,

however, is that the poet-speaker gains a new, spiritually enlightened vision: it is he who, in

this version of the poem, sees beyond death, whose utterance, 'I know', belies its simplicity.

It embodies an epistemological revelation that only he, in isolation, experiences. However,

there is a cost exacted in this, one feels. The closing couplet introduces ambivalence when

read against the excitement implicit in the earlier word 'miraculous': now, there is a

downward cast in the language and rhythm of the final declaration, a sense that the speaker is

both enlightened and yet condemned, perhaps perpetually, to see the 'altered' souls and hear

the 'lost sounds'.

The 'cost' of poetic vision for Douglas, as for Alun Lewis, has already been discussed

in terms of the destabilizing effects of perpetrator guilt, complicity, or even survivor

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[31] Douglas, in a letter to Margaret Stanley-Wrench, 8 Jan. 1943, BL 57977 f.10 and f.11, reproduced in Douglas, *The Letters*, p. 256.

[32] Douglas, 'Cairo Jag', in *The Complete Poems*, p. 102.

[33] These lines appear in a version of 'Cairo Jag' that first appeared in a letter to Olga Meiersons (undated), housed in the British Library as two fragments, BL 56357 fol. 8 and BL 53773 fol. 57, later reproduced in Douglas, *The Letters*, pp. 261-264 (p. 264).

conscience upon a vulnerable, uncertain core of identity. Douglas intimates his ambivalent mix of amused pride and self-damnation in 'How to Kill' (1943).[34] Elsewhere, as in 'Saturday Evening in Jerusalem', he casts himself as the wandering Jew who was punished for offending Christ and whose travail was to be suspended between life and death.[35] The poem evinces a haunting sense of alienation of the subjective self, exiled in a place where 'the street is full of shoulders' (l. 5). The image connotes more than mere bustle; it expresses, too, a sense of the imagined impersonal distance of the inhabitants from the estranged speaker. The latter observes a scene of moonlit 'silver children' (l. 11) mingling amongst young courting couples where, as in the unifying nature of poetry itself,

> It is a collaboration between things
> and people; the cat moonlight prowling about
> rubs against friendly legs, leaps upon
> the shoulders of a family. Family song,
> incense of talk or laughter mounting the night;
> in the dome of stars the moon sings.

> (ll. 13-18)

The 'cat moonlight' resonates as a fusion of Eliotesque images, but here the overwhelming sense is of the love and friendship that suffuse the lives of the indigenous people.[36] In the last stanza, however, there is a shift and deepening intensity of feeling. The impression earlier conveyed is seen as a deceptive poetic trick, a preparation for the speaker's final voltaic turn that exposes the pain of his isolation:

> But among these Jews I am the Jew
> outcast, wandering down the steep road

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[34] See Douglas, in *The Complete Poems*, p. 119, ll. 14-16.

[35] The story emanates both from a thirteenth-century European legend of the doomed sinner who had taunted Jesus on his way to the Crucifixion, and from various Biblical sources which include Hosea 9.17. Most commonly, the source of the legend is attributed to Matthew 16:28 in which we read, 'There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom'.

[36] T. S. Eliot's images of a cat and moonlight pervade several of his poems in contexts of loneliness and isolation, as in 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' or 'Rhapsody on a Windy Night'. In the former, the 'yellow fog' is configured as a nocturnal, prowling cat that 'rubs its back upon the window pane' (l. 15), while in the latter we encounter, again at night but under moonlight, the 'cat which flattens itself in the gutter' (l. 35). The images intensify the respective moods of the emptiness of the speakers' lives, heightening their estranged predicaments. The poems are published in T.S. Eliot, *The Collected Poems and Plays of T. S. Eliot* (London: Faber and Faber, 1969), and the lines quoted appear on pp. 13 and 25, respectively.

into the hostile dark square.

<div style="text-align:right">(ll. 19-21)</div>

There is no equivocation in the emphatic solitude of the word 'outcast': its placement in the line enacts the human condition it describes, while the movement of the speaker is 'down' to a tryst with hostility. Once again, the 'I' leads us to its emphatic certainty of its own damnation, 'alone and cursed by God' (l. 23). It is the almost self-elegiac statement of one who, as a soldier and poet, has lost his sense of moral belonging and fixity.

Desmond Graham notes that Douglas 'shaped' 'Tel Aviv' (tentatively dated by him as 'April, 1943-1944'), and possibly 'Jerusalem' (c. 1944), from 'Saturday Evening in Jerusalem'.[37] Certainly, close reading of the three poems seems to testify to the plausibility of his judgement, while to examine them together reveals another dimension of Douglas's exilic experience, namely its exacerbation of his sense of solitude in absence, particularly from those once, or perhaps still, loved. The hint contained in his awareness of young love in the previously discussed poem expands into a conflation of conscience, romantic and exilic estrangement, and, in 'Tel Aviv', an affirmation of his coded, stylistic detachment, termed as his 'walls of indifference' (l. 24). As Graham reminds us, Douglas composed the latter poem following two significant experiences: one, his recent leave spent with Olga Meiersons in Tel Aviv, and two, the news learned there of the death of Colonel Kellet, his commander.[38] Together, these instances generated a sharpened sense of unreality and loss, qualities that coalesce in the poem as a palpable sense of lost opportunity, infused with semi-apologetic self-justification.

From its opening image, 'Tel Aviv' establishes a dream-like state in which the one addressed is clearly lost, an apparition afloat in the shadows that lie between permanent and transient ontological states. She is the Ophelia to the speaker's imagined alter ego, the

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[37] Graham, *Keith Douglas,* p. 195. The two poems of which he speaks appear in Douglas, *Complete Poems,* pp. 113 and 114, respectively.

[38] Graham, in *Keith Douglas*, pp. 194-195.

Hamlet who, too late, is drawn to kiss one who is, or who might have been, his departed lover. One feels that the addressee, fading into ethereal, deathly 'whiteness' (l. 2), is one to whom he should have been more open but with whom he last met, constrained by a sense of cautious distance:

> Like Ophelia in a lake of shadow lies
> your face, a whiteness that draws down my lips
> our hands meet like strangers in a city
> among the glasses on the table tops
> impervious to envy or pity
> we whose drug is a meeting of the eyes.

<div align="right">(ll. 1-6)</div>

Graham records that Douglas had written to Olga earlier from Port Said in a bitter mood, rather off-handedly stating that, when they would meet in Tel Aviv, they 'should do more kissing than talking'.[39] He concludes that the poem, written after that liaison, thus becomes a kind of apologia for lost chances, and an expression of Douglas's desire to escape the world of separation in which 'the many heads of war / are watching us' (ll. 9-10). The speaker's sense of absence and distance intensifies, as does his loss of equilibrium:

> We who can't put out a single hand
> to help our balance,
> [...]
>   must
> balance tiptoe on a pin.

<div align="right">(ll. 13-14, 16-17)</div>

Though ostensibly a love poem, 'Tel Aviv' is thus an affirmation of a shared, fragile, precarious universe, in which escape from the realities of war and estrangement in far off lands heightens awareness of the transience of shared opportunities. Furthermore, the reflexive metalanguage of the final stanza shifts the speaker's focus both in tone and intent.

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[39] Douglas, in a letter to Olga Meiersons, dated 2 April 1943, BL 56355 f. 179, reproduced in Graham, *The Letters,* pp. 273-274 (p. 274), and quoted in Graham, *Keith Douglas*, p. 190.

The opening imperative is a plea for understanding which conflates explanation with apology

for having feared to express truths openly when the speaker and the addressee last met:

> Do not laugh because I made a poem
> it is to use what then we couldn't handle –
> words of which we know the explosive
> or poisonous tendency when we are too close. If
> I had said this to you then, BANG will
> have gone our walls of indifference in flame.

<div align="right">(ll. 19-24).</div>

For Douglas, therefore, the poem, while not itself couched in impersonality, is a medium for

explaining why, in the uncertainties and dislocations of war and enforced exile, postures of

'indifference' become a mask of self and a means of mutual protection. Tel Aviv, in

temporal and spatial terms, thus becomes a meeting place that can only represent, in poetry, a

transient and incomplete triumph over the exilic predicament, the self for whom distance and

separation are, ambivalently, a source of anguished uncertainty and a means of protection and

survival.

'Jerusalem' (1944) emerges as a fusion of the previous two poems.[40] It resurrects

images of random city motion in 'the cat moonlight' (l. 2), of a tryst located where, 'in the

dark words fall about' (l. 5), while its second and third stanzas are, like 'Tel Aviv', framed as

a direct address to the speaker's beloved, his 'Ophelia':

> Ophelia, in a pool of shadow lies
> your face, flower that draws down my lips
> our hands meet like strangers in a city
> among the glasses on the table-top
> impervious to envy or pity
> we two lost in the country of our eyes.
>
> We two, and other twos.
> [...]
>   But now, and here
> is night's short forgiveness
> that all lovers use.

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[40] Douglas, in *The Complete Poems*, p. 114.

The same sense of absence and muted sadness of the previous poem lingers audibly, particularly in the overt acknowledgement that 'other twos', perhaps in clandestine meetings, must – like 'all lovers' – seek 'night's short forgiveness'.[41] Compared with 'Tel Aviv', however, this is a less troubling, less ambivalently layered poem, a more open expression of a love shared, even though briefly, in what the poem's closing words suggest is a moment of mutual, sacrosanct solitude beneath the darkened sky, ominous with the shadows of war:

> Now the dark theatre of the sky
> encloses the conversation of the whole city
> islanded, we sit under
> the vault of it, and wonder
> to hear such music in the petty
> laughter and talk of passers-by.

There is still a sense of a moment snatched, a precious respite from the exilic self, but no feeling here of lost opportunity to express truths. What is also voiced in these final lines, however, is the feeling that the speaker recognizes in their 'islanded' state a sense of Otherness, of separation from a world of 'petty laughter and talk'. He is not the 'Jew outcast' here, but is momentarily cocooned in a different, if shared, kind of exile. That shared moment, however, is transient, only temporarily redemptive for one who must again depart and return to a space in which love is signified by absence.

Absence, lost loves and lost realities are themes already raised in other contexts in this thesis, of course, each constituting an element of Douglas's inner dialectical tension, a condition that was both a creative spur and a torment, divisive to identity. In the landscape of desert warfare, though the latter constitutes a shared experience, Douglas's vision is unique and his language expressive of his isolation, battling with his own metaphysical enquiries into meaning and being. Writing to Antoinette Beckett, Douglas had expressed his 'terror of

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[41] Douglas may well have been self-referential here: at the time, he was also closely involved with Milena Pegna, and would soon after visit her and her family in Alexandria. See Graham, *Keith Douglas*, p. 191.

perishing into an ordinary existence without having tasted a hundred strange pleasures and experiences'.[42] Such a fate could not possibly materialize for a soldier-poet enmeshed in the psychic and geographical dislocations of war. There could be nothing mundane for one who sought wholeness of being and artistic and epistemological truth in a landscape fraught with death and sparse testimony to what survives, what lies beyond. As his persona states in an early draft of 'How to Kill', voiced in far more explicit and overtly subjective terms than the superior final version, 'I am gliding / towards the minute when shadow and self are one'.[43] Douglas is unequivocally announcing his own drift towards death and insubstantiality, the product of his own 'sorcery', confessed in the draft as 'I have committed sorcery / sorcerers are of the angels cursed'.[44] It is a self-damning image that, as discussed earlier, he retains with greater significance and economy in the words of the completed, published version, 'This sorcery / I do'.[45] The seemingly impersonal admission of the perpetrator's amusement cannot extinguish the speaker's sense of self-corruption: his actions have transformed love, the essence of humanity, to spectral nothingness:

> Being damned, I am amused
> to see the centre of love diffused
> and the waves of love travel into vacancy.
> How easy it is to make a ghost.

(ll. 15-18)

The lines express awareness of the most profound form of 'vacancy', the ultimate absence that death brings, while beneath the apparent indifference of 'How easy it is' there resides the speaker's awareness of his own ultimate extinction. Nothing survives if love is diffused, except its ghost.

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[42] Douglas, in an undated letter from Oxford, published in Douglas, *The Letters*, pp. 106-108 (p. 107).
[43] Quoted in Graham, *Keith Douglas*, p. 219. The final version appears in Douglas, *The Complete Poems*, p. 119.
[44] Graham, *Keith Douglas*, p. 219.
[45] Douglas, in 'How to Kill', *The Complete Poems*, p. 119, ll. 14-15.

Douglas's sense of 'final oblivion' expressed in a letter to Jean Turner in 1940, had been framed in optimism, the thought of active service in the East, mingled with anger and the pain of the loss of his love, Yingcheng (Betty Sze).[46] It was to be a preoccupation that never left him, even latent in him from his early years where, so often, it conflates death with the despair of lost or absent love. 'Canoe' (1940),[47] addressed either to Yingcheng or Antoinette (Toni), the poet's subsequent lover, is deeply imbued with uncertainty of 'whatever doom hovers in the background' (l. 5), already anticipating the companion's absence and the self as a revenant, wandering soul, a ghostly 'shade' seeking the beloved:

> What sudden fearful fate
> can deter my shade wandering next year
> from a return?

<div align="right">(ll. 9-11)</div>

Place and anticipated exile coalesce as an interplay between presence and absence, while the prospect of death is implicit in thoughts of return, not as a physical reality, but as an anguished shadow, a 'spirit that kisses your mouth lightly' (l. 16). It is the same interplay that is found in 'Farewell Poem' (1940), an expression of recollected moments between Betty Sze and Douglas when, at Oxford, along the river banks, they 'fell asleep embraced and let the shades run' (l. 6).[48] The images recall lost innocence replaced by the knowledge, in the present, that in those departed moments

> that day was complete behind us and wiped out:
> so now we are broken apart unaware,
> and keep pain prisoner cleverly enough.

<div align="right">(ll. 12-14)</div>

Again, death hovers, cynically configured as 'the great black figure with a hideous laugh' (l. 23), and the speaker's only assurance is finally expressed as a statement of defeat and a grim prophesy:

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[46] See Douglas, *The Letters*, pp. 151-152 (p. 152).
[47] Douglas, *The Complete Poems*, p. 40.
[48] See Douglas, *The Complete Poems,* p. 38.

> We must never start our story again;
> for God is waiting with unexpended pain
> and will not bless you my dark afflicted love.

<div align="right">(ll. 27-29)</div>

There is no hope here, only despair, the dark certainty that this love cannot be saved: only the unfinished, imprisoned pain of its loss can survive. Moreover, there is detectable ambivalence in this 'dark' affliction: it seems to be ascribed to his 'love' both as the object of his affection, but also self-reflexively to the love he carries within him and which afflicts those it touches. The speaker defines, perhaps not what Kristeva calls 'the tragic purity of true exile',[49] but nevertheless the declaration of one who is already exiled in his own inner landscape.

Earlier, while at school, Douglas had expressed a similar, though less disturbed vision of the impermanence of love's halcyon moments. In 'Kristin' (1937), the speaker warns his beloved (Douglas's first 'love') that the literal and metaphorical 'season' (l. 1) of their 'sublime' union (l. 6) is an unsustainable 'country interlude' (l. 9) that is haunted by his own fears, not only of what Douglas knew was looming in Europe, but of what he sensed in himself as inevitable inconstancy.[50] The present idyll will last only 'this candle hour' (l. 12), then be extinguished:

> Yes, futile to prolong this natural instant:
> Black days lean over, hours curtailed with fear.
> [...]
> A little forlorn magic has homed again.
> Take this, these limpid days will not be constant;
> They will forsake you, will not reappear.

<div align="right">(ll. 13-14, 16-18)</div>

There is no exilic predicament in this, only the poet-speaker's prescience that his affinities would be transitory, vulnerable to his inconstancy and caprice. The poem expresses certainty

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[49] See Kristeva, in *Kristeva Reader*, p. 15.
[50] Douglas, *The Complete Poems*, p. 17.

only in its negatives, emphatically articulated in the elisions and repetitions of the closing couplet. It is, perhaps, a nascent presentiment of the sense of impermanence, of loss and of estrangement that Douglas would experience in the exilic, displacing landscape of the desert war.

'The Two Virtues' (1941), written at Sarafand in the Middle East, forms an open confession of what is clearly the poet's growing certainty of his inconstancy and duality as a lover.[51] He admits both to his passion and his 'fierce' inconstancy (l. 5), a juxtaposition which he justifies as complementary virtues:

> I've the two virtues of a lover
> hot as the Indies, mutable as weather.

(ll. 6-7)

There is an underlying tone of self-defensiveness in this, despite the further attempt to mitigate his mutability: the speaker asserts that his passion generates the loved one's 'reciprocating heat' (l. 12), even romanticizing their union as a force that will

> alight remain
> until the flames die out above
> the dying salamander, love.

(ll. 12-14)

Passion, he says, like the salamander of mythology that lives in fire, must die out, and with it, perhaps love itself. The notion of orgasmic death is implicit here, but so also is self-justification that gathers intensity in the final stanza:

> Then being true to love, I'll be inconstant;
> not to be so, would cheat you of the last
> and most of love, sorrow's violent
> and rich effect. In that lagoon the lost,
> the drowned heart is wonderfully recast
> and made into a marvel by the sea,
> that stone, that jewel tranquillity.

(ll. 15-21)

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[51] *Ibid.,* p. 80.

The succession of antinomies, truth, cheating inconstancy, violent and rich passion, constitutes both an attempt to salve the sorrow the beloved will feel after their 'last' passionate union, and a farewell. The speaker is slowly distancing himself in a final act of justification: she, the 'drowned heart' whom he has left, will become a 'marvel' of ultimate 'jewel tranquillity'. In effect, the closing words express the coalescence of death and love, and a sense of the beyond, of what survives, not as the pain of absence, but perpetual peace. The poem constitutes the inconstant lover's attempt to excuse and assuage the hurt his duality must inflict, using the power of language to transform it into virtue, but one senses beneath this conceit the poet-speaker's own desire for tranquillity, perhaps an escape from conscience. In effect, it becomes a poetic representation of Douglas's confrontation with his own ambivalence and his 'other' self, that which is disruptive to any attempt at constancy. In his discussion of exile as a 'ritual of endurance', Jonathan Bolton argues for 'the exiled writer's tendency to turn away from what might be seen as a [...] Proustian recovery of the past and meet present circumstances head on'.[52] Douglas's speaker embraces this confrontation, not merely content to poeticize a sense of loss and parting, but to accept and affirm his own frailty and prepare both the lover and the self for estrangement.

Distance augmented Douglas's inner battle to find his authentic, unified self, but, as the earlier examination of his 'bête noire' suggests, what he achieved, most consummately in his tripartite 'Landscape with Figures' (1943), was a realization of his complex plurality.[53] The dual quests to achieve artistic fulfilment in his 'endeavours [...] the lilies of ambition', and to find correlative meaning in the polarities of life and death, were intensified as his wartime, rootless desert journey proceeded.[54] Hence, his poetry was to develop, even when seemingly couched in detached impersonality or framed through a mediating lens and shifting perspectives, as that which Roberta Wondrich defines in her discussion of exilic writing as 'a

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[52] Bolton, in *Personal Landscapes*, p. 46.
[53] Douglas, *The Complete Poems,* pp. 109-111.
[54] See Douglas, in 'On a Return from Egypt', *The Complete Poems*, p. 132, ll. 13-15.

complex interaction of environment, language and history'.[55] Her use of 'history' implies the private rather than the public, although these contexts cannot be entirely separable. Undoubtedly, the 'important test' that Douglas had anticipated he would undergo in the desert was to constitute such a complex interaction, stimulating both inner disruption and the creativity that sought to repair personal fragmentation, to reconstruct diffracted identity, and to secure understanding of the borders between life and death.[56] In a sense, this becomes an artistic and personal challenge to take control of chaos in unfamiliar and estranged circumstances that intensify both absence and the need to give testimony, thereby accentuating the poet's obligation to perfect the language and mode of perception with which to tell both public and private truths.

As Douglas's love poems therefore seem to testify, estrangement and memory constitute an element of the 'test' he anticipated, and in their treatment of absence and desire, perhaps even confirming what Bolton observes as the 'investigation of nostalgia as an ontological state', the exiled soldier-poet's exploration of Self in terms of what he is, what he has become, or what he must be to survive.[57] Paul Tabori states that 'deracination, exile and alienation in varying forms are [...] conditions of existence' which prompt the writer's 'quest for home, through self-discovery or self-realization'.[58] The quest to place and define selfhood is reflected in Douglas's work, but it is hard to discern an explicit reaching after 'home' in real, spatial terms. As he wrote to Olga from Egypt, having read Sacheverell Sitwell's *Valse des Fleurs* (1941),[59]

> Whenever I read such fantastic descriptions it reminds me that England will never be my home country. I must make my life extend across at least half the world, to be happy. I love people, and I think my only real ambition apart from those ambitions

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[55] See Wondrich, *Irish University Review*, p. 7.
[56] See Douglas, *Alamein to Zem Zem*, p. 15.
[57] Bolton, *Personal Landscapes*, p. 46.
[58] Paul Tabori, *Anatomy of Exile: A Semantic and Historical Study* (London: Harrap, 1981), p. 14.
[59] Sacheverell Sitwell, *Valse des Fleurs* (London: Faber and Faber, 1941).

connected with making my living, is to meet more and more people, [...] and to love them all, and be loved by them.[60]

As his poetic evocations of Jerusalem testify, he was not always to feel loved in foreign lands, nor to believe his romantic affinities fulfilling and requited with the desired intensity. However, these words iterate another layer of his inner self, namely that he felt intrinsically exiled and nomadic, even though, paradoxically, they also voice an unexpected philanthropy. His life and work continually articulate his acceptance of estrangement, and despite – or perhaps because of – the wounds he knew but suppressed within him, inculcated in him that desire to 'get East [...] and leave the rest to Allah', even welcoming the prospect of 'final oblivion'.[61]

His final open testament to the lost loves of his life is possibly the nearest Douglas comes to Wondrich's concept of 'the tragic purity of true exile'.[62] 'To Kristin Yingcheng Olga Milena' (1944) brings together nostalgia, loss, the ambivalent joys and pain of love, and the poet-speaker's implicit regrets, in a final, valedictory act of seeming unselfishness:

> Women of four countries
> the four phials of essences
> of green England, legendary China,
> cold Europe, Arabic Spain, a finer
> four poisons for the subtle senses
> than any in medieval inventories.
>
> Here I give back perforce
> the sweet wine to the grape
> give the dark plant its juices
> what every creature uses
> by natural law will seep
> back to the natural source.[63]

(ll. 1-12)

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[60] See letter to Olga Meiersons (undated), BL 56355 fols 174-76 and 53773 fol. 7 and fol. 11, reproduced in Douglas, *The Letters*, pp. 228-231 (p. 230).
[61] See Douglas, *The Letters*, pp. 151-152 (p. 152).
[62] Wondrich, *Irish University Review*, p. 15.
[63] Douglas, *The Complete Poems*, p. 132.

The speaker expresses a desire to make a final gesture to 'give back' that to which he has clung in his estrangement, the memory of love for the women he has lost. They exist now as recollections of the essence of their countries, ambivalently the source of 'four poisons' that constitute the 'sweet wine'. The poem is an act of valediction and release in which we sense an undertow of remorse, but a sadness that is subordinated to an acceptance that to lose love is part of the cyclical process of 'natural law', perhaps yet another instance of Douglas's self-justification. William Scammell posits that, in this process which the poem enacts, 'the 'I' necessarily dies or seeks out 'another place' in which to survive; and the whole of creation, revolving on the same axis, is implicated in the outcome'.[64] This is an enticing analysis, utterly relevant in its conclusion that the poem evokes the 'inexorable cycle of profit and loss' the speaker feels. However, the reference to Douglas's 'Dead Men' (1943) and the words 'I in another place', here truncated, leads to the inference that the subjective 'I' desires survival as part of a regenerative, cyclical process.[65] This, I feel, is an optimistic reading. Rather, the speaker seems to be expressing an intimation of his own mortality: love may survive as the 'juices' that are reconstituted in new life, by implication new lovers, but he is bidding farewell and expressing sad gratitude, aware that he is caught between life and eventual death. Soon after, Douglas's actual 'oblivion' descended in a sliver of mortar shell.

'Dead Men' is Douglas's most explicit poetic examination of the ontological balance between life and death, the speaker locating himself in self-imposed exile in 'another place', and shifting from 'I' to 'you' in a grammatical adjustment that permits him both detachment and involvement. It constitutes a metaphysical scrutiny of being and non-being and expresses the speaker's contemplation on the finality of death. Douglas's imagery, too, balances between the trance-like, illusory world of moonlit lovers and the hard, tangible facts of death, the transformation of flesh to bone, thus enacting the coexistence of two states of being, of

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[64] Scammell, in *Keith Douglas: A Study*, p. 84.
[65] Douglas, in 'Dead Men', *The Complete Poems*, pp. 100-101 (p. 100, l. 5).

the undefined 'them' whom 'the moon inveigles [...] / to love' (ll. 1-2) and the physical

residue of death,

> the dead men, whom the wind
> powders till they are like dolls: they tonight
>
> rest in the sanitary earth perhaps
> or where they died, no one has found them
> or in their shallow graves the wild dog
> discovered and exhumed a face or a leg
> for food: the human virtue round them
> is a vapour tasteless to a dog's chops.
>
> All that is good of them, the dog consumes.

(ll. 11-19)

The lines articulate uncertainty of any ultimate peace for the dead who only 'perhaps' can

experience ultimate 'rest': there are, too, the alternatives, the incontrovertible reduction to

food for the scavenging dog, all human worth vaporized.

Despite the tone of detached acceptance voiced here, Douglas's scrutiny seems

disturbingly self-referential in the speaker's penetration to the paradox inherent in what he

sees:

> You would not know, now the mind's flame is gone,
> more than the dog knows: you would forget
> but that you would see your own mind burning yet
> and till you stifle in the ground will go on
> burning the economical coal of your dreams.

(ll. 20-24)

To extinguish the 'mind's flame' would seem the final extinction of Self, of all sentience,

until the emphatic 'but' confirms that the vision of what must come is prolonged until stasis

comes and the 'you', the Self, must 'stifle'. Scammell calls this pattern of alternative

perceptions 'teasing paradoxes': underlying those that are voiced on the surface is, perhaps, a

deeper one, a desire for release from the 'mind burning' to be able to 'forget' in final oblivion.[66]

The penultimate and final stanzas, though fluctuating between forensic detachment and metaphysical speculation, also voice the speaker's anguish in recognizing that nothing survives, that the dead are 'not capable of resurrection' (l. 26) and that the sentient body becomes 'the bone / so soon' (ll. 28-29). The closing lines thus shift our perceptions, along with the speaker's, suggesting that it is therefore 'prudent' not to dwell on death or the permanence of love but simply to surrender to the needs of the self in the present, thus emulating

> the lover
> who in his planetary love revolves
> without the traction of reason or time's control
> and the wild dog finding meat in a hole
> is a philosopher. The prudent mind resolves
> on the lover's or the dog's attitude forever.
>
>   (ll. 31-36)

Though the speaker seems to reach a resolution here, the central ambivalence of his enquiry into death and existence remains: he seems to hover between the need to keep his 'own mind burning' and a desire for the extinction of that part of the self that cannot help but dwell on death and the loss of 'human virtue'. Accordingly, the troubled mind, exiled in a place of death, seeks but does not find epistemological closure: instead, one senses the speaker's suspension in a liminal place that echoes both the Adornian state of 'homelessness' and Kristeva's 'practice of displacement'. He remains locked in the present, though leaving us with the feeling that, like the dead, the mind is 'an organism / not capable of resurrection' (ll. 25-26). As Graham states, 'Prudence is a just response to the simple nihilism of the dead, but it is not a point of rest for the poet'.[67]

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[66] Scammell, in *Keith Douglas: A Study*, p. 156.
[67] Graham, in *Keith Douglas*, p. 187.

Mark Rawlinson has defined the dimensions of the desert battlefields in Henri Lefebvre's terms as "'representational space', a codified space which is 'directly *lived* through its associated images and symbols'".[68] He seems to confirm Lefebvre's theory that textual re-imaginings of such environments seek to 'change and appropriate' this space which is thus 'passively experienced'.[69] The poems examined above, however, do not suggest Douglas as a passive respondent, except insofar as his frequently evidenced impersonality masks the active engagement of feeling that lies partially obscured. Nevertheless, Rawlinson's deduction that such texts are 'dialectical reinscriptions' which help us to grasp the 'competing perspectives of the soldier-subject' is surely tenable.[70] Douglas's inner dialectical tensions repeatedly emerge in a structure of 'competing perspectives', arising from his location in exilic space which permits and demands existential scrutiny. As Said reminds us, such a predicament stimulates the exile to 'cross borders, break barriers of thought', metaphysically and ontologically.

The thin veil between life and death is repeatedly examined in Douglas's poetry, arising, one feels, from his own ambivalent and tenuous balance between these polarities, his zest for life and the allure of extinction. In 'Cairo Jag', for instance, barriers and boundaries dissolve, between Cairo, a place of moral degeneration and escapism, and the desert where waste and the detritus of battle demand the poet's testimony.[71] The conclusion drawn is that despite a shift to the desert's 'new world' (l. 23), the reality is that both places are 'all one'. The implicit question posed is, 'is there life anywhere?'. The desert welcomes the dead body as dust while existence in Cairo is another form of nihilism, a life 'dedicated to sleep' (l. 9) where humanity unresistingly perishes, 'afflicted with fatalism and hashish' (l. 13). The

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[68] Rawlinson, in *British Writing of the Second World War*, pp. 116-117. Lefebvre's remarks are taken from Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* ([1974] Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), p. 39.
[69] Lefebvre, in *Production of Space*, p. 39.
[70] Rawlinson, *British Writing of the Second World War*, p. 117.
[71] See Douglas, *The Complete Poems,* p. 102.

reader is left with the sense that in such alien yet adjacent spaces, 'the exile everywhere walks on the dead and their deposits'.[72]

Douglas's desert poetry, though often veiled in tonal detachment, is also at pains to register both the fact of the speaker's survival and, simultaneously, the vexing question of what endures, if anything, beyond the body's departure. As shown above, Douglas, through the poetic persona, articulates little if any consolatory belief in any 'Beyond'. His poetry repeatedly conveys his awareness of the self as a distanced observer of life in death, conscious of the permanence of loss and absence set against the impermanence of the living. At times, as in 'Mersa' (1942), the speaker's spatial and temporal dislocation results in a spectral fusion of the present and the lost realities of the past, of the beauty of a long-gone 'halfcircle of sea' (l. 1) that was 'Cleopatra's hotel' (l. 4).[73] The present constitutes the reductive transformation war brings:

> here is a guesthouse built
> and broken utterly, since.
> An amorous modern prince
> lived in this scoured shell.
>
> Now from the skeletal town
> the cherry skinned soldiers stroll down
> to undress to idle on the white beach.

<div align="right">(ll. 5-11)</div>

The casual observation belies the darkness that underlies the speaker's words, however. The comma that separates 'broken utterly' and 'since' reinforces and enacts the finality and instantaneous nature of destruction, as does the line's brevity. This place is the nexus of stark antinomies, of death and the deceptions inherent in what remains in this

> poor town whose masks would still
> deceive a passer-by;
>
> faces with sightless doors

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[72] Fedden, in *An Anthology of Exile,* p. 9.
[73] Douglas, *The Complete Poems*, p. 99.

> for eyes, with cracks like tears
> oozing at corners. A dead tank alone
> leans where the gossips stood.

<div align="right">(ll. 15-20)</div>

This ghostly return precipitates the speaker's re-imagining of himself, configured impersonally through the eyes of creatures that scavenge the dead. As he views his feet beneath the water, the speaker is drawn, for the first time, to voice the subjective 'I':

> I see my feet like stones
> underwater. The logical little fish
> converge and nip the flesh
> imagining I am one of the dead.

<div align="right">(ll. 21-24)</div>

Douglas, through the poetic persona, speaks as if on the brink of his own extinction: he has merged with the spectres of the past.

In or around May, 1941, not long before embarking from England for the exilic spaces of the Middle East, Douglas wrote his own obituary in the form of an undemonstrative plea, or even instruction, to place his complexities on record, but in simple terms. 'Simplify Me When I'm Dead' implores the reader to

> Remember me when I am dead
> and simplify me when I'm dead.
>
> [...]
>
>   leave me simpler than at birth
> when hairless I came howling in
> as the moon came in the cold sky.[74]

<div align="right">(ll. 1-2, 6-8)</div>

There is a clear desire to be remembered rather than consigned to oblivion, but held in balance with the need for others to simplify him: it is as if he may thereby defer the task of shedding his self-recognized, innate complexity and 'long pain' (l. 14) to others. Already,

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[74] Douglas, in *The Complete Poems*, pp. 74-75.

aged only twenty one, Douglas anticipates his death, and what might lie beyond it, but also articulates an implicit certainty that to 'simplify' him will not be easy, even when he is viewed through 'Time's wrong-way telescope' (l. 18). Simultaneously, he asks us to

> Through that lens see if I seem
> substance or nothing; of the world
> deserving mention or charitable oblivion

(ll. 21-23)

He desires artistic fruition, perhaps even fame, but implicitly fears that his achievements will demand an act of consignment to obscurity, lost in the kindness of time and forgetfulness. Accordingly, he asks that his final plea or instruction be judged with balanced scrutiny. The closing reiteration of 'Remember me when I am dead' (l. 25), however, renders 'charitable oblivion' subordinate to the quietly stated need for remembrance.[75]

On the surface, these words are a far cry from Douglas's bold embrace of 'final oblivion' as he longed to go East, yet what they share with the later declaration is their signification of something deeply embedded in his consciousness. For him, the confrontation with death and desert exile, fed by his predilection for ontological and epistemological enquiry, generated a sense of one's ultimate, irrevocable extinction, except as the material dust that is part of cyclical nature. Landscapes – both internal and external – are altered by war, and the soldier in exile is himself more intensely aware of both his dislocation and the competing claims of self-survival and self-extinction. As Samuel Hynes posits, in the battlefield's defamiliarizing space,

> man is no longer secure and at ease there. Nature [...] remains as an absence – the quality, the value, the experience of human belonging that once existed, and should still, [...] has been displaced by war.[76]

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[75] The poem may also be interpreted as a plea for others to understand Douglas's complexity, and the nature of his 'bête noire', more fully than he himself has. The eponymous term, 'simplify', thus reveals its capacity for multi-layered significance.

[76] Hynes, in *A War Imagined*, p. 201.

The resonance with Douglas's desert experience in particular is easily heard. As his work repeatedly testifies, he never seemed free of his sense of distance and of the correlation between presence and absence, nor of the need to excavate the meaning or reality of death and extinction. The poet's stylistic impersonality, of course, emerges as another form of self-extinction, a strategy that nevertheless invites us to penetrate beneath the disguise of detachment to the camouflaged awareness of personal and shared loss. However, nothing is simple, free of ambivalence or confirmed in certainty with Douglas. Perhaps this is what adds greater poignancy to his poetic plea for ultimate simplification. What does survive is the poetry, the richness of its complexity, and its power to demand we engage with its quest for truth.

<u>Part 2</u>
<u>Alun Lewis: Border Crossings, Longings, Belonging and
Un-belonging</u>

In 1986, writing of his sense of dis-location between his Palestinian colonial past and his

American imperial present as an in-between, exilic state, Edward Said stated:

> Identity – who we are, where we come from, what we are – is difficult to maintain in
> exile. […] we are the 'other', an opposite, a flaw in the geometry of resettlement, an
> exodus. Silence and discretion veil the hurt, [...] soothe the sting of loss.[77]

His words conceptualize his literal exile as location in an 'interstitial space' that, though

generating a sense of dispossession and homelessness, is also empowering, enabling him to

articulate his awareness of not belonging and to speak from the margin, as it were. Said, of

course, is writing of the nature of culture and identity as interdependent and constantly

changing processes.[78] Notwithstanding the differences that exist between the context of

Said's remarks here and the wartime experience of Alun Lewis, there is a degree of synergy

that emerges, not only in terms of notions of Otherness and the fragmentation of identity.

Just as Said's writings disclose the intentional irony of his own reference to the concealing

and annealing power of 'silence and discretion', so also does the creative voice of Lewis, and

Douglas, attest to a resistance to 'silence' and an inability – perhaps even a refusal – to

conceal the inner fracture, uncertainty, displacement and estrangement that inhabit exilic

'space'. In this respect, the rupture inherent in wartime exile is paradoxically the stimulus for

creativity and the impulse to give voice, even, or especially, to those inwardly fracturing

experiences that occupy the mind's landscape.

For Lewis, as with Keith Douglas, soldiery in a mobile war precipitated both

geographical displacement and the disturbing psychological and emotional experiences that

accompany such disruption. Furthermore, as discussed earlier, Lewis's early life appears to

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[77] Edward Said, in *After the Last Sky: Palestinian Lives* (New York: Pantheon, 1986), pp. 16-17.
[78] This view is extensively discussed in Bill Ashcroft and Pal Ahluwalia, *Edward Said: the Paradox of Identity* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), pp. 1-6.

have engendered in him an incipient awareness of his own liminality and otherness, expressed in his writings as an ambivalent sense of anchorage and belonging within his Valley community and during his education. As John Pikoulis tells us of Lewis's time at Cowbridge Grammar School, the boy was 'more than unusually unhappy there and [...] was, in effect isolated'.[79] Pikoulis recalls one of Lewis's stories written while a student at Manchester which reflects Lewis's reaction to his environment, and his 'sense of abandonment at the time'.[80] Lewis writes:

> It was an evil street. The pavement echoed dull and cold beneath the pedestrian's feet, save for the mocking laugh with which an occasional flagstone greeted the passer-by. How sullen was the blind stare of its 49 doors.[81]

The words are freighted with a powerful antipathy to place and a disturbing sense of its hostility to one who, perhaps like Lewis himself, is a 'passer-by'. In the light of such early evidence, it seems inevitable that Lewis's wartime journey could only intensify his sense of exilic estrangement and propensity for existential division. Given such circumstances and predisposition, combined with what emerges with increasing clarity in Lewis's later poetry and prose as an ontological insecurity, one is drawn towards a fusion of the aforementioned views of Adorno and Kristeva: for Lewis, writing is conceivably both 'the home of the homeless man',[82] and an expressive act that cannot exist unless stimulated by 'some kind of exile'.[83]

The physical nature of place and one's location within it were to become preoccupations central to Lewis's creative trajectory. In 'To Edward Thomas' (1940), this manifests as a Wordsworthian impulse to celebrate union with Nature and beauty, and with the eponymous poet for whom Lewis's words are an act of remembrance:

Climbing the steep path through the copse I knew

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[79] Pikoulis, *A Life*, p. 22.
[80] *Ibid.,* p. 41.
[81] Lewis, 'The Challenge', in *The Serpent,* February 1936, p. 71, quoted in Pikoulis, *A Life*, pp. 41-42.
[82] See Wondrich, *Irish University Review*, p. 3.
[83] See Kristeva, *Kristeva Reader*, p. 298.

> My cares weighed heavily as yours, my gift
> Much less, my hope
> No more than yours.
> And like you I felt sensitive and somehow apart,
> Lonely and exalted by the friendship of the wind
> And the placid afternoon enfolding
> The dangerous future and the smile.[84]

> (ll. 9-16)

Here, the conflation of place, reverence bordering on love, and a need to be separate from the world is palpably present, as is the undercurrent of 'dangerous' uncertainty, proleptically configuring the sense of apartness and vulnerability that permeates Lewis's later wartime poems. Even in this relatively early phase of his poetic development, therefore, place evokes ambivalent feeling, the speaker oscillating between the artist's joy of desired estrangement from worldly matters, and prefigurations of a 'dangerous future', of 'endless rides of a stormy-branched dark / Whose fibres are a thread within the hand' (ll. 52-53).

Landscape in Lewis's work is, in fact, rarely configured solely as the locus of Romantic calm, of desired 'exile' in a state of spiritual exaltation. His configuration of place at times affirms a sense of the strangeness of a displaced self, divorced from any feeling of communal integrity, as detected, for instance, in the detached tonality of the opening words of 'Destruction' (1939): 'This is the street I inhabit'.[85] Elsewhere, his poems convey a state closer to that of partial belonging, a condition of liminality, as earlier discussed in Chapter 1 in relation to 'The Mountain over Aberdare' (1941), a poem to which I must briefly return, in which the valley and its deprivations are perceived from the speaker's liminal location, described thus:

> From this high quarried ledge I see
> The place for which the Quakers once
> Collected clothes, my father's home,
> Our stubborn bankrupt village sprawled

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[84] Lewis, *Collected Poems*, pp. 29-30.
[85] Lewis, 'Destruction', in *Collected Poems*, p. 90, l. 1.

> In jaded dusk beneath its nameless hills;[86]

These opening lines seemingly establish a sense of 'belonging' to community in subtle hints such as '*Our* stubborn bankrupt village' (l. 2), while correspondingly evincing a sense of the poet-speaker as existing in a process of withdrawal, of being already partially absent.[87] However, as the poem progresses, a tonal hint of anger subverts any certainty that Lewis, in the speaker's persona, is either totally dissociated or totally content in his liminality.[88] A desperate interaction is exposed between the landscape and the mind-infecting pain of daily toil as the observer alights on

> Allotments where the collier digs
> While engines hack the coal within his brain.
>
> (ll. 11-12)

The force of 'hack' and its transferred significance from the pit, to 'allotments', to mind, resonates powerfully, as does the sense of this place as irredeemably assailed by 'insidious', drenching rain (l. 18), and by history's cruelty that, apart from bringing familial loss, turns the community to 'mourners' (l. 16). Though remaining liminally placed on his 'high quarried ledge', the speaker's mounting sense of his personal implication is increasingly audible. We are, with him, witness to the reduction of this community to a state of human dereliction and monotonous dependency on 'winter dole' (l. 10), 'scrutting' for sustenance. Ultimately, therefore, the poem has exposed the ambivalence of the poet-speaker's disengagement from a landscape and a community, each steeped in 'Huge grief' (l. 25). The speaker has voiced audible disapproval for the hardship of his Valley, but in his inflections and articulation of loss one detects a hint of betrayal, the sense that he is somehow complicit by virtue of his partial self-distancing:

> I watch the clouded years

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[86] Lewis, *Collected Poems,* pp. 87-88 (p. 87, ll. 1-5).
[87] My emphasis.
[88] See my discussion in Chapter 1, footnote 118, and its reference to Tony Brown's comments in Brown, *Colonial Wales*, p. 87.

> Rune the rough foreheads of these moody hill,
> This wet evening, in a lost age.

> (ll. 35-37)

The sense of complicity would intensify as his experiences of exilic estrangement and life as a soldier of empire progressed, a theme to which I will return later.

As in the poetry of Keith Douglas, constructions of place and landscape thus extend beyond the purely geographical. They delineate the poet-speaker's placement in exilic space, tensioned uneasily with inner conflict, including what Andrew Dawson and Mark Johnson define as

> the experience of self and place as 'other', or, more precisely, of the experience of self and place as located in the movement between and in acts of identification with other possible selves and places. [...] [I]n experiencing self as other, we experience the other as self.[89]

The statement has a distinct echo of Said's comment on the fluidity of identity, quoted at the head of this section.[90] Lewis's trajectory exhibits such experience, evidenced in each stage of his creative oeuvre. Furthermore, like Douglas, his work reveals the interdependence and coalescence of place and the destabilizing experiences war and exile bring. Not least among these are the pain of absence, the uncertain fixity of Self, the dubiety of imperialist rectitude and motive, and the need to express in a unique voice the challenge, as Said terms it, 'to cross borders, break barriers of thought and experience'.[91]

For Lewis, issues of his liminal location at 'borders of thought and experience', of ambivalent belonging and recurrent, haunting remembrances of Wales, interact with each other and with his transit to, and experience of, India. They thus become constitutive parts of his reiterative configurations of the 'exilic self'. Tangentially, they also attest to the inter-flux of 'self' and 'other' expressed above, including what will later be discussed as the need

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[89] Andrew Dawson and Mark Johnson, 'Migration, Exile and Landscapes of the Imagination, in *Contested Landscapes: Movement, Exile and Place,* Barbara Bender and Margot Winer, eds (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2001), pp. 319-332 (p. 330).
[90] See Said, *After the Last Sky,* pp. 16-17.
[91] See Said, *Exile*, 2001, p. 185.

to transcend 'place' and even to shed identity in a metaphysical extinction of 'self'. However, in Lewis's life and work, inextricably bound up in this concept of interchange and 'acts of identification', lie his articulations of love for, and separation from, the beloved. They constitute expressions of longing and of an almost omnipresent sense of absence, but also of the poetic voice seeking immersion in an alternative self, the beloved. Later in Lewis's poetic journey, this longing was arguably to become more tenuous, giving way to a growing impulse for the shedding of painful ties, but his need to experience love, either with a woman, or through some cosmic, collective humanity, would never be totally relinquished

In his journals, Lewis wrote 'the ache for a new thought in the poet [...] the desire to say something new is the next desire after the desire to express the emotions, love and the capacity for pain'.[92] Significantly, in writing of his creative urge for an original poetic voice, he gives primacy here to his desire to express the seemingly contingent emotions of love and pain. If such an urge seems rooted in Romanticism, it also intimates an inherent awareness of the coexistence of such experiences, a union that could only intensify as an exilic anguish that war, and its contingent, enforced estrangement, generate. In Chapter 2, 'War Wedding' (1941), written after Lewis's marriage, was discussed in the context of the poet's 'enmity within'.[93] However, it brings together so many of the elements of separation, love and self-division germane to this chapter that it warrants further consideration here. It evokes the pain of one in the throes of transformation from lover into soldier, Lewis's own predicament, from its outset deeply inflected with a sense of absence from the Beloved.

In Part I, the speaker states:

Here, on this chasm where the stars
Are splashed in powder in the reeling depths,

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[92] Alun Lewis, *Collected Journals* (Bridgend: Seren, 2008), quoted in Archard, *Wales at War,* p. 77. These journals in their entirety are currently not in publication. After their public issue in 2008, they were subsequently withdrawn. They are due for re-publication in 2015, to celebrate the centenary of Lewis's birth.
[93] Lewis, *Collected Poems*, pp. 62-67.

I tremble in nightmares of silence, calling your name.[94]

It is an aching declaration of longing that locates his sense of exile and distance 'on', not 'in', 'this chasm', an image that conflates estrangement with liminality. From such a position, the speaker fluctuates between the subjective 'I' and the object of his love who, though absent, is configured in Part II as a presence, anguished by the separation enforced by war, and by her own feelings of guilt:

>They wanted only to break your gestures
>But all your gentle seed they took
>And all your manly symmetry,
>The soft ways of your speech
>And all your laughter.
>
>All life was active in your gesture.
>But I refused you, threw you farther
>Than heart's reach, nerves' tether....
>Oh! Had I only slid my nails
>Into your gaping cicatrice
>And sucked you with my lips' leech kisses

(ll. 29-39

These are words heavily freighted with a sense of separation, loss and, ironically, of the emasculating demands of war, and yet they flow into images of eroticism that evoke a strange sense of transference of identities. It is as if the 'I' who 'refused you' has shifted from being the '*She who tarries far off, in a strange anguish*', [95] to the male 'pagan lover' (l. 40) who yearns to close *her* wound, the 'gaping cicatrice', a clearly ambiguous choice of language. In effect, the 'self' of the poem seems to be in transit: there is a sense of interchange between the subjective voice and the 'other', at this juncture, the beloved.

As the poem advances, the prospect of war, even death, coalesces with configurations of love and the loss of selfhood in this 'other'. In Part III, the speaker articulates erotic

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[94] *Ibid.,* p. 62, ll. 22-24.

[95] This expression comes from the italicized epigraph that appears at the head of Part II of the poem, in Lewis, *Collected Poems*, p. 63.

longings as he awaits the beloved, seemingly dreaming of the marriage bed, but also

burdened with thoughts of death:

> For first I must encounter
> My dreaming German soldier.
> And when my body falls away
> Will come my useless saviour.

(ll. 47-50)

The 'German soldier' is also 'other', one that must be encountered, but in the speaker's

thoughts of 'when my body falls away', there is an ambivalence, tempting us to think of this

as both the speaker drawing back from the soldier he has killed, and as a momentary vision of

his own death. Pikoulis's words seem to accord with this reading, identifying the speaker's

mingling of culpability and 'a measure of the love he feels' for the dead German: '[H]e is the

cause of the thing he mourns'.[96] The speaker's reverie turns, then, to the beloved as the

means of orgasmic union and as she who awakens him from 'the void of heaven and hell' (l.

53). Carrie Jadud's comments seem apposite here, that 'the soldier connects his death with

the other in intimate terms', and that these lines express an awareness that any true

consummation of love must be 'delayed' until the speaker has met death in the form of his

'"dreaming German soldier"'.[97] However, her conclusion perhaps overlooks the subtle

intimations of the epithet, 'useless', which still hang over this notion of consummation in

imagined ecstasy, undermining the certainty of the beloved's power to save.

The poem's trajectory in Parts IV to VIII continues the dream-like flux between man

and woman, deepening the voiced thoughts of the wounds of war, of separation, and of

longings for peace and consummation. Nor are these longings solely bound to love and

marriage. They are, too, expressions of a fragile selfhood, fraught with fear and frustration.

In Part V, '*The Marriage Bed'*, the soldier-speaker implores his wife, 'Beloved, lie with me'

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[96] Pikoulis, *A Life*, p. 191.
[97] Jadud, 'Fragile Universe', p. 108.

(l. 86), seeking, in sexual union, his movement away from the rigours of war '[T]oward the pole of peace'. The phallus becomes the means of escape from the world, and the source of a seemingly sacramental self-reconstitution in shared otherness with the beloved:

> The fragile universe of self
> In all its fine integrity
> Becomes a cosmic curve, a thrust
> Of natural fertility:
> And Gods who shivered in the dust
> Have found their lost divinity.

<div align="right">(ll. 96-101)</div>

The 'integrity' of 'self', as Jadud acknowledges, allays the fear of separation and aloneness, thus demanding 'the coexistence of a designated other', essential to the conception of a unified self. The absence of the beloved, though she emerges in the poem as a phantom presence, an alter ego or 'other', is therefore 'both conceived in terms of self and necessary to the conception of self'.[98]

Progressively, the beloved's voice seems to float in and out of the poem and of the speaker's consciousness, directly addressing us in Part VI with its own pain:

> My lover is a soldier,
> He brought me all his trouble;
> I thought my heart would break
> That bitter joy to slake.
>
> But now he lies like honeysuckle
> His wounded hands a blessing on my breasts.

<div align="right">(ll. 114-119)</div>

Again, one senses a transfusion of 'self', the word 'blessing' perhaps connoting the benedictory comfort that each discovers in the other, she in her soldier, he in her. Part VII then intrudes as a parting of the two, framed in the context of death, conflated with what resounds in the image of 'eagles', connoting Germany:

> Eagles of suffering hang across the moon
> Their shadows fall upon the smiling child,

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[98] *Ibid.,* p. 115.

> The terrible black eagles that hover
> In ceaseless vigil, the world over.

<div align="right">(ll. 126-129)</div>

The fear for the child of mankind, or of the lovers' imagined union, deeply inflects the speaker's words, culminating in his expressed desire for the ultimate extinction of Self in the peace only death can bring:

> The miracle I seek is peace.
>
> She said I made her fertile with a smile.
> But now the reaper shaves his head
> And goes to harvest with the dead
> [...]
> While War sets all her golden fields afire.

<div align="right">(ll. 135-140)</div>

'War' is now capitalized, a universalized conflagration no longer confined to the speaker's internalization of its effects or his lover's suffering.

Part VIII brings to a close this dialogue of 'selves' in a return to the reality of place, as though a release from an anguished dream:

> The city changes hands by day and night,
> A Whore for whom the drunkards fight.
>
> Where Love surrenders in that brawl
> Their names are scrawled in blood along the wall.

<div align="right">(ll. 143-146)</div>

Love, too, is universalized now, as is the death war brings. Yet, despite this, what lingers most in the poem is the sense of an internal battle, of self-integration unresolved and a longed-for consummation incomplete, such qualities as render the poem's title oxymoronic. As Jadud posits, the poetic imagination configures the loved one out of anxieties within the 'self', not least those centred on the subject's sense of impending loss, and of his uncertain

belonging to life.[99] Out of this comes both fear and longing: fear of the beloved's presence fading to absence, and a simultaneous longing for his or her return as the source of succour and reconstitution of divided identity. It is a condition reminiscent of the Freudian concept of mourning as internalized bereavement. The subject, pre-imagining the loss of the beloved 'other', conceives of the latter as one with whom he identifies as the foundation of Self, thus constituting the means of resolving one's inner divisions.[100] In this respect, the subject and the beloved become the source of pain and comfort for their 'other'. One therefore leaves this poem with a feeling of having witnessed that 'movement between and in acts of identification' of which Dawson and Johnson speak.[101] It provides a sense of our having shared an encounter with the otherness of love, and of the threat to the 'fragile universe of self' occasioned by the soldier-poet's translocation from the desired sanctuary of marriage to the separative, 'exilic' demands of his preparation for war. Once again, the words of Said are resonant:

> Because the exile sees things both in terms of what has been left behind and what is actual here and now, there is a double perspective that never sees things in isolation.[102]

So often in his poetry, as in 'War Wedding', Lewis conveys this 'double perspective' in which absence and presence are in interplay and evocations of love are, simultaneously, configurations of finding and losing self in the beloved as 'other'. Furthermore, such evocations arguably constitute what Kristeva regards as a 'narcissistic wound' which 'never

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[99] *Ibid.,* p. 112.

[100] See Freud, in *Mourning and Melancholia* (1917 [1915]), *Standard Edition,* XIV (1914-1916), pp. 243 -258. Freud adjusted his earlier definition of the conditions of mourning and melancholy in this text to conclude that, rather than relinquishing emotional ties to the lost 'other', thus becoming free of grief, the subject replaces an actual absence with an imagined presence. Moreover, this creates a dual dynamic: the pain of separation from the absent 'other' exposes an ambivalent condition. The subject is inhabited by the 'other' as a reminder of his/her own incompleteness, but also as a means whereby he may resolve his or her fractured subjectivity. Lewis's conflation of absence and presence, and of the self and the beloved, suggest a connection to Freud's theory.

[101] Dawson and Johnson, *Contested Landscapes*, p. 330.

[102] Edward Said, *Representations of the Intellectual* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1994), p. 44.

dwells in us without burning us'.[103] Rather than seeing such a condition as a reconstitution of identity, she sees it as a traumatic self-erasure.

Anna Smith, in her discussion of Kristeva's theory of the trauma inherent in the nature of love, expands on this notion of narcissistic crisis in terms that chime with the aforementioned transience of the subjective self and its location in the 'other':

> Here, the state of love is more connected with identity's abject disintegration than its harmonious resolution. In fact, the limits of love appear to be equal to the limits of subjectivity: when one loses oneself in love, an erased subjectivity 'achieves its point of culmination'. [...] [W]hen we speak of ourselves, we illuminate the transient being of subjects in passage from one state to another.[104]

Smith is speaking of Kristeva's concept of the 'subject' as the speaking being who articulates this crisis of erasure and transformation, and of love as 'a state of affairs whose very *structure* interrogates stable distinctions between exterior and interior states'.[105] Lewis's poem 'The Way Back' (1943), like 'War Wedding', reaffirms this potential instability, but may reveal a further layer of complexity.[106] It expresses Lewis's own deepening sense of fragile fixity and corresponding dependency upon the loved one as 'other', but arguably with the added intensity of being addressed to his new lover, Frieda Aykroyd, while still loving his wife, Gweno.[107] Furthermore, as a letter to the former indicates, thoughts of her absence conflate the beloved with the 'oblivion' of death and the ugly threat of war, from which only writing provides cathartic release:

> I need your real presence [...]. Otherwise, I only ache for oblivion, [...] bad things. Writing of it releases me from it.

As Gweno then invades his thoughts, he continues:

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[103] Julia Kristeva, *Tales of Love*, trans. by Leon Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), p. 4. The inserted quotation is from Julia Kristeva's article (in translation), 'Say Nothing', trans. by Salvatore Mele, in *On the Beach,* 3 and 4 (1984), 10-14 (p. 11).

[104] Anna Smith, *Julia Kristeva: Readings of Exile and Estrangement* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1996), p. 163.

[105] *Ibid.*

[106] Lewis, *Collected Poems*, pp. 127-128.

[107] John Pikoulis writes of Frieda's 'impact' on Lewis at the time of this poem's composition. Though framed largely within a biographical context, his comments may justifiably suggest the dual presence of Gweno and Frieda as the beloved of the poem. See Pikoulis, *A Life*, pp. 183-185.

> I must try and write to you of the trouble in me. [...] I love Gweno very deeply. I can feel her love all the time, its reality and its deep tides. [...] It would be impossible for me not to love her. [...] The trouble is in the conflict of two tides of loving. [...] I'm so worthless, too, beloved. [...] Love is one of the few things we can't be careful about. It lives & dies in its own nature.[108]

The language resonates with the ache of his ambivalence, while the 'two tides' represent conflicting frontiers of feeling that render Lewis's self-unification impossible. Out of this pain sprang 'The Way Back'.

Lewis's opening stanzas are fraught with a sense of the speaker's isolation, displaced both temporally and spatially. Place and time transform memory of the loved one into a burning image of erotic longing, and a threat to his need to lose himself in her:

> Six days and two thousand miles
> I have watched the shafted rain
> Feminise the burning land,
>
> [...]
>
> Six days and two thousand miles
> I have gone alone
> With a green mind and you
> Burning in the stubborn bone.

<div align="right">(ll. 1-3, 7-10)</div>

The repetitive phrasing attests to a sense of liminal solitude, while the flux of pronouns from 'I' to 'you' asseverates the desire for a 'way back' to the absent beloved. That desire, and the interplay of pronouns, intensifies in erotic nostalgia as a shift of tense further distances the speaker:

> I swam within your naked lake
> And breasted with exquisite ease
> The foaming arabesques of joy

<div align="right">(ll. 16-18)</div>

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[108] Alun Lewis, letter to Frieda Aykroyd sent from Karachi, 31 August 1943, reproduced in *A Cypress Walk: Letters to 'Frieda'* (London: Enitharmon Press, 2006), pp. 118-121.

The language rides on a sense of delirium and of the speaker's loss of self in the other he so desperately needs. The poem's close attests to this need, but also intimating that to cross the borders from self to other constitutes a danger of dissolution of that self:

> And in the hardness of this world
> And in the brilliance of this pain
> I exult with such a passion
> To be squandered, to be hurled,
> To be joined to you again.

<div align="right">(ll. 31-35)</div>

The violence of the verbs enacts a desire for the 'oblivion' referred to in Lewis's letter to Frieda, while 'joined' expresses a union that is framed within the context of an act of centrifugal self-fragmentation. Once again, Lewis articulates a return to the absent beloved as both a finding and a losing of a centred identity.

Less than a month later in September 1943, having returned to his battalion from his brief sojourn with Frieda in Bombay, Lewis would write again in 'A Fragment' (1943) of his continuing anguish and desire to complete the self in his lover, Frieda.[109] As discussed earlier in this thesis, the poem attests ambiguously to the throes of sexual union conflated with the proximity of death:

> I the deep shaft sinking
> Through the quivering Unknown

<div align="right">(ll. 5-6)</div>

Such images are impelled by the speaker's thoughts of the ferocity of his separation,

> Where aloneness fiercely
> Trumpets the unsounded night

<div align="right">(ll. 1-2)</div>

This anguish dominates his focus until the poem progresses to an open declaration of the fusion of the self and his beloved in its final line. However, here, despite the underlying

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[109] Lewis, *Collected Poems*, p. 161.

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crisis of identity that this need for fusion affirms, there is a simultaneous sense of renewal and continuance in these closing words, 'I am, in Thee' (l. 13). Moreover, the placement of the comma is a subtle source of duality to this confession, of another kind of 'double perspective': the line defines the speaker's self-transfusion to the body and soul of the loved one, but also asseverates an ontological certainty. *Only* in her does he exist, while the capitalized 'Thee' places her as a reverenced, almost transcendent being. Earlier, in 1941, Lewis had alluded to his wife in poetry as 'the singing rib within my dreaming side'.[110] Now, in 'A Fragment', it is the poet-speaker who is 'in' the beloved, someone seemingly other than Gweno, and not one who carries his Eve-like other 'within' him. However, despite the apparent differences here, both poems, along with 'War Wedding', are arguably variant expressions of a common anguish, articulating the conflation of love and estrangement. In each, identity thus emerges in the process of flux, transgressing the boundaries between the self and the beloved other.

As his wartime experience progressed, Lewis's sense of separation intensified. His journey outward constituted not only the crossing of physical frontiers to the Indian sub-continent, but also as discussed earlier a challenge – in Said's terms – to the boundaries of his 'thought and experience',[111] and of his sense of Self. His writing, just like that of Keith Douglas, though less besieged by the role of killer, repeatedly iterates this challenge as a dual exploration of Self and the Otherness of both place and army life. Set within this context, one of Lewis's letters is interesting. Prior to that journey eastwards, whilst he had been training at Longmoor, he wrote to the Welsh poet and painter, Brenda Chamberlain, that his new location was

> not Wales at all [...] [W]hen I hunger for the mountains I know it's a long time since I
> felt the discomfort of wildness and hardness and want. [...] The comfortable South

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[110] Lewis, 'Post-Script for Gweno', *Collected Poems*, p. 54, l. 5.
[111] See Said, in *Exile*, 2001, p. 185.

will get all that from the Luftwaffe, I expect. It's a pity for the children and the mangling of bodies: but the effect on the mind will be ultimately good.[112]

His words are loaded with a curious ambiguity. While they express a longing for home, an incipient sense of discomforting estrangement and defamiliarization in the training camp, they simultaneously affirm an acceptance that out of the evil of war comes enlightened understanding.[113] The declaration appears to assert a strange logic in its expectation of ultimate 'good'. Whether or not Lewis, in the understated expression of pity, is masking his true depth of feeling, the statement is nevertheless notably prescient of the epistemological experience and transformation war would bring him. Though he may not have yet consciously grasped at Longmoor the extent of this prescience, his writings in transit from England and in India would later testify to a deepened understanding. Increasingly, place would constitute for him an external experience of exilic space, conflating internal longings with his uncertain sense of belonging. It would also augment his already profound awareness of human deprivation, so engendering a correlative compassion for the otherness of the East as a constituent of a more cosmic Love that transcends the limits of the purely romantic.[114]

As early as 1938, in 'Threnody for a Starry Night', as already touched upon, Lewis had envisaged such a universal, transcendent Love, though conflated with freedom from worldly travail and discovered only in death.[115] Furthermore, the poem configures his vision of estrangement from home and from the past in words that articulate a deep sense of permanent disaffiliation, almost prefiguring the wartime exile from which Lewis would not return. The seemingly disembodied poetic voice recalls familiar memories, but they are paradoxically imbued with unfamiliarity:

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[112] Letter to Brenda Chamberlain, 21 February 1941, NLW Alun Lewis MS. 20798c, fols 1-2.

[113] Carrie Jadud posits a similar view, claiming that Lewis's letter suggests 'the exile's construction of Wales' as a place 'larger and more vital than the "comfortable South"'. See Jadud, 'Fragile Universe', p. 217.

[114] Roland Mathias argues that Lewis's concept of Love 'aims for an integrated vision of love [which] contains that kind of caring and suffering for mankind, individually and *in toto* (sic) that Christian love attempts'. See Mathias, 'Black Spot in the Focus' [1980], p. 45. Notwithstanding its Christian emphasis, it is a view that accords with the trajectory Lewis appears to take towards a more cosmic, compassionate understanding and humanity in transit to, and service in, India.

[115] Lewis, *Collected Poems*, pp. 43-47.

> We cannot go back. We dare not meet
> The strangeness of our friendly street
> [...]
> We cannot return there.

> <div align="right">(ll. 37-38, 46)</div>

The repeated 'cannot' is inflected with disconcerting certainty, testament to what lies beyond as a state of un-belonging, as the speaker envisages a journey in which

> Lovers who among the grasses
> Found the soul's sweet fern seed on their bodies,
> [...]
>   wander
> And seek in Palestinian lanes
> The vast immortal Love of Other.

> <div align="right">(ll. 79-80, 83-85)</div>

These words convey a sense of Love as a transcendent liberation in death, and the poem's final line is an affirmation of this. Death is the means to 'End the mad feud. The worm is love' (l. 122). It is a far cry from Lewis's vision as expressed in a poem composed during an illness while a student at Manchester: there he had written of confrontation with death as embodying

> The terrible presence of the
> Lover
> Whom I do not love.[116]

By contrast, 'Threnody for a Starry Night' closes on a vision that foreshadows the cosmic compassion and Otherness Lewis's Indian writings would later express.

Aboard ship in late 1942, bound for India, Lewis wrote 'The Departure': it is a poem freighted with memory and unrest.[117] The opening stanza evokes a powerful sense of location as the speaker focuses on a depersonalized 'He' (l. 2) who, half waking from sleep, feels

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[116] The lines come from an unnamed poem discovered by Gweno in a journal kept by Lewis. She sees the poem as Lewis's attempt to exorcise the threat he felt from within. The poem and the lines quoted appear in Lewis, *Letters to My Wife*, pp. 15-16 (p. 16, ll. 32-34), and reappear in Pikoulis, *A Life*, p. 192.

[117] Lewis, *Collected Poems*, pp. 112-113.

> The pulse and beat
> Of the engines that even now were revolving,
> Revolving, rotating, throbbing along his brain
> Rattling the hurried carpentry of his bunk,
> Setting an unknown bearing into space.

(ll. 4-8)

The insistent alliteration exposes the deceptive detachment upon which the poem is constructed: the 'He' is a mask for the poetic-voice that narrates, and who, in this apparent grammatical displacement from self to an 'other', is charting his destination, his own exilic 'space'.

Absence and presence are juxtaposed and interact as the speaker draws together powerfully concrete images of the lover, left ashore, who

> came with him to the barrier
> And knowing she could come no further
> Turned back on the edge of his sleep,
> Vexed, fumbling in her handbag,
> Giving the world a dab of rouge and powder.

(ll. 16-20)

The 'barrier' is physical and metaphorical, evocative of painful and perhaps permanent separation, as the narrative voice enunciates the woman's fears that are surely his own, barely concealed :

> Knowing more deeply than he the threat of his voyage,
> With all a living woman's fear of death.

(ll. 23-24)

The stanza that follows now accentuates the poem's inter-flux of identities. Focus shifts first to the man's own thoughts and then to his lover's as he imagines her fears for his irreversible absence, his exile constituting an extinction of memory and being. Such fears seem to form a triple anguish, those of the waking traveller, the 'living woman', and the narrative voice, in thoughts of

> A man released from the weary fluctuations

Of time and distance, forgetfulness and dying.

(ll. 29-30)

The final stanza articulates the self in abjection. The pain of longing can only be allayed, it seems, in a seclusion of self and in the otherness of the drudgery of soldiery:

And then he woke unrested from his longing,
And locked himself and hurried to off-load
Boxes of ammunition from the wagons
And send them swaying from the groaning derricks
Deep into the unrefusing ship.

(ll. 31-35)

'Locked himself' suggests an act of retreat from conscious tribulation, perhaps a prefiguration of Lewis's later admission, in a letter addressed to Gweno from India in November, 1943: 'I've always enclosed myself in an impalpable circle of seclusion'.[118] However, 'longing' still brings no true rest or release.

Gabrielle Griffin posits that 'exile is not a singular condition': it may come about through banishment, or through circumstances not freely chosen but, rather 'inflicted' and beyond one's immediate control. She therefore identifies it as a condition 'where the subjecthood of the individual is called into question as s/he becomes the object of a displacing power which s/he is unable to resist'.[119] Lewis's experience in his passage to the East would increasingly confirm his displacement as a constituent source of his pluralistic self-division. If estrangement from the beloved reveals the need for Lewis's poetic persona to be reconciled both with and *in* his 'other', his departure to distant places would demand his encounter with a further dimension to Otherness. Increasingly he was drawn compassionately to the difference of place, while simultaneously disturbed by recognition of the self as other. In Kristeva's terms, it is the paradox of one who becomes a stranger to himself, 'reconciled with themselves to the extent that they recognise themselves as

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[118] Lewis, *In the Green Tree*, pp. 56-57 (p. 56).
[119] Gabrielle Griffin, 'Exile and the Body', in *Cultures of Exile: Images of Displacement,* Wendy Everett and Peter Wagstaff, eds (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2004), pp. 111-124 (p. 111).

foreigners'.[120] Moreover, this strangeness is a condition that resides within the self *and* the other, intensifying as place engenders a disturbing correlation between inner and outer worlds.

Whilst in transit aboard the *Athlone Castle*, Lewis's writing continued to express a deepening estrangement, configuring a journey in which we increasingly sense his poetic persona in the process both of discovery and of becoming a stranger to itself.   'On Embarkation' (1942) evokes a complex image of a mind in transit, fluctuating between present and distanced realities.[121]   It quietly commands us to see what it sees, 'this silent disciplined assembly' (l. 1), and to

> Think of them, as the derrick sways and poises
> Vacantly as their minds do at this passage,
> Good-natured agents of a groping purpose
> That sends them now to strange precipitous places
> Where all are human and Oh easily hurt
> And – the temptation being to forget
> Such villages as linger in the mind,
> Lidice on the road from Bethlehem –
> Ask whether kindness will persist in hearts
> Plagued by the snags and rapids of a curse

(ll. 6-15)

One feels that the objective 'them' and the plangently accentuated 'hurt' are inclusive of the speaker, and the implicit uncertainty of lines 14-15 an echo of his own doubt in the face of death, an entry into 'the long Unseen' (l. 22).   His vision is of war, 'the Bren's straightforward road' (l. 19), and of his present location being where 'We shake down nightly in the strange Unknown' (l. 24).   The capitalizations emphatically conceptualize death and place as related loci of Otherness, reinforcing a sense of this embarkation as the first stage of a defamiliarizing journey that dissolves remembered realities.

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[120] Julia Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, trans. by Léon S. Roudiez (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), p. 195.

[121] Lewis, *Collected Poems*, pp. 114-117.

As the poem advances, absence and presence coalesce in thoughts of 'fields of home' (l. 34), in recollections of Army leave in a 'Cardiganshire lane' (l. 54) and of 'harsh hewn faces of the faming folks' (l. 64). The shifts of vision from the panoptic 'strange Unknown' that is both here and beyond, to these 'things you see in detail, those you need' (l. 57), suggests a mind slipping from its moorings, growing more and more exiled from its Welsh origins. Details of place are 'needed' in order to hold on to some fixity, but are recalled in a tenderness inflected with the blight of moral disapproval:

> And farther on the mortgaged crumbling farm
> Where Shonni Rhys, that rough backsliding man
> Has found the sheep again within the corn
> And fills the evening with his sour oaths;
> The curse of failure's in his shambling gait.

> (ll. 67-71)

Such concrete realities grow more distant as the speaker, now clearly articulated in the inclusive 'us', exposes his sense of certainties in dissolution: thoughts of separation from loved ones segue from the spatial and temporal to visions of death:

> But now each railway station makes and breaks
> The certain hold and drifts us all apart.
> Some women know exactly what's implied
> Ten Years, they say behind their smiling eyes,
> Thinking of children, pensions, looks that fade,
> The slow forgetfulness that strips the mind
> Of its apparel and wears down the thread;
> Or maybe when he laughs and bends to make
> Her laugh with him she sees that he must die
> [...]
> And all are poets when they say Goodbye
> And what they say will live and fructify.

> (ll. 93-101, 107-108)

Once again, the speaker's thoughts turn to the coalescence of love and death, configured in a transference of the speaking self to the imagined thoughts of the 'she' who foresees his irretrievable departure. 'He must die', but what can survive is an expression of farewell as an enduring poetic testament.

However, the closing stanza erases any certainty in these intimations of what will 'live and fructify'. The soldiers 'wait the tide' (l. 109), the 'bell clangs in the engine room' (l. 112), and there is an accretion of verbs and adjectival phrases that connote this vessel as a ship of death. Night 'shrouds' the loved ones at the dockside, amidst sounds of breaking bows as the 'churning screw burns white', and those left behind bear 'pallid faces' that wear 'an unconscious smile', one that betrays the fragility of their expectations of a loved one's return (ll. 113-118). The speaker closes in words that testify, not to realities, but to an illusion of an 'unborn tiny child' (l. 119) for whose future he prays. His final hope is for a world unlike that in which, implicitly, he will be exiled. His prayer is for

> an earth as kind
> As the sweet breast of her who gives him milk
> And waves me down this first clandestine mile.

<div align="right">(ll. 120-122)</div>

It is hard not to hear the voice of one already conscious of himself as having embarked upon an estranging journey, to an otherness that exiles him spatially, temporally, and from the self, in an ontological crossing of frontiers. Indeed, perhaps the poem is an almost elegiac affirmation of what Lewis wrote to his parents around the time of his departure for India: 'I have always known I had some such journey and separation ahead of me, *always*'.[122] His own emphasis attests to his writing as an enactment of a self, forearmed with a sense of the inevitability of its exile.[123]

Lewis's poems written while in transit repeatedly evoke the interaction of absence and presence, thereby further intensifying a feeling of otherness and a dispersed subjectivity. In 'A Troopship in the Tropics', (1942), images fluctuate between the concrete immediacy of

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[122] Lewis, addressing his mother in a letter of 1942, quoted in part in Pikoulis, *A Life*, p. 138.
[123] Alan Vaughan Jones, commenting on what he terms an ambiguous 'uncertainty of emplacement' and the 'ambivalence of register that is characteristic of [Lewis's] evocations of rural west Wales', argues that there are 'traces of the ethic of indifference' in 'On Embarkation'. See Jones, 'Modalities of Cultural Identity', p. 12. Whilst I concur with his detection of ambiguous 'uncertainty', I see the poem, despite its ambivalence, as evoking resigned sadness rather than 'indifference'.

realities aboard ship and an increasingly distanced, tenuous hold on the past.[124] The poet's own censure of class distinctions is implicitly visible in the juxtaposed images of 'The sundeck for the children and officers / Under the awning' (ll. 5-6) and the space below deck, where 'Deep in the foetid hold the tiered bunks/Hold restless men who sweat and toss and sob' (ll. 9-10). Yet, into this sensory reality of place, the absent past infiltrates, disturbing the speaker:

> Welsh songs surge softly in the circling darkness;
> Thoughts sail back like swans to the English winter;
> Strange desires drift into the mind.

(ll. 29-31)

The sibilance enacts a sense of memory dissolving the speaker's fixity, while punctuation reinforces the illusion of place and time as agents of distance and separation.

Though far more prosaic in its narrative tone, movement and construction, 'The Run In' (1942), also written during Lewis's transit, provides a similar sense of flux between past and present, but offers even more compelling evidence of poetry as an enactment of an untethered self.[125] Again, Lewis's speaker is sensorily alive, but even more aware of having somehow crossed boundaries that offer no anchorage:

> There is a little wind on my skin and
> I sweat and cannot find any consolation and cannot tell
> What point in the universe I am. There is no retention.
> Life transfers itself;
> [...]
> And most of us owe something both to the dead and the living
>   and move almost unconsciously between worlds.

(ll. 17-20, 23-24)

The 'I' cannot place itself within the cosmos, expressing at best a state of liminality and transit 'between worlds'. The sense of movement between frontiers both topographical and transcendent, between 'dying and living' (l. 28), infiltrates the consciousness, along with the

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[124] Lewis, *Collected Poems*, pp. 118-119.
[125] *Ibid.*, pp. 194-196.

awareness of the beloved as one from whom, as a soldier, one withholds truths, and who is now permanently absent, except in the erotic incursions of the present:

> Because you dare not try to hold love any more,
> And the lover is always elsewhere than the beloved,
> And always there is the rude itch of the present,
> And the ghostly infidelity of the past never relenting
> [...]
> And you defer writing letters and you choose what to say.

<div align="right">(ll. 30-33, 36)</div>

The poet's words increasingly become a stream of consciousness bordering on abjection, as the voice recollects a morning when

> two black robins were
>   singing
> And contemplating themselves in my mirror and defiling my
>   books with their droppings and exquisitely singing,
> Even then the old ghost was there.

<div align="right">(ll. 37-41)</div>

The two birds are 'black', an image surely configuring a deathly vision of lovers. The meanderings of these lines above begin more clearly to asseverate a conflation of distant longing, the fear of daring to 'hold' on to the beloved, and the guilt that accompanies a sense of betrayal of one's past.

The lines that follow now shift the poem's perspective. Even the tenses become unfixed as the narrative persona urges itself to 'yield to the motion of the boat' (l. 42), simultaneously alighting on 'the man next to him' while the 'engine was purring' (l. 44) and 'they were steering dead into the pole star' (l. 47). The effect of the narrative sequence is disorientating, a deliberate poetic enactment of the speaker's dissolving self-fixity and deconstruction as the poem moves to free indirect discourse. The images drawn suggest a fusion of the speaker with an 'other' who is held in the realities of memory, only to be pulled to the threat and dislocations of the present:

> And this other man he enjoyed a good film with Betty Grable

> And Akim Tamiroff he liked, or Abbot and Costello,
> [...]
> And he was thinking he'd be starving tomorrow night on the
>   meagre ration they carried
> [...]
> And he said this life is a mucking muckup, and you don't know
>   where you are from one day to the next, nor what it's all
>   about, nor nothing.

<div align="right">(ll. 49-50, 55-56, 58-60)</div>

The voice has become dialogic in a transformation to a vernacular register that constitutes an impersonalizing device, yet which cannot totally conceal the narrator's own anxieties in thoughts of 'all the Japs' (l. 62). The thoughts of others become the poet-speaker's own, of the stars above losing their lustre:

> And gradually they noticed the stars paling, and becoming
>   slowly ineffectual, one after one, the stars paling,
>   the greyness growing.
> And each of them knew it was coming.

<div align="right">(ll. 63-66)</div>

The depersonalizing 'they' cannot conceal the sense that the speaker feels the imminence of his own destiny, the 'greyness' presaging the extinction of all light. Images of 'paling' arguably connote a sense of the speaker's identity – even his life – fading, and memory now becomes the agent of transference back to the narrative voice as the eye falls on the beaches, the 'naked long boles' (l. 78) and the 'desultory / testimony of the palms' (ll.81-82). However, as the ship runs in to the beach, it is lines 83-84 that linger as an articulation of the reality of exile, of home as something irrevocably lost. Lewis delineates an arrival at somewhere indeterminate,

> Some place – even at home you were haunted – but once there
>   was always a home.

Edward Said's concept of the provisional nature of home echoes loudly here.[126]

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[126] See Said, *Exile*, 2001, p. 185.

Once more, in the closing lines, Lewis's language becomes rooted in the realities of the present, but only to establish a paradox. What is conveyed, through verbs that enact the speaker's desperate struggle to reach land, is both the reality of a soldier's fear and the awful otherness of place:

> And at last the shock of beaching, hitting the real wetness of the
> sand,
> And you leap over the falling ramp, and plunge kneedeep, your
> nailed boots sinking
> Deep in the yielding clinging softsands of the land.
> Is there no enemy? Is the enemy sleeping?
> Who will survive the next minute? Is this another of the
> dreamer's dreams?
> The day suddenly becomes violent and staccato with the deadly
> rattle of the Taisho
> And the men stumble, everywhere, with the convulsed
> bewildered faces, yes, of children.

(ll. 89-100)

Unreality and reality collide in a powerful evocation of the fear and uncertainty that transform men to incredulous infants. Thus unmanned, they are disaffiliated from the self as they know it, fearing something more than exilic space: their extinction.

Everett and Wagstaff posit that experiences of exile 'include and transcend their specific circumstances' and that they represent 'movement away from a fixed and trusted centre', in a journey towards a 'fractured and disorientating world [...] beyond the borders of a previously secure existence'.[127] The attribution of fracture, and of inclusion and transcendence, resonate with Lewis's experience of exilic space and estrangement, but, as I have suggested earlier, one has to question the notions of security and a wholly trusted centre in his early life and make-up. Rather, his trajectory reveals a quest for both meaning and stability of identity, one that repeatedly invests his work with a sense of their elusiveness. Once in India, Lewis would experience a deepening of his inherent ambivalence, his balance

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[127] See Everett and Wagstaff (ed.), *Cultures of Exile*, pp. ix-x.

between a sense of belonging and what Said calls 'the perilous territory of not-belonging'.[128]

However, in Lewis's story, 'The Orange Grove' (1943), his location in such 'perilous territory' would also stimulate his creative expression of identity as a process in flux, a shedding of the burdens of Self in a gesture of ontological renewal. In this, arguably Lewis's finest prose work, the central character, Beale, surrenders the dead body he carries to the nomadic gypsies.[129] In so doing, he symbolically divests himself of his imperialist identity, thereby transgressing the borders of Self in favour of liberated being. It is akin to the experience Lewis evokes in 'To Rilke' (1943), a gesture of simplicity before a stone effigy of Vishnu, 'like an act of birth'(l. 24), a surrender to a state of Being, 'that which IS' (l. 30).[130] There, place dissolves in the 'distant land' (l. 43) that is India, representing a convergence of the real and the transcendental. Beale's gesture, however, is a surrender of the known self to a desired 'exilic space'. Moreover, in submitting to the enticement of a nomadic life, he is implicitly accepting the permanent flux of identity. To borrow an expression from Stephen Hendon, it represents a 'moment of transit' in which 'identity becomes increasingly indeterminate'.[131]

M. Wynn Thomas has referred to Lewis as one who 'from personal conviction that had grown straight out of his cultural background' became 'a lifelong traveller after meaning'.[132] While endorsing this, one also recognizes the trial this imposed, one that became more complex as Lewis's travels took him further into his Indian experience. As his writings demonstrate with growing clarity, evocations of place increasingly articulate what Thomas calls the sub-continent's 'invincible strangeness', while also feeding his need to

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[128] See Said, *Exile*, 2001, p. 177.

[129] Lewis, 'The Orange Grove', *Collected Stories*, pp. 212-225 (pp. 224-225).

[130] Lewis, *Collected Poems*, pp. 124-125.

[131] See Hendon, in *Mapping the Territory,* p. 136. Hendon is referring to a moment in Lewis's story, 'The Raid' (1943), in which the Indian terrorist surrenders to the imperialist soldiers. One of them, Selden, feels no sense of triumph in this: instead, as Hendon observes, the bomber and Selden emerge as a configuration of mutual otherness, 'indeterminate identities' in an act of transit and exchange.

[132] Thomas, *Internal Difference*, p. 65.

register his growing sense of complicity in an outmoded, increasingly futile imperialism.[133]

Quoting 'The Peasants' (1943), Thomas recognizes in its last stanza a prepositional shift of perspective that I believe to be significant in the present context.[134] He observes, initially, how the first two stanzas objectify the precise details of an environment interconnected with the native women 'breaking stones upon the highway' (l. 5) These people are metaphorically fused with an arid landscape, 'One body growing in another body' (l. 7), but Thomas astutely notes that it is the final stanza that draws the speaker's deepest realization:

> Across scorched hills and trampled crops
> The soldiers straggle by.
> History staggers in their wake.
> The peasants watch them die.

<div align="right">(ll. 9-12)</div>

He states that 'Across' mobilizes another significance, one

> which changes the whole physical and cultural perspective, signifying the migrant soldiers' exclusion from the inner life of the country they are condemned, by war, to traverse.[135]

Thomas's view seems incontrovertible: it highlights the straggling movement of soldiers as an image, not just of the physical weariness conveyed in the performative verbs, but of the colonial presence and cause, and of the imperialist discourse these soldiers represent, that which has become no more than a 'history' that 'staggers in their wake'.[136] They and their cause are effectively 'lost in transit', wandering and peripheral to the reality of the indifferent peasants who 'watch them die' (l. 12). The soldiers exist only as representatives of a cultural dislocation and discontinuity. Moreover, the poem carries an undertow of implicit ethical

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[133] Thomas, *Internal Difference*, p. 65.

[134] Lewis, *Collected Poems*, p. 144.

[135] Thomas, *Internal Difference*, p. 65.

[136] This view is endorsed by John Pikoulis who states that, by the time Lewis was in Bombay in December, 1942, 'The time for colonialism was over [...]. Most people of his generation (and before) felt the Empire was no longer politically viable or ethically tolerable'. See Pikoulis, 'Alun Lewis and the Politics of Empire', in Welsh Writing in English, 8, 2003, 157-175 (p. 160). However, this seems a very broad generalization when viewed in relation to Gandhi's struggle for Indian independence from the UK, culminating in the negotiations of 1947. Lewis's sense of his Welsh identity is more likely to be at play in the anti-imperialist inflections that imbue lines 9-12 of 'The Peasants'. It was this stance which so critically differentiated him from, and was censured by, his fellow officers.

uncertainty bordering on an admission of pointless imperialist complicity. It inflects a condition that, in India, increasingly expanded Lewis's sense of estrangement into a need, not just to sequester aspects of Self that constituted his inner 'enmity', but to seek their extinction.[137]

Repeatedly, Lewis's Indian poems and short stories convey the sense of increasing exilic distance and radical difference between the East and the colonial borders, those that are configured in 'Midnight in India' (1943) as 'the fenced-off landscapes of the West' (l. 2).[138] This, too, is a poem in which the speaker confesses his complicity in depersonalized, imperialist acts of killing:

> And soiled each simple act with shame
> And had no feelings of my own.
>
> (ll. 11-12)

However, this is not solely the shame of imperialism: it also conflates with the guilt felt in separation from the beloved; the absent wife, as Lewis here configures her, is now becoming more tenuously held as a ghostly, erotic presence, but in whom he still seeks succour and exilic, transcendent escape from the self:

> Yet time stands still upon the east
> [...]
> And I behold your calm white face again.
>
> Mysterious tremors stir the beast,
> In unknown worlds he dies;
> I lie within your hands, your peace,
> And watch this last effulgent world arise.
>
> (ll. 29, 32-36)

Lewis's time in India increasingly found expression in his poetry as this pervasive interflux and negotiation between belonging and un-belonging. Thoughts of being severed from the West are reiteratively seen in interplay with a seeming desire to cross frontiers of

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[137] See my discussion in Chapter 2 of this thesis.
[138] Lewis, *Collected Poems*, pp. 162-163.

difference and find self-unification with, and in, the East. Sometimes, as in 'Home Thoughts from Abroad' (1943), despite the enticement and allure of a 'breathless Indian night' (l. 4), the speaker's consciousness is invaded by nostalgia that is a barrier to unifying, untroubled immersion in the landscape: 'Oh West, your blue nostalgic moods / Confuse the troubled continents' (ll. 6-7).[139] The speaker senses the Indian 'darkness twitch / With death among the orange trees' (ll. 12-13), but the poem's close suggests an even more disturbing darkness, that which lies within imperialism. The speaker, implicit in the collective 'We', remains in a state of liminal exclusion in a land in which he seeks to 'find love in the gap of centuries' (l. 16), yet is present as a soldier of empire and a carrier of its infection:

> And yet you cast us out. And in this land
> We bear the dark inherited disease
> Bred in the itching warmness of your hand.

> (ll. 20-22)

The otherness of India is palpable in lines such as these, but so also are the taint of imperialism and a poet's testimony to the guilt arising from this failed attempt at a fusion of cultures. The danger inherent in Lewis's quest for meaning in both his physical and poetic journey is audible here, perhaps bordering on Kristeva's notion of abjection. She posits that the desire for meaning constitutes a 'fragile texture', and that to be abject, 'radically excluded', is to be drawn 'to the place where meaning collapses'.[140] 'Home Thoughts from Abroad' articulates both a sense of such exclusion, and of the fragile vulnerability of the speaker, immersed in a place to which, in the wider order of things, he does not truly belong.

Despite, or perhaps because of such ambivalent, epistemological realizations, Lewis's Indian poems also reveal both his increasing compassion and a deepening sense of India as the locus of a mystical, cosmic union in which he wanted to believe. Moreover, he desired to appropriate this as a means of transcendental self-unification, an extinction of the self he

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[139] Lewis, *Collected Poems,* p. 139.

[140] Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. by Léon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), pp. 1-2.

embodied. It was, however, to be a transitory phase in his quest for meaning and unitary

being which he sensed in the praying of native villagers as 'a rhythm of many universes and

real truths',[141] something perhaps bordering on the aforementioned Rilkean 'Is'. In 'Karanje

Village' (1943), the speaker confronts this experience as he moves among 'naked children

begging, the elders in poverty' (l. 7). His consciousness is held in the grip of human

abjection that is tangibly present in the sensory evocations of the language:

> The crumbling hovels like a discredited fortress,
> The old hags mumbling by the well,
> The young girls in purple always avoiding us,
> The monkeys loping obscenely round our smell[142]

> (ll. 9-12)

But, in a moment freighted with caution, attention turns to an effigy that seems to effect an

invitation to some transcendent ontological state:

> A little Vishnu of stone,
> Silently and eternally simply Being,
> Bidding me come alone,
>
> And never entirely turning me away,
> But warning me still of the flesh
> That catches and limes the singing birds of the soul
> And holds their wings in mesh.

> (ll. 18-24)

Vishnu prompts a warning of entrapment in the ways of the flesh and this world. The poem

then returns us to the inimical hardness of this place, this loveless, 'wasted land' (l. 31), and

to the beloved, prompting the speaker's self-directed questions. They intimate his self-

extinction and location somewhere transcendentally beyond. The language is testament to a

desire for transformation of Self, and an exilic severance of all worldly ties, perhaps that state

of 'simply Being':

> And when my sweetheart calls me shall I tell her
> That I am seeking less and less of world?

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[141] Lewis, in a letter to Gweno, dated January, 1944, reproduced in Lewis, *In the Green Tree*, pp. 64-66 (p. 65).

[142] Lewis, *Collected Poems*, pp. 129-130.

And will she understand?

<div style="text-align: right;">(ll. 32-34)</div>

Such existential simplicity remained beyond Lewis's reach, as would eventually emerge unequivocally in 'The Jungle' (1944)[143] where, despite having expressed the speaker's liberation from 'all fidelities', those which implicitly include the 'specious pretext' (l. 36) of imperialist motives, the poem ends on uncertainties and existential questions unresolved. The state of 'simply Being' remains unachieved:

> Then would some unimportant death resound
> With the imprisoned music of the soul?
> And we become the world we could not change?
> Or does the will's long struggle end
> With the last kindness of a foe or friend?

<div style="text-align: right;">(ll. 95-99)</div>

These final words of Lewis's last poem suggest a journey and a quest unfulfilled. There is neither affirmation of what survives, nor of assured understanding.

By contrast, however, it is perhaps fitting to turn, finally, to one of Lewis's earlier works, namely his poem, 'Goodbye' (1942), which, within its valedictory tones, is inflected with the speaker's deeper understanding of the place he and his lover occupy together in the cosmic scheme.[144] The poem juxtaposes the soldier-speaker's resignation with his lover's apprehensions as he departs for war, voicing simple evocations of parting moments as the lovers 'make an end of lying down together' (l. 4) in a rented room:

> I put a final shilling in the gas
> And watch you slip your dress below your knees.
> [...]
>
> I fill the carafe with a drink of water;
> You say 'We paid a guinea for this bed'.

<div style="text-align: right;">(ll. 5-6, 11-12)</div>

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[143] *Ibid.,*pp. 155-158.
[144] *Ibid.*, pp. 110-111.

Yet, in this almost ritualistic moment, the speaker knows his beloved is 'afraid to speak / The big word, that Eternity is ours' (ll. 15-16). Her 'nameless fears' (l. 18) invade this poignancy, and he acknowledges

> Everything we renounce except our selves;
> Selfishness is the last of all to go;
> Our sighs are exhalations of the earth,
> Our footprints leave a track across the snow.

<div align="right">(ll. 21-22)</div>

Every word is infused with the sense of departure, but the capitalized 'Eternity' suggests, not only a fear of permanent separation, but also the continuation of love. Love is what will endure, even beyond the renunciation of Self. The poem thus becomes testament to the couple's mutual realisation of Love's transcendent survival beyond death. In this, their relationship achieves greater meaning, and, implicit in the speaker's transference from 'I' to 'We', they have *together* undergone an epistemological enlargement. Even the final stanza cannot subvert this. Its opening word intimates a retreat into thoughts of commonplace emblems of love, rather than something permanent and transcendent:

> Yet when all's done you'll keep the emerald
> I placed upon your finger in the street;
> And I will keep the patches that you sewed
> On my old battledress tonight, my sweet.

<div align="right">(ll. 29-32)</div>

However, these emblems configure more than the commonplace, symbolic of the lovers' completion in each other. The stitched patches become a simple, tender image of the departing soldier made whole, and love *will* survive, long after 'all's done'. Perhaps it is in this understanding that Lewis therefore came closest to the simplicity of 'Being'. At the time of the poem's composition, he was in an early phase of his journey, yet his words already express a latent grasp of what endures, even when separation and distance challenge meaning and a stable identity. It is as if, even then, he knew he was destined to 'cross borders, break

barriers of thought and experience' as he strove, unrelentingly, to find, and poetically articulate, truth.[145]

The examination undertaken in this chapter, though structured largely as separate studies of Douglas and Lewis, reveals a striking synergy in their creative response to wartime exile. Differences emerge, of course, contiguous with their artistic uniqueness and the disparities in respective backgrounds and the trajectories of their military experience. However, it is, perhaps, the common elements of their assimilation of wartime dislocation and estrangement that are most striking. This chapter has sought to uncover these elements whilst pursuing and seeking to understand the differences in artistic expression and self-disclosure in the writing of both poets. In so doing, it has brought to the fore the relevance of various theories of exilic writing, notably those of Edward Said, Theodor Adorno, and – though not confined purely to notions of exile – Julia Kristeva.

This scrutiny reveals that wartime exile was for Douglas and Lewis both a dislocating and a creative experience. War itself is a breach in normality, but, as each poet demonstrates, to be distanced and estranged spatially and temporally exacerbates not only the tensions of inner division, but also feeds the impulse to transform such tensions, perhaps even resolve them, in an act of poetic creativity. As demonstrated here, both poets endured a journey into physical and psychic exilic spaces. Each sensed disaffiliation from his past, the otherness of place and the self as changed realities, and a concomitant need therefore to find meaning and ontological stability in the midst of deracinating, defamiliarizing landscapes. The journey eastwards for both men brought a coalescence of experiences, of separation, of the struggle to reassemble internal fracture, and of discontinuity. Even memories of the past thus become

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[145] See Said, *Exile*, 2001, p. 185.

ambivalent, recollecting the distant joys of love, yet freighted with present longings and vulnerability.

For Douglas, admittedly, the interplay of longing and un-belonging inflects his work far less than in Lewis's writings. More frequently, his desert exile instead stimulates his absorption with war's debris, and place as a killing field. Accordingly, he demands our presence as witness to the part he plays in this. However, his concern with his complicity, albeit partially concealed in tones of detachment, is not wholly removed from that of Lewis. In India, the latter drew upon his own growing sense of complicity and of his helplessness in the imperialist cause, the 'specious pretext'.[146] Both poets configure exilic space, not only as a correlation between place and death or, in Lewis's case, human impoverishment, but also as epistemological enlargement. Their exilic location becomes the space in which a quest for meaning, and unification of Self, may be fulfilled. In neither case was this to be a consummation achieved.

Douglas and Lewis grappled with Otherness in its multiple forms: both poets endured inner contestation, their work exposing the plurality of those dialectical tensions and of their sense of identity. A shared aspect of their expression of Otherness is found, not only in their assimilations of place, but in their configurations of Love, either in Douglas's intimations of guilt for lost opportunities, or in Lewis's more strenuously repeated configurations of the beloved. In Lewis's poetry, however, there resides the weight of increasing estrangement and, far more detectably than in Douglas, the sense that the loved one is a constituent of the poet's self-division. Thus, as shown, his poetry at times configures an inter-flux of self between speaker and beloved, a transfusion of 'selves' that constitutes what Said terms a 'double perspective'.[147]

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[146] Lewis, 'The Jungle', *Collected Poems*, p. 156, l. 36.
[147] See Said, *Representations*, p. 44.

Despite this difference, and the sense that, unlike Douglas, Lewis sought self-renewal through both romantic union and, in India, a transcendent cosmic Love, what remains indelibly written in their work is that both travelled an exilic journey of which, one senses, as Lewis terms it, they had 'always known'.[148] Moreover, whether through Lewis's sense of entry into cosmic unity in a transcendent space of 'Being', or through Douglas's annihilation of his 'beast' within, both poets sought in their journeys what may be termed an 'extinction of Self'. Their respective quests for epistemological and ontological certainties, and for inner resolution, remained inconclusive, but the result is testament to the efficacy of their exilic passage to the East. Ultimately, what their work affirms is not just a sense of struggles unresolved, nor of the self-dissolution which exile brings, but the assurance that resides in Adorno's words: 'writing becomes a place to live'.[149] Moreover, their creative trajectories arguably suggest that, for each of them, their greatest writing 'was impossible without some form of exile'.[150]

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[148] Pikoulis, *A Life*, p. 138.
[149] Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, p. 87.
[150] Kristeva, *Kristeva Reader*, p. 298.

Conclusion

In her study of the relation between physical suffering and selfhood, *The Body in Pain*, Elaine Scarry observes, 'the structure of war itself will require that injuring be partially eclipsed from view'.[1] She argues that the experience of psychological and emotional pain associated with war presents what this thesis has identified as a central paradox, that the writer's need to express what may seem a fundamentally inexpressible 'pain' demands a 'large scale commitment to constructing forms of language appropriate to pain, and devoted to its alleviation'.[2] Scarry posits that, in seeking to give voice to the hurt both externally visible and internally felt, the poet's effort to bear witness intensifies his dilemma. He must grapple simultaneously with what she identifies as the power of pain to render the subject 'inarticulate', and discover the means to avoid silence and find 'alleviation'. Scarry's words thus seem apposite to the creative work of both Keith Douglas and Alun Lewis in that, as this thesis argues, the impersonal voice at times adopted by both can be seen to relate to the ways in which both poets testify to war's 'injury'. Their strategies of objectivity and self-distancing constitute their mutual efforts to overcome the dilemma Scarry identifies and to triumph over silence, emerging as their 'partially eclipsed' testimony to human suffering, and a subjugation or even 'extinction' of the poetic 'self'.

The notion of 'extinction of self' is crucially placed in my argument. The poetry of both men repeatedly questions the nature of death and its coalescence with life, even expressing a predilection to seek it as a welcome oblivion, if not an alternative mode of being, or to shed the burden of an 'other' that inhabits and divides their sense of identity. Consequently, poetic configurations of inner fragility and self-fragmentation, and the pluralistic presence of Otherness, emerge as inextricably bound up in Lewis's and Douglas's

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[1] Scarry, *Body in Pain*, pp. 65-66.
[2] *Ibid.,* p. 485.

respective struggles, not just to resolve inner division, but to comprehend their nature and, ultimately, to expunge the disruptive elements of selfhood. As I have argued, these dislocations of identity and multifaceted manifestations of Otherness constitute a paradoxically destructive and creative element: the tensions they engender are present in both writers' work in multiple forms, expressed as Douglas's protean and self-fragmenting 'bête noire' or Lewis's 'enmity within', yet it is such tensions that mobilize the creative impulse to confront and articulate the inner dialectic. I therefore argue that these 'warring forces'[3] are crucial in comparing the trajectories of these poets and their re-imaginings of wartime experience, as well as indicative of what I identify as innate, 'organic' ambivalences. Moreover, in probing these facets, I have extended my original grasp of commonality in Douglas's and Lewis's poetry: the process of poetic excavation has uncovered the diverse nature of the inner contestations that inflect their writing. They appear in multiple manifestations: in the ethical uncertainty of the soldier poet, complicit as an agent of death or imperialism; in fraught expressions of estrangement from past or present lovers; as signifiers of rootless exile or liminality, or in their contemplations of existence and what lies beyond.

Both writers have a shared commitment to poetic integrity and to responding to experience with 'Truth'. In so doing, they exhibit a desire to discover their own voice which, however conscious of the generic, First World War traditions, seeks to articulate a uniquely personal response to a vastly different, mobile wartime experience. Their work testifies to the need for a new poetic register, unshackled by hegemonic, polemical discourses on the heroic nature of combat. Tim Kendall has pointed out how Douglas, though influenced by Great War poetic models, sought consciously to avoid repetition of them, thereby departing from Wilfred Owen's emphasis on pity. Kendall asks, 'what exactly are the uses of pity?

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[3] The term derives from the work of Barbara Johnson, *The Critical Difference* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), p. 90. She speaks of the way in which textual deconstruction may reveal pluralities of meaning, often present as contradictions or shifts and uncertainties that require 'the careful teasing out of warring forces'. Germane to the argument I advance in this thesis, she points out that such forces may signify an apparently contradictory identity within the text.

Who benefits from it?', and goes on to state, 'Douglas refuses to saccharine his responses in this way'.[4] This thesis concurs with this view to an extent, but has gone on to remark on the frequently submersed, interstitial vein of empathy with the human loss perceptible in Douglas's work. It is in this qualifying observation that my thesis either departs from or modifies a large portion of the received critical opinion on Douglas referenced earlier. Douglas's apparent stylistic impersonality is both testament to his natural propensity for self-protective detachment, and a strategy to express self-engagement, compassion, and self-reflective complicity in poetically coded terms. Herein lies the apparent stylistic 'self-extinction' which, when one reads within the spaces of language and grasps the perceptual shifts of the poetic voice, emerges as a controlled deception.

By comparison, even within its essentially Romantic concern with feeling, with a response to 'Nature' and 'Beauty', or, as Jeremy Hooker identifies, with 'his bewilderment or anguish or depression',[5] Alun Lewis's poetry reveals a progression towards greater objectivity, particularly in the last poems, with their Indian settings. In his earlier work lie the seeds of this progression: there is frequent fluctuation between the primacy of the subjective voice and an often stark realism. 'The Mountain over Aberdare' is a prime example discussed in this context, and in its delineation of detached liminality, juxtaposed with the speaker's open, almost diagnostic engagement with the human and social condition of the valley he observes. It exemplifies Lewis's negative capability to objectify what commands his focus, yet simultaneously – even in the stance of detachment – to disclose the undercurrent of subjective engagement in the speaking voice. The counterpoise of engagement and detachment displayed here suggests a degree of contiguity with Douglas's dual vision. As Terry Eagleton has argued, this kind of duality can appear as a text in conflict with itself, and a critical analysis of it as such can demonstrate our 'knowing the text as it

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[4] Tim Kendall, '"The Pity of War?"' in *PN Review*, 30.1 (September-October 2003), 30-32 (p. 32).
[5] Hooker, 'Afterword', in *Selected Poems of Alun Lewis*, p. 102.

cannot know itself'.[6] However, while recognizing that the close critical analysis applied in this thesis may reveal these poets' subliminal contradictions, ethical uncertainties or exilic longings in the gaps and sensed 'unsaid' between the words, the greater thrust of my argument rests on a belief in their poetic control.

To adopt this view does not mean to suggest the irrelevance of what lies in the undertow of poetic language. As my deployment of theories of trauma and of exile testifies, I have stressed the need to examine how both Douglas and Lewis exhibit a creative effort to express what may seem inexpressible. Accordingly, concepts of pain and the self-fragmenting trauma that can inflect and shape the language of the soldier-poet have featured significantly in this thesis, including Freudian and Jungian psychoanalytical theory, and its interpretation by theorists such as Felman and Laub, Cathy Caruth and, as mentioned above, Elaine Scarry. Their work has enhanced my understanding of the ways in which internal disruption, vulnerability and contestation may influence poetic re-imaginings of one's agency as the soldier-killer, for instance, or how Lewis's and Douglas's writings grapple to give expression to the repetitive incursions of guilt, spatial and temporal dislocation, and the crisis of divided, unresolved identity. For Lewis, this crisis would engender the ambivalent desire to extinguish the known, troubled self while achieving some kind of transcendental resolution of identity, perhaps resonant with what Dannie Abse voices in his poem, 'Duality' (1952): 'yes, myself I kill, myself I save'.[7] The understanding I have gained from investigating such manifestations of self-fracture is, of course, a work in progress, deserving of further exploration than the scope of my thesis permits. However, the examination undertaken here has arguably exposed the relationship between the disruptions of war and the ways in which such trauma can coalesce and become, however potentially destructive and resistant to

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[6] Terry Eagleton, in *Literary Theory: An Introduction* ([1983] Oxford: Blackwell, Anniversary Edition, 2008), p. 36.

[7] Abse, 'Duality' [1955], in *Collected Poems 1948-1976*, pp. 15-16 (p. 16), l. 31.

articulation, an enabling creative force. The poetry of Douglas and Lewis, and their prose

which has also occupied a secondary, supportive place in this study, amply testify to this.

In this thesis I have commented on the ambivalence that both Lewis and Douglas

disclose in their work, not only as a feature of language but in their expressed relationship

with their past. In Douglas's poetry, this emerges particularly in his recollections of the

women he has loved, his re-imaginings fluctuating between the poignancy of loss and

longing, and the implicit guilt of one who has failed to hold the object of his affection.

Ambivalence is present, too, in terms aptly described by Dawn Bellamy:

> Douglas, [...] although he makes explicit his attempts at disconnection, [...] is unable
> to deny completely his links with his predecessors; simply by being a soldier-poet of
> the Second World War he becomes part of a specific genre. [...] The vastly different
> nature of the conflict meant that the soldier-poets of 1939-45 would not be saying
> exactly the same thing as their predecessors; yet their sense of themselves as part of a
> larger literary tradition enables them to transpose the mythology of the previous
> conflict so that the past remains in the present.[8]

Her comments have dual significance: they highlight Douglas's indebtedness to his poetic

forbears,[9] while reminding us of his 'disconnection', his paradoxically personal voice

articulated in a new register of apparent impersonality. By comparison, Lewis also reveals an

ambivalent relationship to his past, not only in the homage he pays to writers such as Edward

Thomas and D. H. Lawrence, for instance, but also expressed in his ambiguous sense of

belonging to the Welsh valley of his origin. So often, as revealed in his writings in India,

memories of Wales evince a sense of longing, yet it remains the place to which, elsewhere in

his poetry, he expresses an ambivalent, liminal attachment. The irony in this is that, in his

struggle to resolve or even transcend a sense of divided and fragile self, Lewis's work

conveys what is so succinctly expressed by Tony Brown: 'In fact, what we are is inextricably

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[8] Bellamy, in *British and Irish War Poetry*, pp. 313-314.

[9] In his essay, 'Poets in This War' [1943}, Douglas wrote, 'there is nothing new, from a soldier's point of view,
about this war except its mobile character. [...] Almost all that a modern poet on active service is inspired to
write, would be tautological. [...] The hardships, pain and boredom; the behaviour of the living and the
appearance of the dead, were so accurately described by the poets of the Great War that everyday on the
battlefields of the western desert [...] their poems are illustrated'. See Douglas, *Prose Miscellany*, pp. 117-120
(pp. 119-120).

bound up with what we were. Our individual identity is essentially created by a sense of the continuity of our consciousness through time'.[10] His comment may equally apply in relation to Keith Douglas.

This study has revealed a range of thematic commonalities in the work of the two poets. Configurations of Love and Death frequently coalesce with images of Place and with the poets' shared predilection for epistemological and ontological enquiry, for instance, while the savage ennui of prolonged training became the paradoxically enervating and enabling source both of their creativity and their desperation to go East and engage an uncertain future. Their personal courage, though manifested in different ways, is a shared virtue, however fraught their poetry often is with uncertainties, including those that are rooted either in the questionable ethics of killing or of imperialist occupation. Both Douglas and Lewis reveal in their poetry a profoundly personal response to Place, and to the nature, challenge and ambivalent effects of exilic space upon poetic and moral sensibilities. Both writers express the fascination and the hostility or surreality of the desert or jungle spaces in which they eventually found themselves, and – tragically – were to die. For Douglas, despite the residual memories of war he might have subsequently experienced, Egypt bore a deep attraction, even to live there had he survived. For Lewis, both by comparison and contrast, the transcendental attractions of India and its mysticism held an ambivalent appeal. As Gareth Evans comments, 'such transcendentalism could be made to offset the paradoxical elements of soldiering, the sense of being always away from home yet never able to get back, a kind of static Diaspora'.[11]

In my final chapter's examination of 'the exilic self', I have drawn on the writings of various theorists, particularly Edward Said, Theodor Adorno and Julia Kristeva. These

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[10] Tony Brown, 'Time, Memory and Identity in the Short Stories of Margiad Evans', in *Rediscovering Margiad Evans: Marginality, Gender and Illness*, Kirsti Bohata and Katie Gramich, eds (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2013), pp. 69-85 (p. 83).
[11] Gareth Evans, 'Welsh Writing in English: Case Studies in Cultural Interaction', (unpublished doctoral thesis, Swansea University, 2012), pp. 22-23.

theorists have enhanced my understanding of the impact that the spatial and temporal dislocations of enforced exile has upon the act and nature of writing. As I have aimed to show, the poetry of Lewis and Douglas reveals the relationship between the physical act of 'border crossing' and the writer's capacity to articulate the coalescence of internally and externally changed realities, and their power to evoke both their continuity and discontinuity with the past. I have suggested that exilic space, whether in Douglas's death-strewn desert or Lewis's parched yet mystically alluring India, can become the locus of a complex coalescence of memory with a quest for new meaning, and with love, loss, fear and challenge. It can also become the site of an augmented desire to shed the burden of guilt or complicity in acts that war or imperialism demand. And finally, the condition of exile may even intensify the desire to seek extinction in death itself, the 'oblivion' that both Lewis and Douglas seemed to regard as a consummation to be wished as much as to be avoided.

As this thesis has demonstrated, the poetry of both Alun Lewis and Keith Douglas expresses a seemingly ambivalent desire. Their work affirms the shared need to bear testimony, not merely to the external, visible realities of wartime experience, but also to their inner conflicts. Their poetry reveals a mutual capacity to give voice to a dual axis of detachment from and engagement with the worlds that occupy their consciousness. In this respect, to compare their writings has offered me a deeper understanding of Douglas's critically acknowledged stylistic 'impersonality', and of its relatedness to the impulse for detachment fused with compassion found in Lewis's poetry, and which, though present to a lesser degree than in Douglas's oeuvre, emerges in Alun Lewis's increasing poetic objectivity.

Having reached the conclusion of this thesis, one realises that there is still much scope for continued study, not least into a key element unearthed in the foregoing chapters. Within Douglas's impersonal stance, one can detect the resonance of his complicity as an agent of

war: in the spaces of language, or in a shift of perception signalled perhaps by a single word, reside the intimations of empathy with, and moral responsibility for, human loss and suffering. Comparably, Alun Lewis juxtaposes apparent detachment with compassion and a discernible sense of moral implication in the human condition that is his subject. Even when the subjective voice recedes to give priority to the objective, concrete realities of penurious Indian existence, or to evoke the hardship and social deprivations of the Amman Valley of the 30s, Lewis expresses a moral engagement that would later become a deepening sense of imperialist complicity. Perhaps it is in this that further scope for investigation resides. This thesis therefore becomes a starting point, from which to launch a wider examination of war poetry, including that which has emerged since the Second World War, in the context of what may be termed, 'an aesthetic of complicity'. One feels that, even in the ostensible silences within poetic utterance, the complicit voice may be heard the loudest.

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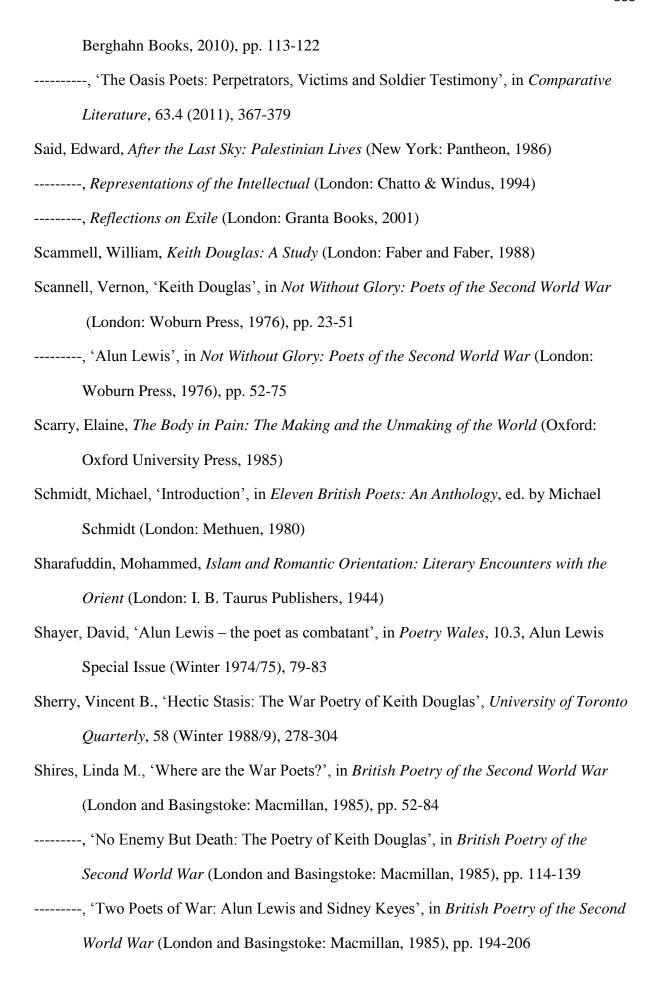
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