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CLEAR LAMPS AND DIN STARS.

NEW PERSPECTIVES ON THE WORK OF IVOR GURNEY.

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by

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INTRODUCTION.

This thesis explores and examines the life of Ivor Gurney, and his work, with particular emphasis on his poetry. There is already a biography, The Ordeal of Ivor Gurney, by Michael Hurd, published in 1978, and another in the making. There is an account of Gurney's friendship with the Chapman family in Stars in a Dark Night, published in 1988. This study does not, therefore, set out merely to re-tell a life story, but to draw together information to shed light on the work he produced. Much of the information is based on research using the original documents - letters, manuscripts and typescripts - from the Gurney Archive in Gloucester. Most of this was unpublished until 1991, with the publication of R.K.R. Thornton's Ivor Gurney, Collected Letters. Research at the Royal College of Music Library has added to the more readily available material in Gloucester.

Because Ivor Gurney's work has not received the attention or recognition many feel it deserves, a major element of this thesis is an attempt to set it in its cultural, social and historical context. An understanding of some of the values and beliefs in the society that produced Ivor Gurney is a prerequisite to understanding how he and his work were perceived by his contemporaries, because this has a bearing on the legacy they left for future generations. Much of this information has come from recourse to contemporary documents, from popular as well as academic sources, the media of the day, and government publications, particularly in relation to the First World War. A well-rounded understanding of Gurney's work, however, must go beyond recognising its

contemporary context, and take into account the perspective of the late twentieth century too.

To this end, this study offers a detailed reading and criticism of a representative sample of Gurney's poetry. Examples are taken not only from published work, but from source material in the Gurney Archive. There is very little critical work available on Gurney, except in short journal articles, references to work on war poetry as a whole, or in comparative pieces with other, generally better known, poets. It is hoped that a closer textual analysis of some of the poems, as well as a wider ranging over-view of his work will add to what is already available. P.J.Kavanagh's Collected Poems of Ivor Gurney published in 1982 enabled access to a large body of work. Six hitherto unpublished poems were published in *Stand* in 1989, but there are others worthy of attention and still unpublished. Some of these will be used to add to the work more readily available, as well as add to the discussion of Gurney's place in English Poetry.

In his early years, Ivor Gurney was regarded as a musician rather than poet. Any exploration of his life and work that excluded a discussion of his music would be incomplete. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to undertake a detailed analysis of Gurney's music, but it is relevant to discussions of the man and his work to look at his music in relation not only to his poetry but to the creative process itself.

Finally, in collecting together information about Gurney's life, setting it in the context of what was known about the external events of that period of history from contemporary observations, together with a late twentieth century retrospective interpretation, and a critical study of

his poems as pieces of literature as well as history, this thesis posits a different reading of a writer too long neglected. He has been regarded as a 'second eleven' poet, shell-shocked, whose reputation depended on two small volumes of war poetry. The reality is that he was a poet of some diversity, a complex and heterodox sense of self awareness, and a creative pride in craftsmanship, whose work deserves a re-reading.

CHAPTER ONE: Generations.

*'Down Commercial Road.....My mother took me walking in
a grey ugly street, but there the sea-wind met us.....'*

Ivor Gurney was the son of a tailor, a Son of Gloucester, one of a damaged generation whose spirit was radically altered by the War, and one who lived to inherit its unhappy legacy. He was undeniably a product of his time and place in history, and yet, paradoxically, much of his life seemed to be a contradiction at odds with his beginnings.

He was born in 1890, on August 28th, at 3 Queen Street, Gloucester, the second child of David Gurney and his wife Florence, nee Lugg. A daughter, Winifred, had been born in 1886, and there were to be two more children, Ronald, born in 1894, and Dorothy in 1900. There had been a son, stillborn, sometime between 1894 and 1890. David Gurney came from Maisemore, one of a family of brothers, mostly builders. He had lived with them at premises listed as Gurney Bros. Builders and Contractors, until the move to Queen St, probably in 1887. Michael Hurd suggests that it was 'at his mother's insistence [that he] was apprenticed to a tailoring firm in Wimborne'. (1). It would appear that they all achieved a modest but respectable income.

In Winifred Gurney's reminiscences, it is clear that she regarded her father as a softer gentler character than her mother. This is borne out by observations from people outside the family too. Marion Scott, who became Ivor Gurney's friend and mentor wrote of Florence Lugg

She was so unusual in her whole way of thinking as to seem almost a 'borderline' case at times. She worried

1. The Ordeal of Ivor Gurney, p 8

inveterately when I knew her, seemed to bear a continual grudge against life.

1

Florence Lugg came from a large family in Bisley, near Stroud. She was a strong and dominant personality who, Winifred writes, "lived till she was 85, still ruling with a rod of iron the greater part of the time'. (2). She goes on to explain that Ivor's

stubborn trait was a product of my mother, who was also proud. We were not allowed to fraternise with those whom she disapproved of so I up till this time do not even know where and who our relations have by now spread themselves in the world, and there must be many, the younger generations certainly within a few miles of where I live now. All this has isolated us as a family.

3

In an age when family, kinship, and neighbours were important as a support network when times were hard, it is not surprising that the lack was keenly felt. In A Life Apart, a study of the English working class from 1890 to 1914, Standish Meacham says,

Families counted on what Elizabeth Bott has called 'connecting relatives', much as neighbourhoods relied upon intermediaries, to keep members informed of impending births, of sickness and death. Frequently those same relatives found themselves cast in the role of principal assistant at such times of family crisis. They helped channel useful information to those within the network who needed jobs...

4

Although Meacham goes on to say that, "Contemporary sociologists have maintained that family and neighbourhood networks are incompatible with

1. Marion Scott's papers, Royal College of Music.
2. Gurney Archive. Winifred Gurney's reminiscences,
3. *ibid.*
4. A Life Apart p 56

the kind of life man is forced to live in an industrial city", and that "Talcott Parsons declares that only the 'isolated conugal family' can function effectively within a modern industrial democracy", (1) , for Ivor Gurney, born into a family without the close ties and support of relatives in the traditional mode, but perhaps too early for the Talcott Parsons model to be able to nurture self-sufficiency in a changing society, home life was fraught with difficulties.

Even the geographical aspect of where families lived in relation to the extended family or kinship networks could have a profound effect on the lives of individual members. When it was commonplace to settle in the same neighbourhood as parents or siblings, to live as the Gurneys did, several miles from Florence's family added to the sense of isolation. There are numerous accounts in literature as well as in factual accounts, of children from large families being semi-adopted by more wealthy relatives, thus sharing the financial stress of child rearing, but keeping the individual within the family. For Ivor, the relationships that had the most profound effects upon him, emotionally, in shaping his education, providing for him in a material sense to some extent, were provided from outside the family, and outside his class. This began at an early age, and it is a highly significant factor in the course his life was to take, contributing another dimension to his sense of self and place in the world. Despite the fact that the Gurney family was a large one, and that Florence refers to various cousins, there seems to have been very little connection with the extended family. There is very little in Ivor's poems or letters referring to family members.

1. *ibid* p 58

Five of David Gurney's six brothers followed their father's family into the building trade, which may have led Florence Gurney to feel that they were somewhat lower in social standing than a small town tailor. The other brother, William Gurney, worked as a waiter in Cheltenham. There is also evidence in Florence Gurney's reminiscences that she considered her own family, the Luggs, from Bisley, to be superior not only in their own neighbourhood - "not the regular sort of Bisley people they had too much in them", (1), but a more desirable, though more distant, hereditary influence on Ivor than the Gurneys.

The Luggs round Stroud are the most respected of anybody and you can say what you like a good ancestor is something be proud of but Ivor hasn't seen a lot of the Luggs he knew the Gurneys better and they hadn't a note of music in them.

2

It is an irony that although Florence seems to have found the Gurneys to be wanting in the social niceties to which she aspired, Ivor's relationships with people who were clearly 'gentlefolk' rather than 'trade', was a cause for jealousy. If Winifred felt that family life fell short of some kind of unspecified ideal, and provided the Gurneys with no useful connections, Ivor felt isolated even within the family itself, and alienated from it by virtue of the connections he made with people outside it. It is interesting to note that for a writer whose pre-occupation is with heritage, ancestry and home, his work contains very little that deals with these themes in any personal way. His interpretation of himself as a 'son of Gloucester' for example implies a

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1. G.A. Letter from Florence Gurney (nee Lugg), undated, to Marion Scott.
 2. *ibid.* A typical example of her idiosyncratic punctuation.

need to claim an identify for himself, to find kinship and belonging which is undercut by relating it to abstract ideals not to his own family and personal situation.

Some of the strains and tensions between family members, particularly later on in Gurney's life, but even in childhood were aggravated by the physical conditions in which they lived. Winifred describes a cramped and joyless existence.

Now business houses usually have to sacrifice the living part of their premises and it was the unfortunate part of our home for after many years when I returned I wondered how any of us managed to keep well and how mother managed to keep sane, for the worst part was the room we most lived in owing to being downstairs and the conveniences and near the shop. With all the windows one end, the rest of the place was in gloom. Such was the place where we grew up.

1

The Gurney family was, no doubt, in similar economic circumstances to many others in the 1890s. Working hours were long, respectability and prosperity did not necessarily go hand in hand. 1873 to 1896 had been years of extreme economic depression. In a county town like Gloucester, the market place for a largely rural area, the changes in agricultural life that were the root of the economic decline of the 1870s must have had a significant effect. Nevertheless, Gloucester was well served by rail, had traditional small industries like the manufacture of nails, and had a thriving docks. Imports of cheap textiles detrimental to the home producers and instrumental in the economic decline of the period, may in fact at an individual level have helped small artisans like David Gurney to produce a cheaper product for his customers without

1. G.A Winifred Gurney's reminiscences.

reducing his profit margin or financial security. Compared with the social stability of the mid nineteenth century, where the demarcations between the classes were more clearly in evidence, where the working classes were deferential and had little expectation of social mobility, the later part of the century saw a blurring of boundaries. Gentility was not measured necessarily in pounds shillings and pence but in matters of habits and taste, the acquisition of a piano.

To be born in 1890 was not only to arrive at the tail end of economic deprivation, but to begin life in a decade of flux and change. Following the technological progress and developments of the earlier half of the nineteenth century, with its relative social stability and prosperity, and the great depression of the 70s, the last decade of the nineteenth century was characterised by feelings of transition. An old monarch inevitably approaching the end of a long reign, ^{and} the end of a century were factors likely to induce a sense of impending change in the collective consciousness regardless of external events; but these too contributed to the atmosphere of both decay and decline typified by the Decadents, and, conversely, to the optimism of the political developments seen in the beginnings of socialism and the stirrings of an economic recovery.

To be the child of a family whose relationships did not provide eager godparents for the first son may have seemed a misfortune. It is recorded that David and Florence Gurney took their child to be baptised on 24th September 1890, but took no-one with them to stand as godfathers, of which if convention were to be observed, there should have been two. The name they had chosen was, according to Marion Scott,

evidence of Florence's desire for social advancement. Their son was to be named after Ivor Bertie Guest, Lord Wimborne, the 'squire' of the Wimborne district where David Gurney had been an apprentice. The name 'Bertie' was in fact a surname, rather than the diminutive of a forename, and Ivor Gurney is said to have hated it. The vicar of All Saints Church, Gloucester, who performed the ceremony there, the Reverend Herbert Foster, offered to be one of the god-parents, and Alfred Hunter Cheesman who was his curate agreed to be the second god-father. This relationship proved to be perhaps the most significant influence on Ivor Gurney's life. Many of the characteristics and interests that were to be vital facets of Gurney's adult identity, could be traced back to this almost accidental meeting.

Gurney's formal education began in either 1895 or 1896, at London Road Junior Boys' School, better known in Gloucester as The National. It was a school that had been founded in 1816, Gloucester's first public elementary school, established to 'educate the poorer children in the tenets of the Church of England'. By 1841, there were 166 boys and 151 girls in attendance, so that it was, by the standards of the time, large and well attended. Although free elementary education had been established in 1890, pupils at The National were required to pay twopence, threepence, or fourpence, per week, according to grade. (Standards I and II, Standards III and IV, and Standards V and VI).

Winifred Gurney records that,

When my sister Dorothy came along...I, against my father's wishes, left school to assist my mother. It was my lot to help in the house and with my sister alas to take her out, which

although robbed me of three years at school or in preparation for my career it made me grow perhaps healthier.

1

School leaving age at the turn of the century, when the youngest sister Dorothy was born, was in fact still set at thirteen. It was not raised to fourteen until the Education Act of 1918. It is surprising that Winifred had hopes of continuing her education for a further three years, and comments on being robbed of the opportunity to prepare for her future career, since this was not the norm for girls at that time. Possibly her reminiscences, written in old age, had taken on some of the bitterness openly acknowledged by Ronald, the second son, that too high a proportion of the family's resources had been devoted to furthering Ivor's prospects, to the detriment of the rest of the family. Nevertheless, such reminiscences shed a little light on family life, and because Ivor Gurney himself shed so little, it is the best we have.

Given the constraints and tensions in family life thus described, and the social and economic ^{position} occupied by the Gurneys, the likelihood of this family producing a musician and writer might have seemed remote.

In The Social Context of Modern English Literature, Malcolm Bradbury asks the questions '*Where do our writers come from? Who were their fathers? How were they educated?*', and answers it by saying that writing may not necessarily be an activity of the educated, but in our society it has tended to be so. (2). He goes on to state that 'the main sources

1. G.A. Winifred Gurney's reminiscences.

2. The Social Context of Modern English Literature p 138

of serious literature in English society has been the 'solid' middle classes', by which he means the professional middle classes, predominantly privately educated. (1). If this sounds like truism, Bradbury points out that it was not necessarily the case in France or the United States, and that 'the social range from which writers are drawn in England in the nineteenth century would seem to be actually wider than it was in the twentieth, at least up until 1945'. (2). This perhaps calls into question contentious issues relating not only to critical evaluations of literature and the economics of publishing, but reflects changes in the reading public, a higher proportion of which could be expected to be literate after the introduction of Board Schools in 1870 and the subsequent changes in education. These points will be taken up in later chapters, but are introduced here, to emphasise the significance of aspects of Gurney's education that differed from the kind of education that would, perhaps, have been typical for the son of a lower middle class provincial family at the end of the nineteenth century.

In Ivor Gurney's case, his godfather Cheesman was, undoubtedly, the catalyst. Despite his mother's aspirations to gentility, the impetus for Gurney's enrolment in 1890, at the King's School in Gloucester, came about as a direct result of the interest of Alfred Cheesman. Both Florence and David Gurney were members of the congregation of All Saints and it seems reasonable to assume that as regular worshippers, they and their growing family would have remained acquainted with Cheesman. It is

1. His findings are consistent with those of Raymond Williams, in The Social History of English Writers and Richard Altick in The Sociology of Authorship.

2. *ibid* p138

not clear what interest the curate took in Ivor, his godson, during the first six years of his childhood, but Hurd says that Gurney began to attend Sunday School at All Saints Church at the age of six, 'attracting almost immediately the sympathetic interest of Alfred Cheesman'. (1). The nature of Cheesman's 'sympathetic interest' has been the subject of speculation. Hurd states, rather coyly perhaps, that

Gloucester observed and cheerfully accepted that the Reverend Cheesman 'had a liking for lads of all ages'. Our own cruder age would, no doubt, have noted his romantic attachments with less charity.

2

It is unlikely that a relationship like that between Cheesman and Gurney would survive in the climate of suspicion extant, now, almost a century later, much less be encouraged. Hurd's comments are based on reminiscences sent to him in the 1960s and 70s, by elderly women who had remembered Gurney, and Cheesman, from their youth. They provide an interesting perspective, and a reminder that the attitudes prevalent in society towards such constructs as sexuality and masculinity not only vary enormously from one generation to another, but form part of the nexus of factors that shape the sense of identity of the individual. Gurney, and his relationship with Cheesman are products of their time and no other. It is necessary to understand this relationship in the context of the social mores and beliefs of its own time, and the bearing it had on Gurney's early life. It may also serve as a useful preamble to discussion of the homo-erotic element some critics have suggested are part of his writing. It is therefore worth addressing the contemporary perspective here, before proceeding to consider

1. Ordeal p 12
2. ibid p 10

chronologically, Gurney's formal education.

The late nineteenth century and early part of the twentieth century saw tremendous changes in attitudes towards homosexuality. The fact that such matters were discussed in public statements and publications was as significant as the content of the pamphlets, books and debates. Edward Carpenter, for example, wrote two books which were outspokenly defensive of homosexuality - Homogenic Love in 1896, and The Intermediate Sex in 1908 - and argued surprisingly that the condition hitherto regarded in many ways as an abomination and perversion was not only natural but socially useful. He goes further to suggest that 'the class conflict might be solved by encouraging homosexuality, which draws members of different classes into amiable relationships.' Unpalatable though this theory may have been to many of his contemporaries, it has an almost prophetic note in relation to the whole question of homo-eroticism in poetry from the First World War.

What is interesting about Carpenter and his beliefs, and their relevance to a study of Gurney in the context of late Edwardian culture, is that they show the interconnectedness of the Arts, sexuality, and political issues, in a juxtaposition that was uniquely of its time. Samuel Hynes comments on the founding of The British Society for Study of Sex Psychology in 1914, primarily by Carpenter and Laurence Housman, and observes that

it is characteristic both of the Society and the time that the aims of a psychological organisation should be defined not by a psychologist but by a novelist-poet-dramatist who was active in the suffrage movement.

1

1. The Edwardian Turn of Mind p 27

If Carpenter and his colleagues were not scientists, they were 'philosophers of sex', and their influence had a greater effect on public consciousness than on the science of psychology. In a critical study of Gurney's life and the work he produced, an understanding of the Edwardian turn of mind is necessary as a framework. Vital though it is, however, to acknowledge the significance of Cheesman's influence on Gurney's life, it is not necessarily useful to be drawn into what is ultimately reductive speculation into the sexual orientation of either. There is so little in Gurney's letters or poems about close relationships, and what there is is now filtered through the consciousness of the mid-twentieth century frame of mind. What is important is that Gurney and Cheesman were of an era that allowed such a friendship. Hurd is clear that whatever interpretation Gloucester society placed on Cheesman's relationships in his own time, or our own assigns to them in retrospect, 'no breath of scandal ever clung to his name'. (1). Gurney himself left no record of anything to contradict this.

Cheesman's recollections of Gurney as a boy, then, from about the age of ten, certainly show a mixture of warmth, humour and affection. At this time Gurney was receiving religious instruction from his god-father, in preparation for Confirmation, but clearly Cheesman was impressed by Gurney's interest in reading, music and nature, and stimulated his lively mind by nurturing his interests and giving him access to books not available at home. He probably also provided a haven where Gurney could retreat from the pressures of his own family. Winifred Gurney described the 'sacrifice of living space, light and comfort to the greater need of the

1. Ordeal p 10

shop and tailoring business, no doubt needed to provide for a growing family. She has also described her mother as a somewhat volatile woman, unable to show much warmth or affection and discouraging it in others. There is little wonder that in these circumstances Gurney should enjoy these luxuries elsewhere. Nevertheless, his relationship with Cheesman aroused an ambiguous response from the family. On the one hand Florence in particular had a sense of pride that her son was moving in circles rather more elevated than their own, but it was soured by irritation that he was in many ways rejecting the values that had been part of his upbringing, and in effect, creating a new identity for himself, that excluded the family. Ronald expressed this very strongly in later years.

Gurney responded creatively and enthusiastically to the stimulus he received from exposure to the kind of cultural heritage Cheesman put before him. Despite the fact that David and Florence Gurney were unable to provide the extensive library offered by Cheesman, Florence at least had some aspirations towards music. This may have been a striving for gentility, rather in the way that D.H.Lawrence's mother in very similar social and economic circumstances to that of the Gurneys, is known to have sought small signs of refinement. In 1896, it is recorded that the Gurney family acquired a piano. Winifred writes,

Although I had very little happiness to attribute to my mother, I look back with thankfulness that she saw to it that I did at least one hour's practice at the piano per day, and that has given me as much satisfaction and pleasure as anything else in my life.

1

This may have provided some compensation for Winifred, but the experiences of childhood for the other members of the family were very different. The

1. G.A. (58) Winifred Gurney's reminiscences.

clash of values between the younger brother Ronald Gurney, and Ivor, represent in microcosm what was happening in society and its view of education. Ronald became the businessman, carrying on his father's tailoring trade, which might in most families, traditionally, have passed to the eldest son. Ivor, because of his 'talent', inclinations and the encouragement of his god-father Cheesman, received something more akin to a 'gentleman's' education, with emphasis on the arts and music. This came about when he became a pupil at the King's School Gloucester on a choirboys' scholarship, in 1890. Marion Scott writes of the tensions this caused in the family.

His father David said to me "I wish to Heaven the boy had never gone to the Cathedral Choir School but his mother would have it, she was full of ambition."

1

Two Royal Commission, The Clarendon (Public Schools) Commission of 1861, and the Taunton (Schools Inquiry) commission of 1864, established that the nine ancient public schools they investigated offered the best possible secondary education. Schools that modelled themselves on these ~~reared~~ seats of learning were considered by the middle classes to offer the best opportunity for social advancement. Martin Wiener in English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit 1850 -1980, points out that

Headmasters, more or less equating the classics (together with Christianity, of course) with civilisation and ideal mental training, were eloquent in defense of a purely classical curriculum.

2

The King's School could hardly claim to be cast in the same mould as the subjects of the Royal Commissions, but in Gloucester, at the turn of the century, despite problems associated with poor discipline and a Headmaster

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1. Royal College of Music, Marion Scott's papers.
 2. English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit p 18

reputed to be, quite often, inebriated, its association with the church gave it a degree of superiority over the other local schools. It was a Cathedral, Choir School, established in the reign of Henry VIII, and its educational standards were no doubt undercut by the priority given to church services and music practice.

The King's School provided in a formal way, an extension of Cheesman's introduction to literature, music and studies of the local flora and fauna, but for Gurney the experience was mixed. The reward of extending his early enthusiasm for learning was balanced against the awkwardness of his relationships with others. The Gurney's spoke with a Gloucestershire accent. It is recorded that as a pupil at the King's School Ivor was teased about it, about his appropriate initials - "Oi be Gurney" - and even at this early stage was made fun of and called Batty Gurney. What emerges is a picture of an eccentric and isolated child. He appears to have existed in a way set apart from whatever milieu he found himself inhabiting, whether family, school or friends. This pre-figures his existence on the edge of families, friends and literary groups for example, in his adult life, and embodies a fundamental aspect of his identity.

Nevertheless, school provided friendships. A close and lasting friendship with Herbert Howells was born. They shared a love of music that spilled over into their leisure time as well as being a major part of their formal education. Gurney's music developed under the aegis of Dr. Herbert Brewer, then the organist at Gloucester Cathedral. It was also nurtured by two single women, half-sisters, who lived at 34 Wellington Street in Gloucester. Again it was Cheesman who introduced Gurney to Margaret and Emily Hunt, and he benefitted from the courteous and gentle criticism and

appreciation they offered, in what must have been a very different kind of household from his own. In Marion Scott's papers in the Royal College of Music, she says that the introduction to the Misses Hunt came via Cheesman because he thought that Ivor needed some feminine influence to civilise him and teach him manners. Given the dominance of his mother in a household with two sisters also still at home, this seems questionable, but may in fact have been a polite way of offering exposure to a different kind of female influence. It also gives an oblique comment on the class difference that gave Gurney different senses of self in different social contexts, and the notion of 'manners' is a very class ridden and culturally determined subject.

Gurney was a frequent visitor to the Hunts' house. That Wellington Street was a familiar place to him is shown in a brief reference in an unpublished poem *Birds*, (1), where he refers to 'Blackbirds of Wellington Street, martins of Leadon's law', The poem is written about the trenches, and the juxtaposition of Wellington Street with Minsterworth, High Hartpury, and Maisemore is interesting, identifying it as a place for which he feels nostalgia, strongly recreated by seeing the birds he usually associated with those habitats. '*Blackbirds of Wellington Street*' gives a good urban image to set against the rural image of Maisemore's green small hill and the yellow hammer at Hartpury. The visual image of blackbirds may also have been a reference to the two older women who were the reason for Gurney's nostalgia for that particular street.

1. G.A. Several typescript versions extant.

It is clear from the Gurney Archive that he dedicated many pieces of music dating from that early productive period in his life, to Margaret and Emily Hunt. Many of these were song settings to words by poets like Herrick and Housman. He also wrote at least three violin sonatas and a number of piano pieces, that he played for the Misses Hunt, and welcomed their response. The fact that Hurd says that the first songs of any consequence were written in November 1907, suggests that consequential or not Gurney was writing music from his mid-teens, and with a degree of maturity and expertise. It also emphasises the importance in Gurney's life of formative experiences and relationships outside the family, that led to a pluralism in his sense of self and identity, in that the persona he probably presented to the Hunts may have been different from the persona compatible with family life.

It seems important to establish that Gurney regarded his creativity at this point as being wholly directed towards music. There is little evidence to suggest that he wrote any verse before 1913. With Cheesman's encouragement, Gurney had been reading widely from the canon of English writers. Like most scholars of his generation, learning by heart was part of the process of literary study and appreciation, and he had therefore, a fund of literary favourites to set to music. This aspect of his education, both formal and informal, was influenced strongly by Cheesman, and had more in common with the 'Edwardian gentleman's education' than the experience of many of his contemporaries. Many of his peers from similar class and economic backgrounds, would, one suspects, have been reading adventure stories by Henty and Boys Own Comic, rather than Tennyson. Denis Winter in Death's Men, points out

that

"in 1902 only 9% of boys were still at school at 14. In a town three decker school there would be 50 to a class with one boy in 200 going to University"

1

He goes on to say that it was the nature of Edwardian Society, with its relatively static class divisions, to put a premium on social deference and correctness, and a low level of cultural interchange.

Deference does not appear to have been a characteristic in Gurney's relationships with those outside the family. Friendships with people like the Hunts, and Cheesman, somewhat removed from his class and rather older than Gurney, certainly enriched his cultural experience, and it could be supposed that he was less likely to be affected by factors that influenced the majority of his peer group. Teenagers had yet to be invented, puberty and adolescence deemed to begin later than it is now, and Youth Culture was a construct still in the future. The Edwardian attitude to youth differed from ours in the twentieth century in many ways. There was a pre-occupation with 'Hooliganism' a symptom of the troubled climate over the Irish question. The quasi-militarism of Baden Powell's Boy Scout movement was an attempt to mop up some of the energy and potential for trouble that could be used to the wrong end were it not channelled into something worthier and safer. 'If young tearaways were not taught the virtues of military imperialism they might succumb to the subversive influence of Socialism' (2)

1. Death's Men p 231

2. Cultural Populism p 91

This explains much about the attitude of many young men on the eve of war. It explains, for many, their willingness to be part of the military machine, because in a diluted and safer form, deference to authority, physical training, marching, camping, and belonging to a group of likeminded young men, had been part of their culture for some time. This then, is the kind of social and cultural context against which to set the specifics of Gurney's life, and gain some impression of the kind of childhood he may have experienced. Accounts of his school life refer to football and cricket as well as concerts, but even his early formative years seem to have been marked by isolation and difference. According to Emily Hunt, Gurney was soon bored with school life and longed for his voice to break, so that he could escape the choir.

Escape came in 1906, Gurney's sixteenth year, and he became an articled pupil of Dr Herbert Brewer. Neither seem to have enjoyed the experience. Accounts from the Royal College of Music later, show Gurney as an undisciplined and wayward student, not easy to teach, and yet the experience with Cheesman shows him capable of enthusiasm and thirsty for knowledge when his interest and imagination were fired. It may be that the competent but pedestrian approach of Dr. Brewer's musicianship was unable to motivate a creative individual like Gurney. It may even have been, to some extent, a lack of recognition or commitment on Herbert Brewer's part. Certainly in Marion Scott's papers it is suggested that

Ivor felt that [Sir Herbert] Brewer had been too slack for him - sent him for birdseed, therefore left with short lessons.

1

1. Royal College of Music, Marion Scott's papers.

There is little in what is written about Gurney to suggest that he was ever conscious of being in a comparatively fortunate position to have access to this kind of musical apprenticeship. The fees must have been paid by his father, although it is quite likely that there may have been contributions from Cheesman, and even from Margaret and Emily Hunt, who had modest private incomes and no family of their own. It must have been apparent to Ronald Gurney, approaching the end of his education at fourteen in the local state school, that the family's resources were not equally shared. There is a telling line in the unpublished poem, *Birds*, where the persona of the poem (and there is no reason to think that it is other than biographical), says

They were my brothers, but I a prince above others,
Having music within my blood, verse eager to say my mood.

1.

The use of 'prince' implies an innate superiority, endorsed by 'music within my blood', which appears to be both an inherited quality as well as showing that it is intimately and physically part of his being. Although it is important not to read too much into a small part of a poem, it is impossible to deny that the tone suggests 'right' rather than 'privelege'. Nevertheless, Gurney attempted to make a contribution either towards his expeses, or the family finances, by selling his sevices as an organist in parishes around Gloucester. His sister's reminiscences in the Archive quote

1. G.A. TS 23

Alfred Cheesman's comment on this period in Ivor's life, that some of these jobs were short-lived because of his undiplomatic way of relating to people "sometimes even to the Vicars' wives". Eventually, he was able to earn a small amount of income from playing the organ in the Mariners' Church on the docks in Gloucester.

Although still living at home in Barton Street, behind the shop, where life with Winifred at 21, Ivor at 17, Ronald at 13 and 6 year old Dorothy must have been cramped and claustrophobic, Ivor is known to have spent much time away from his own family. As well as his friendship with the Hunts, Gurney had already made the acquaintance of F.W Harvey. Will Harvey was two years older than Gurney and lived at Minsterworth, to the west of Gloucester itself. Their paths had not crossed during elementary education, because while Gurney was at the National School in Gloucester, Will Harvey was educated at home until the age of nine, by a governess. He went to The King's School as day-boy in 1897, but for health reasons was sent away in 1902, to Rossall on the north-east coast, where his parents felt the atmosphere would be good for him. Harvey returned to Gloucester after leaving Rossall in 1905, entered the legal profession, articled to a local solicitor. It was not until 1908 that he and Gurney met each other again, according to Anthony Boden, in a chance encounter on a tram, when they realised they had been at the same school in the past and struck up conversation. Their friendship became a close and rewarding one for two young men who shared an interest in music and literature, as well as a deep love of the Gloucestershire countryside. Both men recorded and celebrated their friendship and their love of these local landscapes in poetry. As often happened in Gurney's life, that friendship very soon took in

the whole family. It is easy to understand the appeal an apparently warm and lively family living in a spacious and welcoming household held for Ivor. Anthony Boden describes Will Harvey's love and respect for his father, and the grief he felt when his father died at the end of 1909. There is a stark comparison between the atmosphere described in Winifred's reminiscences, showing a father whose affectionate impulses were stifled by the all-controlling rod-of-iron rule by Florence, and the family life experienced at secondhand in Gurney's friendship with the Harveys.

Although Will Harvey felt that he did not properly know his father, this appeared to be expressing regret that he had not appreciated how much his father had done for him and the family in providing for them. Harvey expresses grief at his father's death very directly, both in a comment in his journal, now in the County Records Office in Gloucester,

Dec. 5th 1909 Father died (Burial on Dec. 9th)

Dec 14th 1909 Nothing is so hopelessly, awfully, wearying as grief. Now I understand how the disciples were 'sleeping for sorrow'.

1

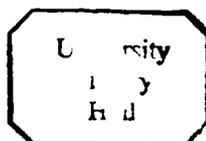
and in a poem, *The Horses*,

.....Gone are the horses
That my father bred.
And who knows whither?...
Or whether starved or fed?...
Gone are the horses,
And my father's dead.

2

1. F. V. Harvey: Soldier, Poet p 28

2. *ibid* p 29



The clues to Gurney's relationship with his father are much more oblique. This is demonstrated in a poignant poem, unpublished, and written in 1925, several years after the death of Gurney's father David in 1919. It is, ostensibly, about Joseph and his relationship with Jesus. It is unusual in Gurney's poetry to see a religious subject extended into a whole poem. There are many stereotypical religious references in Gurney's early poems, and more personal poems of anguish and supplication in the later years, but this poem in fact says little about spiritual or religious matters and much about Gurney's feeling for his father.

Joseph

The carpenter of craft - worker for his wage,
Wedded Mary, beautiful and good - There was nothing
Joseph would not do, save spoil craft, for this lady of young age.
They had a child of love, travellers hearing his beauty
Came to see, gave presents rare, laid on the clothing
Of the cradle - These were good men, travelled, reputed sage...
Who uttered strange blessings over the babe quietly
Breathing his ^{ink} life through in a helpless wait-on-kindness.
The son became a carpenter, meditated long; following the
Precepts of God, - but leaving no tale of poetry -
Or more Psalms as of David, to exalt Israel or Her heritage.
Wandered and drew followers, loved by men to blindness
And noble against the Roman-Official hot in accusation...
Suffered crucifixion...no man is yet sure why.
So Joseph, blamed for his son's fault, in his fifty-third
Year - spake little, being of evil report afear'd
And said only - "The Psalms of David, the King
Of Israel, when Israel was free, now by Rome conquered...
Were beautiful enough, the boy should have made such a thing-
Or poems of Jerusalem or his own Bethlehem.
Shall not God please His Spirit to hear a boy sing
Praise of the high hills, or low valleys - in verse inspired,
Or made carefully as a carpenter plots and makes.
He turned and kissed Mary: "Many lies have they uttered
About the birth of our son, and what he desired.
But they who lied, also paid tribute betrayed.
Israel cares no more for poetry's many sakes,
Music is not a worship, Beauty not obeyed.

Priests under Rome's rule, wasting soul of Israel.
And our son gone to the dark with few words scattered,
After such anguish, insult, my son trained to my trade."

The poem exists in the Archive in typescript only, and there is what appears to be a typographical error in line fifteen where it could reasonably be assumed that *son'* should read *son's*. The poem reverses the situation in Harvey's poem, of a father's death, and takes the death of a son as its central subject. Using the names of Joseph and Jesus gives this poem on the one hand a universality in that any reader could feel in possession of knowledge about the context. On the other hand, it gives a very oblique view of the relationship between Joseph and Jesus, because the universality lies in the fact that this could be any father and any son experiencing a rift between the generations. It goes further, and conveys not merely the sense that the relationship between the two is characterised at least on the father's part by loving incomprehension, but that both have somehow lost their own identities because the son 'trained to my trade', has departed from the prescribed and traditional course. It idealises the relationship between parents, and specifies that the child is born of love, and is revered, thus giving a poignant sense that this is how Gurney wishes it had been for him. In lines ten and eleven, the notion of poetry and psalms 'to exalt Israel and Her heritage', and 'his own Bethlehem', is very reminiscent of Gurney's own constant desire to glorify Gloucestershire. There is a parallel, too, in the last two lines, where the son is depicted as 'gone to the dark with few words scattered', implying a lack of recognition for his poetry that Gurney himself felt so acutely. It is a poem that justifies well-turned phrases praising 'high hills and low valleys' made as carefully as a carpenter makes his wares. It is a flawed poem, but says much about Gurney's desire for mutual acceptance and his father's affection.

The relationship with his mother may have been much more difficult. Florence Gurney is variously described as 'hard', 'unable to show affection', and according to Ronald Gurney, writing to Marion Scott, invariably at some difficulty in maintaining a smooth relationship with Ivor,

...really he hardly gets in the house before his nerves and Mother's collide and off he goes again.

1

Marion Scott had herself expressed concern that Florence Gurney seemed to be a 'borderline case' - hardly specific terminology, but making it clear that there were concerns about her mental stability. These concerns are echoed in Hurd's observation that 'her apparent inability to show affection accords very well with the symptoms of schizophrenia,' and that

Bearing in mind her capacity for creating family tension, her extremely vivid and imaginative style of letter-writing, and her lack of maternal warmth, Florence Gurney may have passed on to her son all the essential ingredients of his genius and his undoing.

2

Marion Scott says, retrospectively, that

For many years he seemed to cherish the ideal of what a mother's love might be, and at times to hope for it from her but he never got it, and ultimately his one wish was to have her kept away from him. Yet I think it was from her he inherited his strange power of placing ideas in unusually [sic] juxtapositions, a power which showed very much in his later poetry. But there was this difference that with him it was genius and with her it was almost foolishness

3

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1. Ordeal p 133
 2. ibid p 198. It has also been suggested in recent research into schizophrenia, that people with a pre-disposition to or a diagnosis of the condition are likely to have a 'schizogenic mother', and this is defined in terms very similar to those her family, M. Scott, and Hurd retrospectively have used in describing Florence Gurney
 3. Royal College of Music, Marion Scott's papers.

It would be unfair however, to suggest that Gurney's experience of family life was entirely bleak. Hurd quotes from Winifred Gurney's reminiscences, showing the family engaged in a commonplace and happy activity, walking over to Maisemore to visit David Gurney's mother

When Ivor was in the Cathedral Choir he was allowed to invite another choirboy, or more, to have tea with us before setting off. In these things, combined with trips down the Canal, or the River, as well as country walks, Mother generally accompanied us, and they were the pleasant days of our lives....

1

Separation from the family was inevitable if Gurney was to pursue his musical training. It appeared at first that he would do this at Durham University, where he was offered a place on passing the matriculation exam in September 1907. It is not clear in Hurd's biography why he did not take up the place, or what happened in the intervening years, but in 1911 he was awarded a scholarship to the Royal College of Music. Again Cheesman was a crucial factor in enabling Gurney to accept the place, providing money to supplement the forty pound scholarship he had won. Gurney moved to London, and the separation from both his family and Gloucestershire offered new horizons.

1. Ordeal p 20

and when in 1820 my grand father was born.
I later (he) knew that our Grandfather was the illegitimate (2)
son of Priscilla Gurney, the seventh and plainest daughter
of John Gurney - Woolscaple and banker of Norwich.
Although the family lived in great wealth at Earlsam Hall
in Norwich, Priscilla was taken to the Isle of Wight in the
year of 1820. where she gave birth to a son, our grandfather.
Priscilla returned to Earlsam to die before the end of
one year and the baby was taken to Mairimore by Charles
by his then, Uncle Samuel Gurney who was a great friend
and his Aunt Elizabeth Fry the great Prison Reformer.
He was given in charge of Samuel's friend - the Rev.
Richard Dighton. From a drawing in 1823 ~~that~~ the
Rev. Dighton drew of Samuel, he must have visited
Mairimore three years later. - Incidentally, my own father
often spoke of the Rev. Dighton which gave the impression that
he was the greatly respected friend of them all. in after years
William Gurney the son of Priscilla married Mary Wilkes
and had ^{seven} sons - no daughters. - my father, named David
being the seventh and the youngest. who later was the father
of my brother Ivor, the first son of the seventh son.
My grandfather died at the age of 52. - my father (also
died at 52 and both of the same thing "Cancer"

Now, what of the paternal parent of my grandfather? Was
it Schubert? By the biographer, Schubert, he did visit
England and by the evidence from Priscilla's journals
he visited Earlsam Hall and later she appears to have
met him in Austria. where Schubert's school master friend
enabled him to meet her at Dr Schellman's house where
a party of mostly pretty girls were waiting to welcome him
Priscilla was very plain. Priscilla duly returned home and
Schubert, although he wished to visit Dr Schellman's family ^{again}
did not do so. Apparently, Priscilla became seriously ill
and, in her journal, paid her sister Elizabeth a tribute

CHAPTER TWO : Time and the Soldier.

If Alfred Cheesman had been the most influential figure in Gurney's early life, undoubtedly it was Marion Scott who became the most significant influence in his adult years. To some extent Marion Scott also fulfilled a similar role to that of the Misses Hunt in Gloucester. As an older woman the relationship was one of mentor, confidante, and affectionate friend. Just as the musical Misses Hunt had fostered and encouraged Gurney's early striving in composition and musicianship, Marion Scott, a competent musician, musicologist and critic herself, was able to continue that process. She had been a student at the Royal College of Music, and had become the editor of the college magazine, in addition to pursuing her own research. Marion Scott seems to have been aware of Gurney's presence at The Royal College of Music, from his earliest days as a student. His reputation as talented but difficult to deal with, gained him the notice of both tutors and fellow students. Hurd puts this somewhat theatrically in a description of other significant friendships.

In 1912 Herbert Howells came to London and the Royal College, and the pair formed a particular friendship with a young Australian student, Arthur Benjamin, who was a year younger than Howells and three years younger than Gurney. He was relatively wealthy, but seems never to have abused the fact. They make a strange trio: very different in character and talent, and marked out for very different destinies. Benjamin, a cheerful bachelor, extrovert and facile, directed his engaging talents with extraordinary skill and made money out of music. Howells, quiet, contemplative, and soon to be happily married, directed his deeper and more mystically inclined talents with an equal sense of purpose. Gurney, muddled, inhibited, enthusiastic did not enjoy their 'talent', but was caught up instead in the crueler demands of genius, and scarcely knew which way to turn.

Whether 'talent' or 'genius' are appropriate terms may be arguable, but it is clear that regardless of how it could accurately be defined, his creativity at this stage, at the Royal College of Music, was being both shaped and challenged. In Gloucester, under the aegis of Canon Cheesman and Margaret and Emily Hunt, Gurney had probably received the praise and encouragement usually offered to competent and hopeful young musicians. They were not in a position to offer the sophisticated and technical analyses of his work that was part of his musical education at the Royal College, from tutors with established reputations, like Sir Charles Stanford, for example, and later, Ralph Vaughan Williams.

Howells describes Gurney as 'a most loveable egotist', with 'an astonishing creative pride', (1), and it may be that Gurney found the rigour of approaching music as an academic discipline stressful, instead of finding it fulfilling as a way of self-expression. Nevertheless it was a productive period, and Hurd records several pieces of music that can be attributed to Gurney's early years at the College. Some are simply acceptable pieces, suggesting 'a certain dogged student determination to do the right thing'. (2). Others, however, show evidence of inspiration resulting in more successful pieces like the string Quartet in A minor of 1912. Such flashes of brilliance and originality are characteristic both of Gurney's music, and of his later work as a poet, but there is also a pre-figuring of the darker side of his work evident in the music of this period. Some of the instrumental pieces, like many of the poems, open with a clarity of vision and

1. Ordeal p 35

2. ibid

apparent unity of thought which degenerates into a less focussed and clumsy ending.

It may be significant, that after two years at the Royal College, emotional and physical symptoms began to affect his capacity to work. From a twentieth century perspective, it is hard to disentangle the two, and the digestive disorders Gurney described as 'the trail of the dyspeptic serpent', taken in conjunction with what was known about his chaotic eating habits, were no doubt interwoven with his emotional and psychological state. It was recognised that Gurney was suffering from 'nervous disorders', and it was in 1913 that the condition was diagnosed as 'neurasthenia', and Gurney returned to Gloucester in an attempt to restore his health.

Faith in the restorative properties not only of fresh country air but the soothing qualities inherent in rural landscapes and country pursuits was an attitude commonplace in the early twentieth century. For Gurney, whose focal point was Gloucester, it would have been unthinkable to choose anywhere else to recuperate, although it appears that he did not return to his family in Gloucester itself, but lodged at the Lock House at Framilode, from whence he wrote to Marion Scott, in May 1913.

There, in addition to walking, hard physical labour and sailing were part of his regime. Both Gurney and Will Harvey wrote about the small secondhand boat, the *Dorothy*, that they had purchased jointly, for five pounds some time between 1908 and 1911, when their friendship had been renewed after Harvey's return from boarding school in Lancashire. Harvey left Gloucestershire again, at least temporarily, in 1911, and his friendship with both Gurney and Howells had continued in London. Harvey,

like Gurney, had since adolescence been regarded by his family at least, as 'highly strung', a quality they associated with creativity. There are striking parallels between the 'nervous dispositions' of the two young men, obliquely expressed in Gurney's poetry, but referred to rather more ingenuously and transparently by Harvey.

For some time it has been born in upon me that I am not yet *Awake!* - that somewhere down beneath this garment of flesh is the *Real me* - with the *Real eyes*. Is it possible that I may one day wake and "see things as they are"? or can *Death* alone awake the soul now walking in its sleep?

1

It was through Will Harvey that Gurney met John Haines, who was both a published poet and a literary entrepreneur, who took great interest in a wide ranging circle of both significant writers and those he regarded as interesting or talented whether or not they had received public recognition. Anthony Boden records that Will Harvey and Ivor Gurney were frequent visitors to John Haines' office where he had his practice as a solicitor in Gloucester. John Haines' son Robin also remembered Gurney visiting their home, when the two would disappear for long walks, often at very inconvenient times. Robin Haines described Gurney as a man not particularly liked by the women in the family, largely due to his habit of upsetting the routine of the household. (1). (This does not, however, appear to have been the response of other families like the Harveys and, later, the Chapmans.)

Anthony Boden suggests that Marion Scott may have been instrumental in arranging for Gurney to become a part time organist at Christ Church in

1. F.W. Harvey, *Soldier Poet*. p8

2. Interview, D.E. Ward and Robin Haines, September 1985.

High Wycombe, where he met the Chapmans, who became another of his adopted families. Although living in Fulham during the week, Gurney was offered lodgings with the Chapmans at weekends, and was able to experience, again, a warm and supportive homelife in which he was made welcome, very similar to his visits to the Harveys in Minsterworth. Michael Hurd describes Gurney's life in London as less than satisfactory.

Ill at ease in the noisy London streets, and cramped in squalid lodgings, unable in term-time to glimpse the restoring countryside.....

1

and yet his poems about London show the same keen observation of small detail, and sense of historical continuity that are present in the poems about Gloucester. There is a similarity in tone between two poems about London - *Time to Come* (2) and *A Wish* (3), and although they were both written at a later date than Gurney's young adult years in Fulham, they indicate an awareness of place not entirely consistent with Hurd's interpretation above. There is, too, a sense of humourous resignation about the price to be paid for an education at the RCM. After spending time in Gloucestershire, Gurney writes,

London is worse than ever to bear after that. Still, let us hope the Militants [Suffragettes] will blow it up soon.

4

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1. Ordeal p 43
 2. ibid p 211
 3. Collected Poems p 160
 4. Letters June 1913, p 6

It could be argued that, although there is no doubt about Gurney's deep love of Gloucestershire and preference for his home county as a place to live, the emotional stress that precipitated his 'nervous breakdown' in May 1913, could be attributed more appropriately to his sense of self than sense of place.

There are both simple and complex factors in this aspect of Gurney's sense of being. Firstly, there is the crucial factor of his early development and family life. It is often the case that both 'nature' and 'nurture' are provided by the parents. In Gurney's case, however, although there are what appear to be significant details known about his mother, giving insight into possible hereditary factors, it is also apparent that from a comparatively early age some aspects of 'nurture', or at least social conditioning came from outside the family. Influences from outside the family affected some of the most fundamental aspects of Gurney's life, but in doing so both enriched and displaced him, and perhaps endorsed or re-inforced his sense of multiple modes of being. His displacement is illuminated by reference to Basil Bernstein's paper on *Social Class, Language and Socialisation*, in which he comments about factors affecting the process of socialisation.

Without a shadow of doubt the most formative influence upon the procedures of socialisation, from a sociological viewpoint, is social class. The class structure influences work and educational roles and brings families into a special relationship with each other and deeply penetrates the structure of life experience within the family.

1

This is taken a step further in Bernstein's paper when he argues that the (class dependent) process of socialisation is not only the means by

1. Social Class, Language and Socialisation p 227

which a child acquires a specific cultural identity, but which is also that which determines his response to such an identity - that is, determines individual personal identity within a given social and cultural context. For Gurney, education did not reflect his true class background, and relationships with his family could often be defined more appropriately by what they lacked than by what they offered.

The importance of the inter-relationship between class, language and identity will be explored further in a later chapter, but the significant point for the purposes of this chapter, considering Gurney's early adulthood, is the part played by influences from outside the family. Bernstein lists four basic agencies of socialisation in contemporary societies - the family, the peer group, school (which could legitimately be widened to include post-school education) and work. As has already been established, the circumstances of Gurney's family life meant that he was open to other influences from outside. School life dislocated him from his class and to some extent increased the distance between Gurney and the rest of the family. The second phase of his life, away from home and family, had a much greater influence. In Gurney's earlier adolescent life, the influence of peers seems to have been less important than for many young men of his age. This was partly due to Florence Gurney's isolation of the family, (1), and partly because in early adolescence his relationships with Alfred Cheesman and later with the Misses Hunt appeared to be dominant, as Gurney himself shows in a letter to Marion Scott written in 1913,

I shall be very glad to see you again. You and M.H
[Margaret Hunt] are in different ways my confidants,

1. G.A. Winifred Gurney's reminiscences, see previous chapter.

on whom it does me good to let leak all my bilge and waste water; or the chimneys through which I love to vent the smoke I cannot consume.

1

The pattern of his relationship with Cheesman was repeated to a great extent in the relationship with Marion Scott, in that Gurney looked to her for advice and encouragement, and brought his work to her for criticism and approval, but it was during Gurney's life as an independent adult in London that friendships with a group of young people his own age became important. If Bernstein's theory is valid, the significance of peer group influence on Gurney at this period in his life should not be underestimated.

The friendship with Herbert Howells had been established at school in Gloucester, although there is little mention of Howells' family. The friendship with Will Harvey continued in London as well as being firmly rooted in the common ground of Gloucestershire. To some degree, the friendship with Howells fed the musical and Harvey the literary side of Gurney's nature. It was during this period that Gurney was increasingly drawn to the coterie of writers loosely associated with the Georgian movement, whose central figure was Edward Marsh, the editor of several volumes of Georgian Poetry. Hurd gives a picture of Gurney as a satellite on the periphery of a collection of probably minor poets, rather similar to the position he had occupied in relation to John Haines and the literary figures with whom he associated in Gloucestershire. As a striving, hopeful young poet, he is clearly

1. 1. Letters p 6

flattered by such connections, and communicates this to Harvey in a letter dated August 17th 1913.

Did I tell you that Haines had seen Abercrombie? Who asked Haines whether he knew one named Harvey, who showed great promise.

1

Friendship with John Haines provided a link of sorts to a group of established writers, whose interests were archetypally Georgian, and therefore writers whose work Gurney both admired and perhaps unconsciously emulated. as he became more preoccupied with poetry as a channel for his own creativity. Hurd says that

The earliest proof we have of Gurney's interest in writing poetry on a professional level comes in a letter to F.W. Harvey which, though undated and minus an envelope, belongs probably to 1912. It contains a poem which he describes as having been 'refused by *Eyewitness*, which should not be, as its author is a great admirer of Hilaire Belloc, and takes in the *Eyewitness* every week now.

2

He seems to have felt some ambivalence towards the dichotomy of music and poetry, and wrote that 'the brighter visions brought music; the fainter, verse or mere pleasurable emotion', (3) a sentiment echoed in his letter to Marion Scott. The friendship with Harvey probably strengthened the interest in literature, and both sent poetry to each other for comment and criticism.

The friendship with Arthur Benjamin is less well documented and somewhat

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1. Letters p 6. The poet Lascelles Abercrombie had moved to Ryton, near Dymock, in 1911, and his wife Catherine was related to Haines.
 2. Ordeal p 42
 3. *ibid* p 199

enigmatic. Hurd first describes Benjamin as a 'cheerful bachelor', which appears to be a euphemism for 'well-integrated homosexual' which is the term he uses later in Ordeal. In the footnotes to the chapter on Gurney's mental state, Hurd quotes Arthur Benjamin's reminiscences from 1955, in which he implied that he believed Gurney 'bore the same inflexion but never recognised the fact'. Benjamin had revealed this belief to Marion Scott, in a correspondence between them in 1922, when many of Gurney's friends were concerned about the obvious deterioration of his mental health. It is expressed obliquely,

I used to know a great deal about Ivor; and on that knowledge - the details of which it is impossible for me to discuss with you - I think that psycho-analysis is the only chance.

1

but since the new science of psycho-analysis was widely held to be pre-occupied with sexual matters his meaning was no doubt clear. (2). Howells, on the contrary, according to Hurd, regarded this as 'unthinkable', and said that Gurney 'would have died first'. (3) (The polarity between Benjamin's and Howell's perception probably says more about each of them than it does about Gurney.) John Lucas in the

1. ibid p 225

2. See for example Nerves and The Nervous, p 117. This is another instance where it is important to look at contemporary documentation to shed light on prevailing attitudes. Ash's comments, written the year before Benjamin's letter to M.Scott, state that 'so far did the followers of Freud over-run this field of investigation that the term psycho-analysis...eventually stood for nothing more nor less than a minute examination of all the sexual thoughts and feelings from the earliest years...' and that 'from the point of view of the ordinary man or woman psycho-analysis commonly means an investigation of the sex experiences.'

3. Ordeal p 197

Times Literary Supplement simply suggests that it appears that sex was not of great significance to Gurney.

Of far greater significance were the relationships with his close companions, shown above, and with whole families. Friendship with Will Harvey soon became a friendship with all the Harveys, characterised by an eagerness on Gurney's part to experience what was lacking in his own. A letter to Harvey, written from his lodgings in London, shows this,

How is your mother, the embodiment of dignity and maternal sweetness, to visualise a little. How's Eric, and the Motor-bike merchant, and the young Varmin, also the young Lidy? I wish I were in the bosom of such a family at such a time and place. (Likewise the Aunt)...Ah, well, Willy, these be comforting things to hold in memory and prospect. I hope to share many such with you.

1

A similar friendship with a family in High Wycombe, the Chapmans, is now well documented in Stars in a Dark Night, and shows a relationship full of affection on both sides, and from Gurney a sense of involvement and belonging. A letter written to the Chapman children when Gurney was in training camp in Essex demonstrates his eagerness to be part of such a family

My Dear Kids,
How's hockey? How's cats? How's dogs? How's football?
How's Keep Hill? I would like very much to share these with you, but Lord Kitchener won't let me...But really: Essex is a flat and unsatisfactory place, and now Autumn is in the air I remember High Wycombe, and how I went down there just about this time last year, and discovered a family which liked Bach and whose presents I am now loaded with...
Is Winnie going back to school? What will Kitty do? Is Arthur going to take a commission? Is Micky allowed to associate with more respectable children? ...How's Dad? With whom I used to settle the fate of Europe and the Universe....

2

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1. Letters p 5
 2. Stars in A Dark Night p 34

Anthony Boden says that 'Ivor brought to the children a wonderful mixture of fun and enlightenment', (1), and there are occasional glimpses of Gurney's happier self that are indeed like stars in a dark night in the knowledge of his recurring struggles against mental disintegration. *Praise* reflects this,

O friends of mine, if men mock at my name,
Say 'Children loved him.'
Since by that word you will have far removed him
From any bitter shame.

2

There are other similar brief references to children or childhood, as for example in *Hedges*,

'Bread and cheese' grow wild in the green time,
Children laugh and pick it, and I make my rhyme
For mere pleasure of seeing that so subtle play
Of arms and various legs going every, any way.

3

and in *When March Blows*,

.....meres and the rutted pools
Mirror the wool-pack clouds and shine clearer than jewels.
And the children throw stones in them, spoil mirrors and clouds.

4

There is a very clear idealisation of childhood evident in all these examples. In the first, there is an ambiguity about the word that will absolve the persona from shame. It is partly the conventional notion of redemption by love, but it is given an extra potency because it is the love of children. Gurney does not raise any stereotypical images of innocence, but there is a more subtle implication, that perhaps

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1. *Stars* p 5
 2. *Collected Poems* p 35 (written in 1917 and included in *S and S*)
 3. *ibid* p 124
 4. *ibid*

childhood represents a state that pre-dates the failure of human relationships, and the ontological insecurity inherent in adulthood. In the second example, *Hedges*, there is a resonance between growing wild in the 'green time', - spring and early summer, since 'bread and cheese' are young green leaves of hawthorn - and the 'green time' of life and the pleasurable freedom and 'wildness' of children implied in the last line, in 'arms and various legs going every, any way.' There is, however, a darker side apparent in the third example. *When March Blows* contains strong visual images typical of Gurney's interest in 'skylscapes', but there is a prophetic sense of destruction, and a destruction, moreover, for which children are themselves responsible in the first line of the second stanza, where 'children throw stones in them, spoil mirrors and clouds.' It may be that in Gurney's obvious enjoyment and interest in the company of the Chapman children, he is seeking to re-write his own childhood, or at least to experience for himself at second hand a different kind of childhood from his own.

Friendships with both peers and with children as discussed above was clearly important in Gurney's life as a young adult, but it was also a period in his life when he was pre-occupied with his own roots and identity. The episode recounted so frequently about Gurney's first appearance at the Royal College of Music where he was referred to as Schubert, has been treated anecdotally, which rather belies the seriousness that lay behind it for Gurney himself. Apart from the fact that 'Schubert' was a *soubriquet* given to Gurney on the basis of his appearance, Winifred Gurney says that his handwriting and compositional style were also considered to be very like that of Schubert. This led

to a complex set of speculations, 'not least by Ivor himself for he paid a visit to Somerset House London and later enquired of me to know the maiden name of our grandmother'. (1). Winifred Gurney at least was willing to believe that the family was related to the family of the prison reformer and Quaker, Elizabeth Fry, nee Gurney. The connection with Schubert is reputed to have been through the illegitimate pregnancy of one of Elizabeth Fry's nieces after meeting him in Austria. The explanation appears to be based on inaccuracies, and some striking coincidences regarding names, particularly the fact that both the Norfolk Gurneys and the Gloucestershire Gurneys were friendly with clergymen both called Richard Dighton. It is not necessary to repeat the whole story, but what is interesting is the earnestness with which Ivor sought explanation for the connection, as if kinship with Schubert offered some kind of validation of his own identity as a musician. It also suggests that Gurney is seeking to re-frame his family history to give himself a more meaningful explanation of who he is, in a way that does not reject his family, but shapes it into something a little more compatible with his own world view.

At this point in his life, as a student at the Royal College, Gurney's sense of his own identity was as a musician. There is excitement and high spirited humour in his account of the completion of his five Elizabethan Songs, as well as a modest satisfaction that 'technique all right, and as to word setting - models.' (2). He describes them as

'Five Songs for Mezzo Soprano - 2 flutes, 2 clarinets, a harp, and two bassoons.

by Ivor Gurney. A.R.C.O.

Yes Willy, I got through that exam, and meningite my cerebrealis if I didn't get Second Prize.

3

1. G.A. Winifred Gurney's reminiscences.
2. Letters p 10 3. *ibid*

Gurney's time at the Royal College of Music was of course interrupted by the war. and poems and letters from this period are particularly important in providing a window through which to view one of the most stable periods of Gurney's adult life.

For most adult men, between the years of 1914 and 1918, the war and the consequences of war, dominated their working lives. At best it produced as it did for Gurney, interruptions to established or intended career paths, (1) even for those fortunate enough to survive. It also altered not only the structural dynamics of society, but the sense of self and purpose of individuals within it. Divisions that had hitherto depended largely on class, were complicated by the differences between the forces and civilians. At the beginning, being a soldier conferred a sense of purpose and identity that, on the one hand, mirrored and re-inforced some of the attitudes extant in the class structure itself. Middle class, well educated men had a duty to lead, and the masses had a duty to do as they were told. Gurney demonstrates this in *The Silent One*, where his non-compliance with the order given in 'a finicking accent' was not a conventional response. The superiority of the middle and upper class was largely unquestioned, and extended beyond wealth and education to assume a moral and mental superiority too. This is illustrated in a

1. Interruptions were some extent accommodated to meet the pressing needs of supplying more men to the army. For example, the *War Budget* records that 'In common with the older foundations, Birmingham University has made a generous response in the hour of the country's need. Many of the academic staff and nearly 200 students have exchanged their gowns for the King's uniform, and a few are already in the fighting line. Every encouragement has been given to recruiting, and medical training has been speeded up in order that advanced students wishing to do so might take their degrees and then join the RAMC, (*War Budget*, January 16th, 1915. p 279)

comment by W.H. Trotter in his influential analysis Instincts of the Herd in Peace and War.

Amongst the first-class Powers today the mentally stable are still the directing class, and their characteristic tone is discernible in national attitudes towards experience, in national ideals and religions, and in national morality. It is this possession of the power of directing national opinion by a class which is in essence relatively insensitive towards new combinations of experience; this persistence of a mental type which may have been adequate in the simpler past, into a world where environments are daily becoming more complex - it is this survival, so to day, of the waggoner upon the footplate of the express engine, which has made the modern history of nations a series of such breathless adventures and hairbreadth escapes.

Trotter p55 1

Acceptance of the 'natural order' soon broke down under the vicissitudes of war, but was a significant factor, and one which was exploited, in the early days when it was urgent to recruit large numbers of men to supplement the regular army.

Gurney was no less immune to the pressure to join up when war was declared than others of his generation. The pressure was both national and personal. Propaganda urged women to put pressure on the men in their families and social circle, and it is recorded in the Gurney symposium in *Music and Letters* in 1938, that on August 8th Gurney had tried to enlist, partly in response to Margaret Hunt's 'appeals and scorn'. Another, equally powerful factor, not acknowledged in *Music and Letters*, was peer pressure. War had been declared on August 4th, and the regular soldiers in the 5th Battalion of the Gloucestershire regiment were brought back to Barracks in Gloucester from a camp in Buckinghamshire where they were to have stayed for two weeks routine training. Instead

1. Instincts of the Herd in Peace and War... p 55

they were mobilized, and were paraded through Gloucester to a civic reception immediately before leaving on troop trains from Gloucester station to begin their part in active service. The paradox of anxiety and sadness mixed with an almost carnival atmosphere of parades and display of uniforms was a powerful incentive to many men to join up. Gurney had returned home when war was declared, and like most of his contemporaries tried to enlist. Will Harvey and two of his brothers joined up on August 8th, but Gurney was refused on the grounds of poor eyesight.

The tone of some of Gurney's first war poems (1) suggest that like many of his contemporaries he was motivated at least in part, by patriotism and the wish to do his duty, to serve his country. Reference to honour, duty, and service, albeit 'strange' and 'dreadful service', is evidence of the powerful influence of propaganda and the collective stereotypical attitude prevalent in most communities, even if Gurney's perception of them did not entirely match the norm. *Maisemore*, from Severn and Somme, for example, recognises the bravado and sense of adventure that gripped the population when war was still an unknown quantity.

O when we swung through Maisemore,
The Maisemore people cheered,
And women ran from farmyards,
And men from ricks, afeared

To lose the sight of soldiers
Who would, 'fore Christmas Day,
Blow the Kaiser William's Army
Like mist of breath away!

2

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1. i.e. poems written before Gurney had seen active service.
 2. Severn and Somme p 23

The feeling is evoked in one word - 'swung' - which expresses cheerfulness and energy far more effectively than merely 'marching' would have done. Nevertheless, the dark side of war is immediately present, in the end rhyming of 'cheered' with 'afear'd'. Gurney's use here of enjambement gives 'afear'd' a double edge. The inevitable hiatus produced by its position at the end of a stanza makes it appear first of all to stand alone - the men running out from the farmyards are fearful. Reading on, into the next stanza, the fear is related not to fear of war, but to the ambiguous 'lose the sight of soldiers'. They were afraid to miss the spectacle of the parade, and, more poignantly, not wanting to see the soldiers go. In a small community many would have been friends and family, and although the poem repeats the widely held belief that the war would be over by Christmas, the *tristesse* of the moment holds a pre-figuring of the disillusion that was to follow, in the image Gurney uses of blowing the German army 'like mist of breath away', where the image has a close resonance with the conventional portrayal of death as the last breath. The poem is a poem of hindsight, and Gurney says so in the third stanza,

The war it was but young then!
And we were young, unknowing
The path we were to tread,
And the way the path was going.

but it suggests that Gurney had himself been caught up in the naive and simplistic response the early days of the war produced, and that he is writing out of his own experience.

Gurney's army life began in February 1915, when he volunteered again, and was accepted. Standards had been lowered with the progressive need to replace lost men, and Gurney's eyesight was of little concern. Since

the beginning of the year, 1915, there had been speculation as to whether an invasion of British soil was possible or likely. The naval authorities declared this to be impossible, because they felt their skill and efficiency would prevent this happening. Nevertheless, according to *The War Budget*, January 16th 1915, 'The Germans might well think that the loss of almost their whole fleet was a cheap price to pay for landing a great army of invasion in England' in order to 'terrify England into concluding peace by exhibitions of "frightfulness" such as we have seen in Belgium'. It was a potent threat with which to further the aims of the recruiting drives, and the same article goes on to exhort

Every man within the age limits and proper physique should enlist in the Regular Army or the Territorials. it is essential for everyone to recognise that obedience to the military authorities will be of the first importance, and that upon every able bodied man rests the responsibility to do all in his power to make himself fit to take his part should he be called upon to assist in the defence of his country.

Obedience to the military authorities meant that age limits and proper physique were of little importance. There was, inevitably, no attempt made until much later on in the war to determine psychological fitness, but this was to happen retrospectively, when anything in an individual medical or family history that suggested a pre-disposition to 'neurasthenia' was taken to be a reason for avoiding the expense of paying a disability pension.

Both Hurd and Boden state that Gurney felt that army life would be beneficial to his physical and emotional well-being. Although neither author gives a reference for these assertions, it is likely to have been so on the evidence of letters written very soon after Gurney had enlisted. A letter to Will Harvey, dated February 1915, says

Let's hope it'll do the trick for both of us, and make us so strong, so happy, so sure of ourselves, so crowded with fruitful memories of joy that we may be able to live in towns or earn our living at some drudgery and yet create whole and pure joy for others. It is a far cry for me, but who knows what a year may do?

1

and a few days later, from Northampton where B Company of the 2/5th Gloucesters were based,

Well, here I am; hard worked and apparently able to stand about 7 hours a day drill, praise be to God. I think it will be all right. If so, May should see me considerably better and much happier.

2

If this was Gurney's belief, it was hardly surprising, because the recruitment drives had promoted idealised visions of army life that must have been seductive to young men already under pressure to join up. Looking at contemporary material offers a picture of life in a typical training camp was described thus, in January 1915,

The day begins early...They rise at 6am, and before 7 they are out on the parade grounds, ready for the morning run. This occupies from 15 to 20 minutes, and after this period of brisk going in the invigorating air they are in good fettle for breakfast at 7.30, a substantial meal of good and abundant fare. Parade calls them all again at 8.30, and drill, field practice, trench digging, musketry, signalling, riding, and the other duties reserved for specialised corps keep them busy till 4 o'clock.....

1. Letters, p 12

2. ibid p13

The meal at mid-day, taken out of doors, consists of hot tea prepared in the cooking carts, sandwiches, or bread and cheese. On the men's return to barracks they have dinner which consists of roast meat, steak pies, vegetables and pudding... ..Much is crowded into the working hours, and the variety and healthfulness of the duties seem to appeal to all classes of men.....They revel in the open air work, the free healthy life, the happy feeling of good comradeship that exists, the enjoyment that is felt in every simple pleasure that comes along

1

This eulogistic presentation contrasts sharply with Gurney's subsequent interpretation of a similar regime at his training camp in Chelmsford,

They are mad as hatters here. Reveille at 5, Roll Call and Rifle Inspection at 6. Breakfast at 6.30. Parade at 8.15. March or summat. Dinner 1.30 - 2.30. Bayonet Practice 3.30. Tea 4.30. So the meals come at 6.30, 1.30. about, and 4.30. O Generation of Vipers! And I joined to cure my belly!!

2

His criticism rises to a farcical crescendo,

Thank God we leave camp tomorrow! In it we have suffered all the horrors of slum life. They have driven us to distraction with parades and unexpected unnecessary swoops on our (supposedly) free time. Rainy weather was our only respite, and that on claying soil how appalling! Shackles and over and underdone roast. Execrable tea, margarine crying to Heaven and the Sanitary Inspector for deracination. Bread often fit for museums. Bacon virginal - unspoiled pig.

3

It is typical, however, of Gurney's ability to communicate simultaneously in two different registers, that the letter containing such excoriating criticism of daily trivia, also contained the Brookean sonnet *To the Poet before Battle*. In this, the third poem in Severn and ~~Somme~~, the elevated language gives war a sonorous and portentous quality. (4).

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1. *The War Budget*, Vol 2, January 23rd, 1915, p 309.
 2. Ordeal p 55
 3. *ibid* p 56
 4. Hurd dates this poem from 1917, and uses the upper case for Youth, Poet, War, emphasising the portentous quality. Thornton says this is probably the first poem Gurney sent to M. Scott, from Chelmsford 1915

This is a poem that could only have been written early in Gurney's war experience, and at this early stage there is an inherent sense that its focal point is the striving for validation of Poets' identity, and it sounds like a struggle for the survival of poets and poetry in the face of war.

Not all aspects of war were uncongenial. Routine, and the imposition of some kind of order on his eating habits provided Gurney with a framework that appeared to be supportive, despite his complaints. There were no doubt many incursions into his '(supposedly) free time', and he wrote to Ethel Voynich in April 1916,

But O, O, O to get back to my music, and time for books and walks. All manifestations of energy are hard for me, but I'd manage more work now than ever before in my nerve-ridden existence.

1

Nevertheless, it is clear from correspondence that he found much time for reading. His letters frequently ask friends to send particular editions or new works, and carry on discussions and criticism of the books he has been reading. As Fussell points out, this was a very literary war. Reading was the most convenient form of entertainment, and this was perhaps the first generation who had had access to free education and widespread literacy. This is evident not only in the shopping lists soldiers sent home asking for a wide variety of reading material, but also in the writing they produced themselves. Parodies, pastiche and allusions to classical works were common in the *Wipers Times*, for example, and appealed to a very mixed audience. As Fussell

1. Letters p 77

suggests,

one did not have to be a professional critic to fall naturally into a front-line activity very much like literary criticism. Carrington once felt 'a studious fit' and sent home for some Browning. "At first", he says, "I was mocked in the dugout as a highbrow for reading 'The Ring and the Book', but saying nothing I waited until one of the scoffers idly picked it up. In ten minutes he was absorbed, and in three days we were fighting for turns to read it and talking of nothing else at meals."

1

The literary influences on Gurney reflect his early training from Cheesman, and his continuing openness to, and interest in, new works as well as the familiar landmarks in the canon of English Literature.

This period of Gurney's life was, again, made bearable not only by his ability to enjoy books and his own creative abilities, but by his close friendships with fellow soldiers. The subject of homoeroticism occurs elsewhere, as does the question of gender and orientation, but they are not particularly important in looking at Gurney's war experience. Freud suggests that

in the development of mankind as a whole, just as in individuals, love alone acts as the civilising factor in the sense that it brings a change from egoism to altruism. And this is true both of sexual love for women with all the obligations which it involves of not harming the things that are dear to women, and also of the desexualised, sublimated homosexual love for other men, which springs from work in common.

2

There can be little doubt that the 'work in common' during the war gave rise to an even more complex response to fellow human beings, as

1. The Great War and Modern Memory p 163

2. Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego, (1921) p 132

well as calling into question the meaning of existence and one's own mortality. The notion of altruism must have been difficult to sustain in the face of human destruction on a huge scale, but also with regard to the relationship between 'the army' and its men and individual officers and men. It is not surprising that the relatively simple relationships between equals, as friends should be so important in making an otherwise intolerable existence bearable.

Gurney's letters and poems illustrate this over and over again. One significantly well-chronicled event appears in several letters and was the basis for the poem *First Time In*. It was one of Gurney's earliest experiences in the trenches, and he wrote to Howells,

supposing I come at last through all this complete in mind and body, there will be some memories will remain. Our first night in trenches was one of the most surprising things that can ever happen to me. We set out I suppose about the beginning of the after-glow, ... In the communication trenches, which were very long, we had lots of opportunity to look at the West, and remember what lay under Venus; as Wordsworth did in a Sonnett written on Calais sands, beginning 'Fair Star of evening'; up we went, with now and again a bullet whizzing above us or a startling clatter of machine-guns in the distance; and then at last the trenches - 2nd and then 1st. We made enquiries, and then C and I crawled into a signallers dugout and so made the acquaintance of 4 of the nicest people that ever you could meet - and educated. They were absolutely first rate chaps. Unlike some men out here, they didn't try to frighten us with horrible [sic] details, but gave us as much help as possible in getting hold of ordinary routine, and in making us feel as much at home as possible. I had no sleep for 36 hours. We talked of books and music. And they sang - Glory be - 'David of the White Rock' and the Slumber Song that Somervell has arranged. What an experience.

1

This is quoted at length because it shows so clearly the disorientating

1. Collected Letters, p 94

effect of beauty in the midst of destruction, simultaneous pleasure and discomfort, and the sense that human companionship is the one sheet-anchor and link to sanity and survival. The friend - C - who shared this experience is Lionel Cridlan, to whom he has referred in earlier letters including one written from Chelmsford, in which he says,

I may be snatched away of a sudden into some remote outlandish place outside England, but that is not immediately likely, though there are rumours. I might also say that if there is another place, Cridlan that analyst etc from Stevens [sic] Jammery would be delighted to get it, and would if necessary get references from his uncles. He would certainly be very useful.

1

As has been noted, the practice of keeping battalions local, at least in the early stages of the war meant that soldiers had a sense of shared interest. Cridlan came from Maise more and one of his uncles was a pharmacist, but it is also clear from the letter that to find a mutual interest, however fleetingly, with the Welsh soldiers encountered by chance, also provides an interlude of human warmth. It is interesting to see how closely the account in Gurney's letter is to the poem,

After the dread tales and the red yarns of the Line
Anything might have come to us; but the divine
After-glow brought us up to a Welsh colony
Hiding in sandbag ditches.....

...Sang to us Welsh things, and changed all former notions
To human hopeful things. And the next day's guns
Nor any line-pangs ever quite could blot out
That strangely beautiful entry to war's rout.
Candles they gave us, precious and shared over-rations -
Ulysses found little more in his wanderings without doubt.
'David of the White Rock', the 'Slumber Song' so soft, and that
Beautiful tune to which roguish words by pit boys
Are sung - but never more beautiful than there under the
guns' noise.

2

1. *ibid* p 49

2. Collected Poems p 69

This says in poetry almost precisely what is contained in Gurney's account sent to Howells. It shows Gurney the poet honest to the experience and gives weight to the argument that the voices he uses in his poetry, diverse though they are, are his own. It also suggests that his poems are to be valued as a way of understanding something of the experience that was a reality for so many.

Gurney survived; Cridlan survived; the fate of the Welsh soldiers is not known, but for all of those whose lives were touched by the war, the advent of peacetime did not mean that it could be forgotten. The aftermath brought the need to assimilate the experience of the war into the new identity of civilian. Few could exercise it. For Gurney, peacetime meant at least, a return, eventually, to Gloucester.



"I may be snatched away of a sudden into some remote outlandly place outside England, but that is not immediately likely, though there are rumours. I might also say that if there is another place, Cridlan that analyst etc. from Stevens Jammery would be delighted to get it, and would if necessary get references from his uncles".

Letter, Ivor Gurney to Edward Chapman, October 1916, from training camp at Chelmsford

"Last Sunday Cridlan and I lay out on a down so like our own; but the first violet had not yet arrived, whereas the woods must be happy-eyed with them at home in Glostershire...."

Letter, Ivor Gurney to Marion Scott, March 1916

Lionel Cridlan, aged 28, fourth from left, back row, in family group. July 1916.

Photograph by kind permission of Mrs F. Cridlan

CHAPTER THREE: Yesterday Lost.

Gurney's return to Gloucester after active service, followed by time in hospital, came in October 1918. The war was not yet over, and he spent time working in a munitions factory, hoping that the heavy manual work would help his state of mind. His behaviour was of concern to both friends and family, but by 1919 he moved back to London to continue his musical studies at the Royal College of Music. It was eight years since he had won the scholarship that gained him entry to the R.C.M. and they had been years of change for both Gurney and for the condition of English music and musicians. His tutor this time was Ralph Vaughan Williams, and the relationship was a productive one, because the period between 1919 and 1922 was a time of great creativity for Gurney both in music and in poetry.

His literary activities were encouraged by the access he now had to active groups of writers, primarily through the Poetry Bookshop, run by Harold Munro, where there were readings and an atmosphere supportive to a writer who had already achieved modest recognition. Severn and Somme went into re-print in early 1919, and in May, the second collection War's Embers was published. Living in London was not without problems, despite the availability of music and literary activities, and Gurney sought the warmth and security of his friends in High Wycombe, and took up the post of organist at Christ Church once more.

The poems he wrote during this period cover a range of themes and styles. He re-worked the poem that had appeared in a shorter version in War's Embers, dedicated to the memory of Edward Thomas, The Lock Keeper. One of his best known and most successful war poems, The Silent

One is dated to this period, although there is no original version in the archive.

The review of War's Embers in The Times Literary Supplement offered the opinion that

Shocked and bewildered by so monstrous an eruption as the war minds with any touch of mysticism in them threw their trust upon what is outside reason. We shall find in the next decade probably a good harvest of mystical poetry.

1

This does not seem to have been the case, and certainly not in Gurney's case, but there are occasional examples where he strays from the pragmatic realist mode to hint at things not quite understood. *The Telegraph Pole*, for example in the second stanza

But the poles on the edge of the rises out westward
Are symbol for all lonely travel -
A strange distance of untold futures,
Significances hard to unravel.

2

hints at 'otherness' and the 'unknowable', in a combined image of distance in both spatial and chronological terms. The 'significances hard to unravel' however, have a personal note, and the lonely traveller, by implication, is Gurney himself. The poem links the idea of the mystery of things scientific and technical, and foreshadows his own later pre-occupation with destructive forces of electricity, as well as harking back to the effects of rapid technological developments that were a direct result of the war. Scientific allusions and symbols occur

1. T.L.S. August 7th 1919.

2. Collected Poems p 102

as metaphors for destructive forces sometimes, but often as a symbol of something powerful but not entirely comprehensible. (1).

This period in Gurney's writing was also characterised by poems that link Gloucestershire and France in a lyrical nostalgic mode that contrasts dramatically with some of the bleak images from the war. Bleak memories like the line in *Tobacco*, 'while despair/Dripped incessantly without interest from the air;' are at least temporarily replaced by the ability to remember something pleasurable, however transient, in the experience. In recollecting moments of epiphany, they create another, as in *Behind the Line*.

I suppose France this morning is as white as here
High white clouds veiling the sun, and the mere
Cabbage fields and potato plants lovely to see,
Back behind at Robecq there with the day free

.....red wine surely as delectable
As in Nineteen Sixteen; with the round stains still on the
dark table.

2

Although this was a period of prolific writing for Gurney, the third proposed collection Rewards of Wonder was turned down, which Kavanagh says 'is understandable because Gurney begins to sound so original, pressing music out of ordinary speech'. (3).

It appears that he was perhaps less willing to take risks in his music.

1. Even before the war there had been reference to the mysterious effects of science. For example in *The Stile*, in Light and Twilight, Edward Thomas describes a conversation between two friends, 'We had been talking easily and warmly together, in such a way that there was no knowing whose was any one thought, because we were in electrical contact and each leapt to complete the other's words....'

2. Collected Poems p 108

3. Collected Poems p 11

In the poems Gurney chose to set to music in this period of great creative activity, it appears that he chose increasingly from a store of poetry that was both familiar and comfortable, echoing his own sentiments. *The Little Waves of Breffny* by Eva Gore Booth, is a case in point, where the conventional four line stanzas, alternately end rhymed, are bland and stereotyped in their imagery. They nevertheless represent the notion of 'places of the heart' with which Gurney can identify, in 'the little roads of Cloonagh go rambling through my heart. It is a cliched image and in setting it to music the combination is competent rather than inspired.

If, however, Gurney's choice of words to set to music remained within a limited and predictable range, his own poetry, by contrast, demonstrates his confidence in a variety of styles and voices. During these particularly productive four years many of Gurney's familiar themes are re-addressed but often in a developed and mature way that marks this as his most original and creative period. *Winter has Clouds* for instance, describes the familiar 'skyscape' in dazzling visual imagery.

Winter keeps high pale skies and cirrus wisps,
Winter puts pressed-flower clouds out and all over sky clasps
A frozen expressionless dull steely cloak of cloud.

1

There is a relentless build up of bleak images in the repetition of 'l' sounds, which often lend a fluidity of sound, but which here simply increase the weight of description to produce a crescendo on 'cloud'. This is followed by the synaesthetic collocation of 'toothache sky', and aurally clumsy but visually effective last line, that evokes the glistening salt-white of some imagined vast territory, that conveys a sense of threat -

1 Collected Poems p 136

'terror' - without necessarily having immediate access to Gurney's train of thought in the neologism 'Enyoepan' (1). Similarly, in 'mendical', Gurney is manipulating the word for his own purpose, providing a rhyme for the previous line, but also toning down the harshness of 'mendicant', and making its descriptive value impressionistic rather than specific or literal.

Other poems are sometimes surprising in the similarity they show to work by writers with whom Gurney superficially had little in common. Two poems on the same theme, one in the Gurney Archive, still unpublished, and the other, *April Gale*, in P.J.Kavanagh's selection, are almost Imagist in their compactness, and strikingly similar to H.D's *Oread*.

Pines like the sea are still,
That like the sea are loud
When the wind tears doglike
Teeth bared, on the hill
And night is black cloud.

2

The wind frightens my dog, but I bathe in it,
Sound, rush, scent of the spring fields.

My dogs hairs are blown like feathers askew,
My coat's a demon, torturing like life.

3

April Gale is the better poem, and one which feeds all the senses in such vivid and exhilarating imagery of 'sound, rush, scent of the spring fields' and the wind powerful enough to frighten a dog. There is a neat balance between the ruffling of the dog's hairs, and the picture of the coat flapping in the wind, but the latter is given a sinister twist in the comparison to 'a demon, torturing like life'. The visual image of a coat

1. Kavanagh suggests that it is a neologism from 'Enyo', Greek goddess of war.

2. G.A. unpublished.

3. Collected Poems p 91

being flapped and blown around its owner's body gives a sense of inescapable violence, and the lack of control over external forces. The first two lines are life-affirming. The scent of fields in spring suggests immediate pleasure, and connotations of optimism and growth. The last two lines undercut this, bring disorder, and the recognition that the very things that bring pleasure and exhilaration contain the means of destruction too.

Many of the poems from this period tell and re-tell experiences from the war. They are often very personal, detailed and conversational, chronicling the commonplace activities of day to day living, in a language that is simple and direct. There are often examples of Gurney's ability to find moments of epiphany, in unexpected beauty fleetingly revealed, or the pleasurable surprise of finding friendship or a shared experience. In

La Gorgue, the fact that the countryside is reminiscent of Gloucestershire, and Fates and the Commander are kind, is enough to distil this experience, in memory, into an oasis of peace - 'Time's truest riches' - but it is a precarious and temporary respite. The tone of the poem is hard to pin down. 'Fates', 'Times truest riches' and 'perilous joy' give the beginning a Brookean quality, but Gurney subverts this with the compound 'like-Stroudway', and the informality of the last two lines, particularly in 'line trouble' and 'hatch out'. In the second stanza, the persona enters into what feels like a direct conversation with the reader, as if the asides anticipate and answer the reader/listener's questions. The parenthetical first person comment '(I tell the noted thing)' and the explanation that 'friendliness sanctified all there without doubt' in case the reader/listener puts a less charitable interpretation on the reason for

the privates gathering 'like wasps round sugar', give a sense of immediacy, of involvement and of the importance of getting the details right. In *Of Grandcourt*, too, there are similar conversational asides, and reported speech, that give a sense of *reportage* to the account.

Rain there was - tired and weak I was, glad for an end.
But one spoke to me - one I liked well as friend,
'Let's volunteer for the Front Line - many others won't.

1

It is as important to Gurney to be true to what happened and what it felt like, on an individual level, as it is to writers like Herbert Read, Owen and Sassoon to convey 'Truth' on a larger scale. Edmund Blunden, who had also been a combatant on in France recognised that Gurney's poems captured something elusive about the lived experience of soldiers, in a way that many other writers did not.

to this day they express part of the Western Front secret
of fifty years ago with distinctive, intimate and
imaginative quickness.

2

Time has become another dimension contributing to the dislocation of identity apparent in Gurney's later poems. The oppositional forces that both connect and divide the idealised and mythologised 'England' and 'France' of Gurney's consciousness and memory, also operate in a similar way with regard to time. The dichotomy of 'here' and 'there', is mirrored in 'now' and 'then', in that each extreme is intricately connected to, and therefore embodies a formal enactment of, very different aspects of Gurney's identity.

1. Collected Poems p 100

2. *ibid.* p 11

The soldier identity, together with the key factors of 'then' and 'there' are seen clearly in *Towards Lillers*. The precarious insecure existence of military life is subtly evoked in lines made terse by punctuation,

This was war; we understood; moving and shifting about;
To stand or be withstood in the mixed rout
Of fight to come after this.

1

but only after the cognitive dissonance engendered by the situational irony portrayed in the opening lines,

In October, marching, taking the sweet air,
Packs ridig¹ lightly, and homethoughts soft coming,
'This is fight marching, we are even glad to be here,
Or very glad?...

'Sweet air' and 'homethoughts' provoke an emotional response. When the physical senses receive messages that spell 'Autumn', and this in turn brings nostalgic and pleasurable memories of home, it is little wonder that there is both surprise and confusion in 'even glad', and 'Or very glad?', because the sweet and familiar have been juxtaposed with the hardship and uncertainty inherent in living in the middle of a war. It is a poem that demonstrates clearly that there can be no fixed point when the outcome of the 'fight to come after this' cannot be known, and marching means that the sense of transience and dislocation is increased by constant 'moving and shifting about' to different and unknown localities. The poem itself compounds this shifting of realities by returning, in the last line of the first stanza, to 'October lovely bathing with sweet air the plain'.

The dichotomy between soldier and civilian identity is a subtle presence in this poem, and which works because 'October', 'sweet air' and 'plain' function metonymically, representing for Gurney a combination of important

1. Collected Poems p 112

factors and values. Autumn, the changeability of the seasons, the physical sensation of being out in the fresh air, aesthetic appreciation of landscape (and, inevitably, if Gurney refers to 'home' as in 'homethoughts' he means Gloucestershire), are all bound up in the first and last lines of the first stanza. There is also a reminder of the difference between soldier and civilian in the sixth line - 'what man's heart holds dear' - dealing with human rather than military values, compared with the staccato statements defining war in the tenth and following lines.

Strange Hells deals with the tension between then and now, and the gulf between soldier and civilian identities much more overtly. It also expresses clearly Gurney's sense of indignation and outrage - themes that are repeated, sometimes as a brief reference but occasionally with anger and bitterness, as in *Swift and Slow*, contrasting the speedy snuffing out of life in the trenches, and the torture of his own long-drawn out suffering,

Death swooped suddenly on men in Flanders,
There were no tweedledees or handy- danders
The skull was cleft, the life went out from it
And glory in a family tale was set.

1

Although this in no way minimises the brutality, death, like darkness, has a 'cheating swiftness', and this is emphasised by the short, matter-of-fact way it is portrayed. The skull is 'cleft' not shattered, and the phrase 'the life went out from it', although not denying the finality and reality of death, does not even hint at the quality of death. (It is a striking contrast to the expansive and very physical description of death in *To His Love*, for example). Suggesting that such a death ensures at least 'glory in

1. Collected Poems p 147

a family tale', implies by its absence that glory, or honour, or gratitude from the nation is lacking, and, furthermore, that those who survive to find 'Slow death in the loved street and bookish room', receive no glory, and a mere pittance. In this poem and increasingly in the later asylum poems the voice of the damaged survivor is heard above the rest.

The notion of different voices has been used by several critics (1) to describe, analyse and understand the heterogeneity of Gurney's style, and this is appropriate, in that although the examples given in this chapter are the products of his poetic maturity, the variety in style, tone and theme in poems in Severn and Somme and War's Embers also bear this out. The analogy works on several levels; Gurney certainly has a musical as well as a literary voice. He uses, effectively, different registers and modes of expression, to convey a sense of co-existent realities. Because his poems are unequivocally autobiographical, the voices he uses are all his, expressing a diverse personality, but there is another factor to be taken into account. R.K.R Thornton suggests *appropos* 'Hawthornden', that this represents a cluster of ideas for Gurney. and this seems to be characteristic of the way he thinks or finds stimulus to write. The relationship of word-play, events, and the influence of both material he has read and his perception of personalities to whom he feels drawn, results in what P.J. Kavanagh has called poems that 'are not *pastiches*; they are more like acts of ventriloquism'. Although Kavanagh is referring mainly to the later poems, it is worth examining *Sonnet- September 1922* in the light of this comment.

1. Jon Silkin, *inter alia*

The poem is one of Gurney's most effective pieces. Gurney used the sonnet form frequently, despite his comment to Marion Scott that 'sonnets seem especially fated to be the work of "solemn whiskered men, pillars of the state"' (1). The poem links some of Gurney's most dominant pre-occupations, to produce an anti-war poem; but one which is not a conventionally expressed condemnation of war, but a complex and self-aware analysis of the contradictions inherent in attempting to rationalise it. The antithesis of ideas in the second line illustrates this.

Fierce indignation is best understood by those
Who have time or no fear, or a hope in its real good.

2

'Fierce indignation' is an emotion for people with time to reflect, insensitives, or idealists, although the juxtaposition of 'time or no fear', contrives to remind readers with any contextual understanding of the First World War that in the immediacy of front-line fighting, many accounts suggest that there was no time to feel fear. This is confirmed in the third line- 'One loses it with a filed soul or in sentimental mood'. That is, indignation evaporates in the presence of the softer emotion of 'sentimentality' or conversely when pitted against brutality, implied in the rare collocation of 'filed' and 'soul'. Landscape, sky and water imagery provide objective correlatives to show the diminution of indignation and anger, with the note of calm confirmed by 'easy'. This is followed by a mood shift after the caesura in the fifth line, and the tone of indignation gives way to a sense of resignation in the suggestion that the earth 'forgets protestation in its turning'. If this tends towards cliché, it is rescued by the unusual use of the poppy and blood image. The

1. Collected Letters p 25
2. Collected Poems p 149

conventional image is of the poppy as a symbol of blood and thus the war-dead, but Gurney inverts the stereotype, and refers to the poppy's blood ageing the 'headland's brow'. The connection here is both lexical - 'head'/'brow'- and an anthropomorphism to emphasise the emotions of pain and ageing. It is the spirit of the nation, represented by landscape, showing distress at bloodshed, which is a complex image relying on inversion and subversion of expectation. 'The earth that ploughs' and 'forgets protestations' is being portrayed as active rather than passively being ploughed. It also adds to the argument that this poem represents a cluster of ideas, in the connection, again at a lexical as well as visual level, between plough/furrow, and 'furrowed brow'.

The sestet adds a further dimension, in suggesting that there are clues about the literary influences on Gurney evident in the sonnet. Firstly, Kipling in an early poem, *Pagett, N.P.*, writes

The toad beneath the harrow knows
Exactly where each tooth-point goes:
The butterfly upon the road
Preaches contentment to that toad.

1

This has a resonance with Gurney's

But the toad under the harrow toadiness
Is known to forget, and even the butterfly
Has doubts of wisdom when that clanking thing goes by

But there is perhaps an even greater link between this and a poem by Lascelles Abercrombie in the second Georgian Poetry, which attracted criticism that he was simply using gratuitous brutality, and in D.H.

1. The Works of Rudyard Kipling p 26

Lawrence's opinion, producing 'nasty efforts at cruelty'.

When I was young
My mother would catch us frogs and set them down
Lapt in a screw of paper, in the ruts,
And carts going by would quash 'em; and I'd laugh,
And yet be thinking, 'Suppose it was myself
Twisted stiff in huge paper, and wheels
Big as the wall of a barn treading me flat!'

1

Gurney admired both Kipling and Abercrombie, and was familiar with their work, often commenting on what he had read in letters. It appears that Gurney's *Sonnet - September 1922* conflates ideas from a variety of sources, and harnesses them to his own use. The combination of images reinforces his sense of the destructive power of the mechanistic world, in opposition to the inherent goodness of the natural world, and as a progenitor of madness. It is also a statement of his own predicament; that destructive mechanical forces cause not only physical injury - the tooth-points felt by the toad - but damage the very heart of existence, causing the toad to forget its own essential qualities, and by implication, therefore, man to forget his humanity. The 'clanking thing' is an effective metaphor for what was, for the first time, a highly technological war. It is also a metaphor for madness as a destructive force, itself a result of violence and damage caused by such technological developments. The last line uses a completely different, and surprising, image to sum up the futility of what has happened, and the inability of humanity to learn from its mistakes - 'No history of November keeps the guy'.

This complex poem was written when Gurney's mental condition was the cause of alarm to both friends and family, and, unwittingly, the cause of conflict between them. Hurd quotes a letter from Ronald Gurney to Marion

1. The Georgian Revolt p 129

Scott, written in September 1922, that says much about the lack of control Gurney had over his own later years. It also emphasises the very different expectations individuals with powerful influence on his future had of him.

I am very much obliged to yourself and Ivor's friends for their persistent help to a rather undeserving person.... There is no reason under the sun why he should not become thoroughly well enough to do his music. But it will only be done by his being permanently under discipline and a definite stronger will directing his life. Never again will I permit kind but lenient and letting him have more or less his way kind of people.... If the pensions do not cure him, I will in a month or two's time carry out the original tentative decision to send him to Barnwood and try that.

When he returns well enough, he will for the future live with me. If there is anything then that the College would like him to take up with a view to bringing out something worth while, I will see that he does it.....He will simply not have to think for himself at all, just write his music and poetry and be quietly happy.

All this can only be done by myself only and I shall be glad if you will refrain from giving him anything but simple thoughts to think about. He thinks far too much about things that are far too deep for everlasting pondering upon. He thinks and thinks about such ungodly things, that his head is in a huge unwieldy mess.

1

If the letter speaks more loudly of duty than compassion, it would be uncharitable not to recognise that Ronald Gurney's life and future had been shaped from childhood by his brother's circumstances, and the constant intervention by 'London people', who regarded him as a 'man of genius' and encouraged him in thoughts and activities incomprehensible to the family, must have been a source of frustration. For Ivor Gurney, the possibility of being 'quietly happy' must have been remote, and the fragmentation and dislocation of his existence thrown into high relief, in the very different expectations each faction had of him. The ontological insecurity inherent in his own interpretation of his 'neuraesthesia', seen in the frequent self reflective comments in his letters, must, inevitably, have been

1. Ordeal p 153

exacerbated by his inability at this point in his life to be what anyone wanted him to be. He was in effect required to live out ascribed roles - the difficult brother, the patient, the 'man of genius', but was unable to live them in the way each faction required of him. Nor was he in a position to reject the various external interpretations of his predicament and find self defined tranquility of his own, a still small centre of calm, and he was taken first of all to a convalescent home, and then, when this proved unsuitable, to Barnwood House, a private asylum.

The implications for private treatment were clearly of concern to Ronald Gurney, and there is a telling comment in his letter, where he refers to the circumstances, that

As for Ivor, for the present he is going under the Pensions Office to aneurasthenic Convalescent Home. They think it best he should not be certified insane.

1

Apart from the question of social stigma attached to mental illness, which undoubtedly concerned the Gurney family, there was the practical matter of money. There was a discrepancy between the treatment given to civilians with mental illnesses, and that given to soldiers with war related neuroses, highlighted in a retrospective study of shell-shock

One of the chief fears voiced even when specialised hospitals had been set up was that soldiers who had mental breakdowns might not be given sufficient time to recover and would be certified as being of unsound mind and so lose their rights as citizens.

2

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1. *ibid*
 2. *Shell shock in the British Army in the First World War: Dissertation* Leeds University 1983. p 25

There were financial rights to be lost, too, (hence Ronald Gurney's comment about Ivor's pension and the inadvisability of certifying him insane), and whether or not shell-shock victims were eligible for pensions depended not only on proof that their mental condition was attributable to war experience, but upon the whim of the particular Pension Board who judged their case, and whether it was composed of individuals who did not accept the concept of 'shell-shock' as a pensionable disability. (1) Contemporary documents show the inconsistency of treatment of these cases. The Southborough Committee, commissioned to investigate shell-shock, claimed to have found numerous instances where such cases had family histories of epilepsy, insanity, Tuberculosis and alcoholism, and there was clearly a vested interest in avoiding the expense of paying out disability pensions to men who were pre-disposed to mental illness regardless of their war experience. (2)

No man who has simply broken down mentally should be given a wound stripe, but the man with obvious 'commotional shock' who has been buried or blown up deserves one.

3

This was not necessarily echoed by those who had direct experience of the war. In a letter from a young officer to his mother, written in August 1915, there is a very different attitude,

I know that some people if they have had a really bad time do lose their nerve completely (even the strongest nerved in the beginning and it is just as much a sacrifice to lose one's nerve in the trench as to lose an arm, in fact I'm not sure that it's

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1. Some shell shock victims did not even get beyond their C.O., many of whom regarded shell shock as malingering, and they were not treated as casualties or given leave.
 2. The financial implications were enormous. Between March and December 1918, there were 8000 cases of neurasthenia treated.
 3. *Southborough Committee Report* p 17

not more so, added to which when you get back people are in no way inclined to sympathise with you.

1

Although Trethowan says that both Gurney's sister and sister-in-law were emphatic that his illness was not related to war service, his younger sister Dorothy says in a letter to Trethowan written in April 1975, that she could not recall any reference to his mental illness until after he was invalided home from France. The tone of Ronald Gurney's letter, however, suggests that he was aware of the necessity to use Gurney's diagnosis in a way that would best contribute to his future security.

Gurney stayed some three months in Barnwood House, and this period is well documented in Hurd's biography, but it was decided after he had attempted to escape, threatened suicide, and that visits from his mother were not helpful, that it would be better to remove him to ^e somewhere further from home. He was admitted on 21st December to the City of London Mental Hospital at Dartford, Kent. W. Trethowan states that 'there can be no doubt about the nature of Gurney's illness'. However, on the basis of what Gurney himself wrote, some of the correspondence between medical staff and his supporters, and a strong sense by several critics that there is something more than the documentary evidence suggests, there may be doubts about his treatment.

Hurd hints at this, when he says that 'What happened to Gurney can best be read between the lines of the few letters that have survived from this period'. (2) and goes on to quote a letter from the Superintendent at

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1. Captain William Haldane Round's papers, World War One Archive, Leeds.
 2. Ordeal p 155

Barnwood House to Marion Scott, saying that there has been no improvement in his condition. What Hurd omits is the letter that precedes it, which requests permission from Marion Scott for Gurney to be inoculated with malaria, to see if it will have any effect on his condition. This must of course be looked at in its contemporary context. The rationale that lay behind what now appears to be bizarre and unethical, was that the extremely high temperature induced by malaria might effect a change in the patient's mental state - a metaphor almost for 'burning out' the disease. There can be little doubt that for the patient, to experience fever and delirium at someone else's behest, may well have felt like punishment, and makes it vital not to dismiss Gurney's later writing as deluded, without a careful consideration of the circumstances in which it was written.

The episode noted above is documented, but it becomes much more problematic to assess other possible aspects of Gurney's treatment. It is an inescapable fact that military needs overrode many medical considerations that would have had a higher priority in peacetime. Many victims of shell-shock were subjected to treatment from a variety of electrical machines, which in an age when technological developments that were rapidly changing the character of warfare were mirrored in the increasingly scientific approach to psychology, had the potential to appear frighteningly innovative and untested. There is no doubt that some treatments were used punitively. This is evident in the huge body of literature about medical practice during the First World War, as in the transcript in the *British Medical Journal* in July 1917, of *The Chadwick Lecture*, given by F.W. Mott. He emphasises the need to differentiate between malingerers and genuine

cases, but shows compassion thus,

Of course precautions would have to be taken against malingerers. I am sure that machines employed by doctors as a means of making the functional paralytics move their limbs are wrong in principle and in practice, and I entirely approve of the methods adopted by Colonel Deane at the Croydon Hospital of restoring function by natural methods, in which the mind is exercised.

1

Nevertheless, the treatments that were considered acceptable, were horrific, and in the same lecture Mott says

A particularly intractable case came to the hospital who had been deaf and dumb for nearly a year. I tried strong electric shocks, tuning forks to the head, and sudden noises and hypnotism, without any result, but Dr. Yelland of the National Hospital, Queen Square, cured this man. I think the imposing array of electrical machines, coloured lights, and other strong suggestive influences, were partly instrumental in accomplishing what I had failed to do....

2

Many of the doctors who wrote accounts of their practice and findings were themselves army officers, (Mott was a major for example), and had to reconcile medical ethics with military needs. Eric Leed, writing about neuroses and war is not constrained by divided loyalties, and comments on the response to 'hysterical' symptoms seen in the First World War,

In 1916 M.D. Eder, a British neurosurgeon, enunciated the consensus: "From the combatant's point of view this has been described as industrial warfare; from the medical point of view it might be described as nerve warfare". Psychiatrists in the rear and troops at the front immediately saw the relationship between the industrial features of war and the incidence of neurosis. The dominance of long-ranged artillery, the machinegun and barbed wire had immobilised combat, and immobility necessitated a passive stance of the soldier before the forces of mechanised slaughter. The cause of neurosis lay in the dominance of material over the possibilities of human movement. In a real sense the neuroses of the war were the direct product of the increasingly alienated relationship of the combatant to the modes of destruction.

3

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1. *British Medical Journal*, 14th July, 1917. p 42
 2. *ibid* p 41
 3. *No Man's Land* p 164

Sometimes they are brief passing references, the 'machine gun/ which yet might be needed'; a 'battering of fire and steel', but sometimes they convey not only the industrialised character of the war, but a sense of stasis and immobility in the face of, and despite all the apparatus of brutality, the epitome of human immobility that Leed describes.

Wires mended, neither side daring attacker
Or aggressor to be - the guns equal, the wires a thick hedge

1

It should also be acknowledged that Gurney's own experience as a signaller would have involved him directly in some of the technical innovations used in warfare. For example, using headphones and receiving voices in the context of extreme stress in front line action, and the fact that at least one of the notebooks he carried with him in the trenches contained circuit diagrams as well as notes of music and fragments of poetry, show that Gurney's lived experience was made up of many strands. Gurney himself says this, in *Old Dreams*, in the 'tangles of fate one does not understand' and 'criss-cross purposes and spoilt threads of life', (2). These had been pre-figured in *The Telegraph Post*, discussed earlier in this chapter, as 'Significances hard to unravel'.

The work Gurney produced in later years, both music and poetry, convey often the same sense of 'criss-crossed purposes' and lack a coherent structure, despite the fact that they often also contain memorable lines or melodic phrases. There is also an increasing sense of bodily awareness, as if to offset the 'pain [is] in thought, which will not freely range'. (3) In *The Elements*, which begins,

A writer thought, 'How lovely to rise and lave
My smooth fair body with water clear from earth drawn.

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1. *ibid* p 173
 2. *ibid* p115
 3. *ibid* p 153

and ends with an image of security and physical comfort

....and I'd smile and talk my thanks,
Lie down, covered with a rug for one hour, with eyes clear as
on high Cotswold there'.

1

The archaism of 'lave' lends a ceremonial or ritualistic tone, (suggestive of anointing) to a commonplace process, and increases the feeling of dislocation from reality that suffuses much of his later work. It could also be argued that 'writing the body' has been associated with a female consciousness and perspective, and that the physicality of the imagery he sometimes uses lends weight to the sense of Gurney as an individual with many ways of being and not concerned with stereotyped boundaries. This is not necessarily the product of madness - the physicality of 'red wet thing' and other examples of bodily awareness occur in early poems, even if they become exaggerated in the asylum years.

Much of his writing also suggests a third reference point in his ontological framework; the opposition of 'then' and 'now' is not only applied to the tension between soldier and civilian existence, but to the dichotomy between his arcadian days of pre-asylum existence and the brutalised desolation of his existence as a 'mental patient'. The images he uses to express this often involve the juxtaposition of nostalgia for the good he sees in the natural world,

But I look for some past through the dear flames and remember
What thoughts were once known in bitter frost

2

and industrialised mechanistic images, or the physical discomforts of war set against the beauty and dearness of the seasons in countryside that

1. *ibid* p 199
2. *ibid* p 147

reminded him of Gloucestershire, as in *The Battle*,

The Gloucesters were to go over I was not one-
Glad because of the terribleness, ashamed because of the terror,
I saw the loveliest azure mist September had shown,

1

Gurney's sense of beauty often illuminates, momentarily, some of the bleakest poems, and sometimes even in the asylum poems there is a temporary respite from the tendency to 'think and think about such ungodly things'. There are passages rich in synaesthetic images like the scents in *The Incense Bearers*, a 'hot scent', 'lonely odours that scarcely float', scents in 'floods unchecked, wonderful utterance almost'. Eventually however, even the touchstone of nature no longer holds the power to fend off his desolation, as in *The Wind*,

All night the fierce wind blew,
All night I knew
Time, like a dark wind, blowing
All days, all lives, all memories
Down empty endless skies -

A blind wind, strowing
Bright leaves of life's torn tree
Through blank eternity;
Dreadfully swift. Time blew.
All night I knew
The outrush of its going.

At dawn a thin rain wept.
Worn out, I slept
And woke to a fair morning.
My days were amply long, and I content
In their accomplishment -
Lost the wind's warning.

2

Gurney has lost the ability to see skylscapes, but his existence in this poem is not characterised merely by loss, but an active terror in hearing

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1. *ibid* p 172
2. *ibid* p 220

and sensing the passage of time in a physical way - 'All night I knew the outrush of its going,' - and being forcefully reminded thereby of his own mortality. The attempt to rescue the situation in the third stanza, with the dawn of a 'fair morning', 'amply long' rather than drearily long, and 'I content', does not negate the night terrors. Gurney has revealed himself and the deep emptiness that is now a fundamental part of his identity, and to offer reassurance that sometimes it is not *too* bad, simply makes it more poignant.

As Hurd points out,

the best of his asylum poems, however, make terrible reading. Some are so controlled, so 'finished', that the idea of insanity seems absurd.

1

Periods of lucidity, when the pieces he wrote have a clarity and cohesion that belie the seriousness of his condition, make the anguish he demonstrates all the more poignant. Hurd quotes *What Evil Coil*, with its emotive image of 'Stuck in the mud - Blinkered up, roped for the Fair', and *To God*, but perhaps the bleakest expression of his sorely troubled existence is in the last two lines of an unpublished poem, *Allowed*.

It is allowed to confine men, but not
So as their manhood ever be forgot.
Without work, or hope, and made fill their bodies
With dull food, that leaves nor hope nor ease.
To lie wasting in spirit, hurting of flesh!
Dreadful indeed this terrible inhuman mesh
That's yet put on by humans, by men known
to not God's compassion to be here shown?
to not sweet charity left in hearts of men.
Death to grant would be pity, show pity again
O dwellers in the houses and the streets

Whose pain is passing and as snowdrift fleets -
A passing pain, but this weighs heavy on
From waking till the dark, or set of sun -
Bed time, unprofitable held, who need no rest
In house of dull pain held for day-length a guest,
Grant End to pain, give life a rest in Death,
What use to hold a soul in bonds of breath?
Such end needs not a funeral, nor a wreath.

1

There was to be no funeral and no wreath for Gurney until he had endured fourteen more long years in hospital in Dartford. Marion Scott noted in her journal that he was often 'agonisingly sane' in this wasteland where he at times felt that he was losing whatever qualities had defined him as part of humanity, his 'manhood...forgot'. Hurd gives an account of the years up to his death in 1937. He was not forgotten by his friends, who continued to visit, and attempted to keep his work alive. His works, both poetry and music, were the 'bright tracks' that did not wither or 'vanish clean', and by which Gurney was remembered, but by only a few. Having considered some of the factors that provide a context against which to consider his creative output, his work can now be discussed in some detail.

1. G.A. Unpublished.

TELEPHONE,
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92, WESTBOURNE TERRACE,
HYDE PARK, W2
London

May 9th 1937

Dear Mr Frith

It was delightfully kind of you to write in response to my letter in the "Observer" asking for information re Mr Gurney's manuscripts. Thank you so much. I was glad to get your letter, and I meant to have written at once to thank you. The week however has been such a busy one, and everything is so upside down in London with the tremendous influx of visitors that every ordinary time-table seems to go by the board! Please pardon my delay.

It is kind of you to tell me of the letters written to Mr Gurney which you possess. I have been in communication with Miss Hayward; she had a Violin Sonata by

Gurney, but ^{it proved to be} quite a different one to either of those for which I enquired in my letter!!

We had already communicated with Mr Harvey, but he had very little in the way of manuscripts.

Thank you for giving me the list of the letters you have. It is probable that I shall be writing a short article on Mr Gurney rather later on, and it may be that some of the letters you kindly offer may be very helpful. At the present time the work of cataloguing his manuscripts is proceeding steadily — an undertaking which has the benediction of Dr Vaughan Williams and Mr Walter de la Mare. I saw Mr Gurney himself about four weeks ago and our work has been undertaken with his knowledge and approval. That so true a genius as his should be rendered frustrate through illness is a terrible tragedy. With again many thanks for your letter

Yours faithfully,

Mauro M. Scott

CHAPTER FOUR: *We Who Praise Poets*

Ivor Gurney's work can be examined from several different vantage points, and set against a variety of different contexts. These are by no means mutually exclusive, and in fact to keep in mind the pluralism of Gurney's vision, leads to a better understanding of his *oeuvre*, and the nature of his creativity. An earlier chapter attempts to consider Gurney as an individual and writer led, by circumstance as well as, later, by choice, out of his class. George Parfitt includes Gurney in his chapter on *The Voice of the Non-commissioned*. His status as a Private is to some extent a regression to his lower middle-class family background, because as a well educated man he could have joined the army as an officer had he wished. Parfitt's inclusion in fact links two major contexts against which Gurney's work can be set, class and war. He has been regarded as a local poet, concerned primarily with place. It also is necessary to look at Gurney's work against the background of his musical creativity, and more problematically, to achieve some sort of balance when assessing his work in the context of his mental and emotional health. To undertake a serious study from any of these perspectives, however, pre-supposes that his work is worth studying, and that it is available for scrutiny. One of the major problems with Gurney's work is that few of his contemporaries, whether critics or other writers, had access to his poetry or music, or, if they did, were perhaps unsure how to respond to it. It is useful, therefore, to consider Gurney's work in the context of the aspirations and critical climate of his own time. This is particularly important, since the way his work was received during his life time determined to a large extent what happened in the future, which in Gurney's case was neglect and marginalisation.

Gurney has been closely associated with the Georgian movement in poetry, and indeed his most productive years coincided almost exactly with the years in which Georgianism flourished, from around 1910 to 1922. (1) It had developed, as many movements do, in reaction to the prevailing attitudes of a previous generation of poets, as an attempt to reclaim poetry for personal expression of emotion, stated with purposeful beauty. It was in other words, a rejection of the contrived elegance of the Decadents and *fin-de-siecle* aestheticism. Yeats summarises this, rather disparagingly, in his introduction to *The Oxford Book of Modern Verse*, when he says

Poetry was a tradition like religion and liable to corruption, and it seemed that they could best restore it by writing lyrics technically perfect, their emotion pitched high, and as Pater offered instead of moral earnestness life lived as 'a pure gemlike flame' all accepted him for master.

2.

The Georgian poetic was also a rejection of the morally improving public utterances that typified Victorian poetry. Like Queen Victoria herself, readers did not wish to be addressed like a public meeting; or perhaps more accurately, critics told them they did not wish it. The power of critics, and certainly of reviewers, both to influence readers and to promote or ignore writers, was of great significance. In a chapter called *1909 - 16: Poets and their Public*, C.K. Stead suggests that 'the literary taste of most of these readers was established by the writings of a small group of reviewers in a few influential papers' (3), and quotes from Ford Madox Ford's Return to Yesterday; Reminiscences 1894 - 1914, in which he

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1. Edward Marsh published the first volume, Georgian Poetry 1911-1912; Ivor Gurney began to write verse in 1913.
 2. The Oxford Book of Modern Verse, ed Yeats, 1935, p ix.
 3. The New Poetic, p 46

castigates the *Daily Telegraph's* contribution to literary criticism,

It heralded mediocrity to the sound of shawms and oboes:
it never praised any writer of merit and originality until
he had grown old and imbecile. Its influence among the middle
classes was tremendous.

1

The influence of reviewers in shaping public tastes in poetry is mirrored by the influence of both individuals and groups of people interested in writing and writers instrumental in making available literature for the reviewers to review. There were several key figures in the early years of the twentieth century who fostered the talents of both new and established poets and brought about the publication of their work, often in small magazines and periodicals. John Haines, providing a focal point for a group of writers in Gloucestershire, was doing on a small scale what J.C.Squire and Edward Marsh were doing in London.

Although the retrospective view suggested that 'the situation of poetry in 1909 Or 1910 was stagnant to a degree difficult for any young poet of today to imagine' (2), and regarded as a 'period of very low vitality in spite of Hardy and de la Mare', (3), it was claimed at the time to be a period of stimulating change. Middleton Murry detected 'a fresh breeze in the air', (4); Harold Monro claimed that 'the numbing effect of the Victorian period [seemed] finally to have relaxed its pressure on the brain of the rising generation', (5) and D.H.Lawrence claimed on behalf of writers waking up from the oppression of 'the nihilists, the intellectuals, hopeless people - Ibsen Flaubert, Thomas Hardy', that they were at last 'awake again, our

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1. The New Poetic, p 46
 2. ibid p 45
 3. A Hope for Poetry, p 2
 4. The Georgian Revolt, p14
 5. ibid

lungs are full of new air, our eyes of morning'. (1). The metaphors of fresh air and a personal, physical involvement, through which these writers portray the change, are themselves typical of the direction the change was to take. Edward Marsh's view is, by comparison, understated in his preface to the first volume of Georgian poetry, simply stating that,

This volume is issued in the belief that English poetry is once again putting on a new strength and beauty.

1.

Nevertheless, Marsh together with Rupert Brooke, provided energy and determination as a driving force. There was no manifesto, although there were common aims and beliefs about what poetry should be. In addition to Marsh's vague terms, 'strength' and 'beauty', there was a prevailing preoccupation with 'truth' and 'realism'. It was, however, a pre-war realism, that inevitably gave way to the hard-edged realism of the war, when it would have been impossible to sustain the 'ordinariness' that was so important to the Georgians, in their rejection of the poetic values that had preceded them. It is easy to misinterpret the 'ordinariness' always associated with the Georgians, and it has all too often been disparaged as a movement that rejected Town Hall poetry and the drooping lily, but offered merely cottages and snowdrops instead. This is too simplistic a generalisation, and although it was fundamental to the Georgian belief that nature, everyday lived experience by ordinary people, and simple emotions were good subjects for beautiful poetry, there were other considerations too.

1. Quoted in Poetry 1870 - 1914, Bergonzi, p 46
2. Georgian Poetry Volume 1.

The pragmatism that played a large part in the Georgian movement (and which has a resonance with Gurney's situation), has often been overlooked. Edward Marsh's account in his memoir of Rupert Brooke, suggests that the first volume of Georgian poetry was as much the result of a commercial scheme as poetic inspiration,

Rupert went to stay with Ward in Berlin for November, and kept sending suggestions for promoting the sale of the book. (Years before, a cynical friend of ours at King's, Francis Birrell, had told me that though 'Rupert's public form was the youthful poet, the real foundation of his character was a hard business faculty.'). . . . Some of his ideas were too vast, but others were acted on; and though delays of printing and binding kept the book back till a few days before Christmas frustrating our calculations on huge sales to present-givers, its success outran our wildest hopes.

1

Similarly, Middleton Murry observes in one of a series of lectures delivered in 1921,

At a certain level of general culture, with certain combinations of economic and social conditions (which it would be well worth while to explore), certain artists and literary forms impose themselves. These forms the writer is almost compelled to accept, either because he relies on his writing for his living, or because he feels instinctively that he *must* embrace the means necessary to reaching the largest possible audience. When the fates are peculiarly kind, the writer will find himself naturally attracted to the predominant form of the age.

2.

If Middleton Murry was right, the fates were peculiarly kind to Gurney at least in this respect; that much of his poetry was entirely attuned to the predominant form of his age. The first point Middleton Murry raises is also important, acknowledging that writers need a source of income to live on. This point is also made much later, by Malcolm Bradbury, with the

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1. Memoir, in Rupert Brooke: Collected Poems, p 76
 2. The Problem of Style, p44

explanation that this is 'one reason why so many writers come from social backgrounds where independent means are a possibility'. (1). Gurney clearly did not. The war provided him with an income of sorts, and, in effect placed him in the position of having an occupation which allowed him time to write. This is not to minimise the privations and anguish inherent in active service, but it has been recognised that the organisation of military manouevres, with the likelihood of several days in the front line, followed by several days in reserve behind the line, and several days off, often left soldiers on the Western Front with periods of inactivity. To have time to write, and the stimulus, at least some of the time, of the French countryside as a visual reminder of his own landscapes and home, meant, paradoxically, that Gurney had conditions conducive to writing,

This is a pretty place; flat, with some poplars, and always the same cultivation and red-roofs. Never a vulgar building to be seen, as usual. And O, the twilights of late! Que Dieu soit loue!

2

If, then, Gurney's style was compatible with contemporary trends in poetry, and his practical and financial resources allowed him opportunity to write, a third factor concerned ways of making his work available to the reading public. Again the period in which the Georgians, and Gurney, were active was unique. From the point of view of literary and intellectual culture, the first decade of the twentieth century marked the determined sense of separation from the Victorian era. A sense of relative affluence and security, charged with energy and optimism at the start of a new age

1. The Social Context of Modern English Literature p 148

1. Letters, p 153. The letter goes on to say 'Of course, Minsterworth has been in my mind', and illustrates not only Gurney's homesickness, but his ability to exist in the dialectical relationship between his soldier identity in France, and his civilian identity in Gloucestershire.

was celebrated in poetry. The reinstating of 'nature' as a major subject suitable for poetry, was both a rejection of the mechanistic, industrialised climate of the Victorian age, and a harking back to poets like John Clare, whose simple rural images, familiarity with the local flora and fauna, and use of place-names, had close parallels with the Georgians. It could be said that the pre-conditions necessary to generate a movement like the Georgians were in existence several years before the first published anthology. The second decade, so heavily dominated by the war, saw the bucolic realism and 'long littleness' of everyday existence transmogrified, by some writers into a different reality, of dislocation and violence. This was by no means universal, however, and the war created an unexpected market for poetry. Many periodicals not only published poetry but invited submissions. The numerous little collections of poetry written by soldiers, were often privately printed and circulated, and purchased as an act of patriotism or in memoriam, so that the economics of production were somewhat different from the situation that existed before the war. (1). Also with regard to bringing work to the notice of both critics and the reading public, the immediately pre-war period had seen the flourishing of a number of papers and journals, many of which had continued or resumed their activities after the war, and the twenties became 'the heyday of literary journalism' (2). Many of the influential figures, with their own literary circle of writers, were associated with such journals. For example, J.C.Squire edited the London Mercury, and published a number of

1. Although it should be acknowledged that some of the influential individuals in literary spheres were people with private means who could afford to subsidise publications.

2. The Social Context of Modern English Literature p 149

poems by Gurney during the twenties. (1).

Closer to home, a group of poets living and working in Gloucestershire, in Dymock, had been producing a quarterly journal through which to promote their work. First called *The New Shilling Garland*, subsequently *The Gallows Garland*, and ultimately *New Numbers*, it was a vehicle for Wilfred Gibson, Lascelles Abercrombie, John Drinkwater, and significantly Rupert Brooke, who met Gibson and was invited to contribute, in order to increase the potential readership.

Gibson has been staying with Abercrombie, and has got a great idea that he, Abercrombie, Drinkwater and I should combine our publics, and publish from the Abercrombies (Mrs A. does the work) a Volume four times a year.

2.

It was sold mainly by subscription, but a few copies were sold singly, probably locally. It was printed in Gloucester by the Crypt House Press, and, given the local connections, and since Haines was related to Catherine Abercrombie, Gurney was aware of the Dymock group. (3) It was not until 1916, however, that Gurney made direct contact with them, only weeks before departing for France. In a letter to Marion Scott, he gives an account of his *impromptu* visit to Ryton, and meeting with Catherine Abercrombie. (Lascelles Abercrombie was not at home, but Gurney was clearly made welcome, and later had correspondence with Mrs Abercrombie while he was

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1. *Sights*, Jan. 1923; *Advice*, May 1923; *Thoughts of New England*, *New Years Eve*, *Old Tale*, *The Cloud*, *Smudgy Dawn*, *Tobacco*, *Brimcombe*, Jan. 1924; *Lights Out* (Music to E. Thomas's poem), November 1924; and sixteen more during 1933 and 1934, see bibliography.
 2. Rupert Brooke, letter to his mother, July 11th, 1913, Quoted in *The Muse Colony*, p 46.
 3. The letter to F.W. Harvey, 17 August 1913, confirms this. 'Did I tell you that Haines had seen Abercrombie? Who asked Haines whether he knew one named Harvey, who showed great promise.'

on active service.)

Then a wandering thought became firm. Lascelles Abercrombie and Wilfred Gibson both live at Ryton, near my way. I would go see their houses.....I stood hesitating for long ...made up my mind, went up and knocked. Let it suffice to say that I spent 6 very full hours of joy with Mrs Abercrombie, her husband is munition-making in Liverpool, and acquired a rich memory.

1.

By the time this meeting took place however, Rupert Brooke was dead, and *New Numbers* had been discontinued. The war that had facilitated a proliferation of little books of poems by soldiers, paradoxically, contributed to the difficulties poets faced in promoting their work. The rising cost of printing and the shortage of paper were significant factors.

It was only after the war, in 1919, that Gurney met Edward Shanks, Ralph Hodgson, Harold Monro and W.J.Turner. He also visited John Masefield later that year. In the following October, he met Edmund Blunden and Wilfred Gibson, and in 1921 Walter de la Mare. The chronology is important, because it is apparent that Gurney had constantly been at the fringe of literary circles since he began to write verse. There is a sense however, that despite having networks of communication, through Haines for example, he was never centrally involved with any of the groups of poets, or individual writers in a way that could provide him with the kind of relationship of interaction and critical attention he had with F.W.Harvey. He was less able therefore, to gain access to people with power to promote his work. Marion Scott was assiduous in the collection and preservation of Gurney's work, and competent in her advice on points of punctuation and editing, but it is

1. Letters p 79

likely that as a musicologist, rather than as a writer with a primarily literary focus, she too was peripheral to the Georgians. It is perhaps significant that several of his poems were published in *Music and Letters*, (1), and it could be inferred that this may have owed something to interest in a musician who could also write verse. By the time Gurney had arranged meetings with Harold Monro, Blunden, or Gibson, for example, the Georgian movement itself was in a state of decline, and the last anthology to be edited by Marsh, Georgian Poetry V, appeared in 1922.

Gurney's status as an outsider is illustrated in a letter to Marion Scott,

Shanks told me that Squire thought me the best of the young men below the horizon, which led me to a natural question as to why he had rejected so much lately.

2. 497

There is also a feeling that Gurney pursued writers and literary figures, and engineered meetings with them. His own account of the visit to Abercrombie's house, above, demonstrates this, and is a pattern repeated with other poets. It is also clear from brief references in letters that Gurney has conceived an admiration for certain poets, and on the strength of managing to correspond with them, or meet, refers to them affectionately or familiarly, as if the relationships were closer than is really the case. For example, having met Catherine Abercrombie, only briefly and at his own instigation, some six weeks previously, his letter to her appears to contrive a connection with Lascelles Abercrombie, and with the Abercrombie children, that says more about Gurney's need than the actuality of the

1. *Equal Mistress, The Crocus Ring*, Oct. 1920; *Schubert*, April 1925; *Beethoven*, April 1927; *The Hoe Scrapes Earth, The Songs I Had*, Jan. 1938.

2. Letters p 497

relationship.

But could Mr Abercrombie see the little white puffs of smoke encircling the aeroplanes - Germans high, British low - Could he but see. Ah, poor munitioner, but ah, lucky not to be disciplined and driven.....Goodbye and best wishes and kisses and corollary endearments to the children.

1.

At one level this is simply an example of the side of Gurney's character that Hurd calls his 'genius for friendship and a great capacity to enjoy his friends' (2). Looked at more closely in an attempt to assess Gurney's place amongst his contemporaries, this kind of example confirms the image of Gurney as an outsider, often welcome and accepted but never quite at the heart of the group. This marginal existence is paralleled in friendships with families, in his activities at the fringe of literary coteries, and in the way his work has been regarded as not quite in the front rank alongside that of Edward Thomas, Sassoon or Owen.

This theme is taken up by Piers Gray, in Marginal Men, in a comparative study of Edward Thomas, Ivor Gurney and R.J.Ackerley. It is also productive to consider Gurney's work, and its place in the canon of English poetry, alongside that of Gerard Manley Hopkins and Wilfred Owen. Gurney was certainly influenced by Hopkins, although this may have been subliminal, unrecognised by Gurney himself, who refers only briefly to 'Hopkins or what's his names of the crazy precious diction?' (3). There are several poems from Gurney's post war period, between 1919 and 1922, that have a resonance with Hopkins' work. In *Escape*, for example, the celebratory tone

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1. Letters p 92, June 1916. There are similar examples in relation to Edward Thomas.
 2. Stars Foreword, p vii
 3. Letters, p 140, to Ethel Voynich, 28 August 1916.

Gurney uses, although not specifically theistic, has an awareness of spirituality, (implied by the use of 'worthier' in conjunction with 'spirit') and links this with the innate 'goodness' of nature, that has much in common with some of Hopkins' poems. For example in *God's Grandeur*, there is a similarity in the life affirming vision at the heart of each poem, and Gurney's 'I believe in the increasing of life;' offers a secular alternative to Hopkins' 'The world is charged with the grandeur of God'. It is interesting however, that Gurney's line mirrors the opening line of the Creed, both in its first words and rhythm and cadence of speech, which again reinforces the notion of an underlying spirituality.

There are similarities between Gurney's *The Dearness of Common Things*, and Hopkins' *Pied Beauty*. Hopkins praises his God, whereas Gurney simply celebrates the things he loves, but the results are strikingly similar,

Glory be to God for dappled things -
For skies of couple-colour as a brindled cow;
For rose-moles all in stipple upon trout that swim;
Fresh fire-coal chestnut-falls; finches' wings;
Landscape plotted and pieced - fold, fallow, and plough;
And all trades, their gear and tackle and trim.

1 28

The dearness of common things,
Beech wood, tea, plate shelves,
And the whole family of crockery,
Woodaxes, blades, helves.

Ivory milk, earth's coffee,
The white face of books
And the touch, feel, smell of paper,
Latin's lovely locks.

2 119

There is a similarity, too, in the cloud imagery Gurney uses in the next

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1. *Poetry 1870-1914*, p 28
 2. *Collected Poems*, p 119

stanza - 'grey worsted or wool clouds' - to Hopkins' 'silk-sack clouds' in *Hurrahing in Harvest*. This is not strictly synaesthetic imagery, because the images are as much visual, in both cases, as tactile, but it implies a similar sensibility to the object in question. Other aspects of Hopkins' often innovative techniques can be found in Gurney's work too. Certainly Hopkins' compound words - 'couple-colour', 'rose-mole', 'chestnut-falls' in above, and the evocative 'windpuff-bonnet of fawn-froth' and 'fell-frowning' in *Inversnaid*, for example, are characteristic devices used frequently in his writing. Gurney too uses imaginative collocations to achieve his effect. 'Clutch-frost', 'fire-desiring' and 'air-stirrings', are grounded in the natural world, but he also uses more mundane images to good effect, as in 'poor-struck' and 'army-witted', in *La Gorgue*. There are other similarities in technique, particularly the use of assonance and enjambement. (1) The most striking similarity, however, is in the complex re-ordering of syntax both poets used. Bergonzi says of Hopkins that

in order to achieve compression and immediacy, he often leaves out words or whole phrases that he judges inessential; these syntactical elisions can lead to obscurity.

2.

This occurs more often in Gurney's later poems, but there is a pre-figuring of his techniques of compression and inversion even in the early collections. In Severn and Somme, for example, the five *Sonnets 1917*,

1 Jon Silkin compares Gurney's *War Books* with *Hopkins' God's Grandeur*: 'What did they expect of our toil and extreme/ Hunger' compared with 'It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil/ Crushed' but Pirie disagrees with him, (*Stand*, Summer 1989, p26) arguing that Hopkins' contains not only a 'pyrotechnic display' but a metaphysical content lacking in Gurney. Nevertheless, the aural similarity in this and in many other pieces is unmistakable.

2. Poetry 1870 -1914 p 12

contain lines that have an archaic tone, echoing the Elizabethan sensibility that Gurney admires, but which hint, too, at the way he frequently manipulates conventional syntax or omits words.

.....Not the wisest knows,
Nor the most pitiful-hearted, what the wending
Of one hour's way meant.....

1.

This happens to a greater extent in later poems, for example in *The Two*,

And at home at night
Quiet through poetry the day's roaring shaking and rising
Me has driven to music, great mood to iron-twisting changing:
Withered leaves at next seeing.

2.

As P.J.Kavanagh points out in the introduction to Collected Poems, there are eventually

'syntactical jumps difficult logically to follow ('I Read Now So', 'I Would Not Rest', 'December Evening'), poems which nevertheless contain their own 'rough power'.

3.

Kavanagh also suggests this as a reason for the rejection of Gurney's third collection, Rewards of Wonder, 'understandable because Gurney begins to sound original, pressing music out of ordinary speech', as well as the 'queer contortions and omissions which became a part of his manner.' The rejection of the manuscript in 1922 prompted a letter from Gurney to Blunden,

I hope you will not mind my sending you this stuff, of which, in spite of the base word I am proud. Sidgwick with some politeness has rejected it, but myself see thundering good stuff there, beauty and a very good

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1. Severn and Somme, p 50 ('Pain')
 2. Collected Poems p 208
 3. *ibid* p 17

sense of form, and no swank..... I am an unsuccessful and angry poet writing to a successful poet who has already done things for him, but the Swan of Avon himself has occasionally had his wings plucked here, I think.

1

This confirms the point raised earlier in this chapter, that Gurney was always 'at the marge', and shows, furthermore, that he recognises this, and identifies himself thus, in relation to his contemporaries.

Hopkins was not, of course, one of Gurney's contemporaries, but since his work was not circulated outside his own small group of associates until after his death, his work reached the reading public at more or less the same time as Gurney's Severn and Somme. Robert Bridges had been the custodian of Hopkins' manuscripts, just as Marion Scott had taken charge of Gurney's, but it was not until 1918 that Hopkins' poems were published as a selection in one edition. Bergonzi suggests that

Because of the very unusual way in which Hopkins's reputation developed one has a double image of him: he was undoubtedly a Victorian poet; but he also seemed a modern poet before his time, whose work was admired in the 1930s because he had anticipated some of the innovations of twentieth century poetry.

2.

Gurney's case is a close parallel. He was undoubtedly a Georgian poet, but his work incorporated innovatory techniques. It raises the question, therefore, as to why Hopkins' has been considered a major poet and Gurney, generally, has not.

1. Letters, p 539

2. Poetry 1870-1914, p 12

It is likely that at least one possible answer lies in the issue of identity. Hopkins is, in Bergonzi's words, 'simultaneously a nature poet and a religious poet'. This is entirely consistent with his life as a Jesuit and a man of intense intellectual and aesthetic sensibilities. His poems may be difficult, but they represent part of a cohesive whole; what he is, what he does, what he writes. In addition, when the reading public received Hopkins' work, it was finite; There would be nothing to add to, or change, his reputation. Gurney's public on the other hand, were confronted with a bewildering array of possibilities. Firstly, the co-existence of his musical and literary selves affected the way he was perceived, by himself as well as others, as well as affecting to some extent where his work was published. Secondly, because Gurney wrote prolifically over a long period of time, and because his creativity embraced a variety of styles, it was impossible to categorise his work. When attempts have been made to do this his has not worked; war poems did not fit into the polarised categories of glorification or condemnation; nor were his poems of place merely poems of locality and topography. *Yesterday Lost*, (1), for example, is an ontological and eidetic statement, celebrating continuity, ('Its own for ever ... my own possession') as well as the transience of the moment, ('once seen, for ever gone ') The fact that the poem conveys this through the medium of landscape and the natural world, ('Bredon and Dursley'; 'Coppice', 'mistily'), gives this poem a duality without detracting from its effectiveness as an evocation of this particular corner of Gloucestershire.

1. Collected Poems p 110

There is inevitably much of Gloucestershire in Gurney's poems, and although one of Kavanagh's aims in selecting for Collected Poems, was to help him to 'escape the limiting tag of local poet', Gurney saw the Gloucestershire connection as a useful one. Just as *Music and Letters* took up poems with a musical theme, the *Gloucester Journal* printed poems that had local references. In January, April, and June of 1922 it published *This City, On a Two Hundredth Birthday*, and *Tewkesbury*. Gurney too wished to escape the label of 'local poet', but with characteristically wry amusement he shows himself to be not unwilling to capitalise out of the links, in a letter to Marion Scott shortly after the publication of Severn and Somme.

Thank you very much for the papers. The *Times* review is charming, I think; and satisfactory, save for the stress laid on my being a 'Gloucestershire' poet.

I did not expect Osborne to be pleased with my book, for he is a Prussian - still, his treatment of my book is all I could expect; and his reference to my double endings pleased me very much.

The criticism I most look for is from my friend Haines, and (if it may be) Walter de la Mare in the *S.W.G.* Haines wrote me a delightful letter after a first glance, and he is a good critic. (He is the man who knows Gibson and Co.)

Well, I call that a very successful start. The book has three or four possible audiences. (1) Gloucestershire (2) Musical (3) Military and Friends (4) Poetical and (5) (who knows) pious. I must get a poem on vegetarianism or temperance *in the* next.

1.

At the beginning of his publishing career this may simply have appeared to be naive enthusiasm on seeing his first collection come to fruition.

Many of the poets who published similar small collections between 1914 and 1918 became casualties of the war. Gurney was one who 'refrained from dying', unlike Wilfred Owen, who died only days before the Armistice. If

1. Letters p 376

Hopkins can be compared with Gurney on the grounds of both resonances between their techniques and the fact that their work was published at about the same time, an examination of Owen's poetry suggests different parameters by which Gurney's work can be understood. Owen was almost Gurney's contemporary, born in 1893, and a soldier, enlisting in October 1915. Like Gurney he had started to write verse before the war, and had received encouragement from Harold Monro at the Poetry Bookshop. He identified himself as a poet, writing to his mother in 1917,

'I go out of this year a poet, as which I did not enter it.
I am held peer by the Georgians; I am a poet's poet.

1.

Like Gurney, Owen was shell-shocked during the war, but in hospital, at Craiglockhart he met Sassoon, who offered him encouragement and as an established poet himself, the benefit of his experience as a critic. Gurney's hospital life was, by contrast, an arid experience. Although Marion Scott gave instructions for his work to be preserved and he was allowed to write and to play the piano, his treatment was neither stimulating nor enriching.

Although their circumstances differed in this respect, both Owen and Gurney expressed similar aims. Dominic Hibberd points out that Owen adopts

the creed of Keats's Grecian Urn, that only in beauty is there refuge from the ravages of time, an idea which Owen described as 'almost my Gospel'.

2.

This echoes Gurney's striving for beauty, but which for him often set

1. Wilfred Owen: War Poems and Others. p 27

2. *ibid* p 38

up tensions, as he expressed in a letter to Marion Scott,

I might be a good soldier could I forget music and books.
Indeed I try to fill my still-sick mind with thoughts
of these. Which makes a strange combination, as you may
imagine. A sense of beauty is every hindrance to a soldier;
yet there would be no soldiers - or none such soldiers had
not men dead and living cherished and handed on the sacred
fire.

1.

This was precisely the point made by the poet and critic Arthur Symons in relation to John Clare; that the qualities that made him a poet made him ineffectual as a peasant. Gurney, the uneasy soldier, was constantly aware of incidental beauty. This was both physical, in the landscape, and abstract, in the comradeship he found with others. This applies to both pre- and post-war poetry, as well as poems written during active service. He takes the moment, (and each new moment 'is miracle'), and the incident in which he and those close to him are involved, but he does not portray life with global inclusiveness; he concentrates on the near at hand - the clear lamp rather than dim stars. This is not to say that his work does not have a universal dimension. The war poems, particularly, in depicting such close detail, (as in *The Silent One*, for example), or one man's experience as in *Crucifix Corner*, give great insight into conditions on the Western Front.

There was a water dump there and regimental
Carts came every day to line up and fill full
Those rolling tanks with chlorinated clay mixture
And curse the mud with vain veritable vexture.
Aveluy across the valley, billets, shacks, ruins.
With time and time a crump there to mark doings.

2.

1. Letters p 102

2. Collected Poems p 80

After the strikingly accurate observation about the state of the water - a 'chlorinated clay mixture', Gurney offers a nostalgic and lyrical image, that was also part of the experience,

On New Year's Eve the marsh gloomed tremulous
With rosy mist still holding so marvellous
Sunglow; the air smelt home; the time breathed home -

....Stars that were not strange ruled the lit tranquil sky,
Arched far and high.

1.

If there is beauty here it is an incidental beauty, and a beauty invoked by the dialectical relationship of 'here/there' that pervades Gurney's work. This is a marked contrast with Owen's intention which Hibberd describes thus,

Owen set himself, as most poets do, the task of imposing order upon experience and rendering it beautiful; and because war is a particularly disordered and ugly experience, he needed an unusually highly developed control of words in order to achieve his aim.

2.

It would be a gross misreading of Owen's poetry to suggest that he found war beautiful when so many of his poems portray the despoilation of people and landscape, (3) but his perceptions differ from Gurney's in his ability to regard his participation in war as an aspect of existence that transcends all others.

I can find no word to qualify my experiences except the word SHEER....It passed the limits of my Abhorrence. I lost all my earthly faculties, and fought like an angel.

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1. Collected Poems, p 80
 2. Wilfred Owen: War Poems and Others, p 35
 3. Although poems like the unfinished *Beauty* show a link, as do occasional individual lines - 'Music and roses burst through crimson slaughter'. 'the wildest beauty in the world'
 4. op cit. p 107, Letter to Susan Owen, October 4th or 5th 1918.

It is also clear, later in the same letter, that Owen has a sense of responsibility, and of being involved in some overarching Grand Scheme,

I came out in order to help these boys - directly by leading them as well as an officer can; indirectly, by watching their sufferings that I may speak of them as well as a pleader can.

1.

There is an implication in the tone of Owen's poems that he is aware of the strategic, large scale view of war, which contrasts with Gurney's personal focus. This is reflected for example in the different way each poet deals with the failure of the state to provide for those who had sacrificed so much. In *Smile, smile, smile*, Owen depicts wounded men, reading the news, and emphasises the lack of honour given to casualties,

Head to limp head, the sunk-eyed wounded scanned
Yesterday's *Mail*; the casualties (typed small)
And (large) Vast Booty from our latest Haul.
Also they read of Cheap Homes, not yet planned,
'For,' said the paper, 'when this war is done
The men's first instinct will be making homes.

2.

In Gurney's *Strange Hells*, the sentiment is similar, but is clearly a much more personal statement. Gurney is writing from a point of attachment. Owen writes about 'them', Gurney writes about 'us', because although the second stanza begins with where are 'they', the specificity of the example given - 'showing shop patterns' - and in the third line, the use of the first person 'one', show the writer/persona's close involvement.

Where are they now, on state-doles, or showing shop patterns
Or walking town to town sore in borrowed tatters
Or begged. Some civic routine one never learns.
The heart burns - but has to keep out of face how heart burns.

3.

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1. *ibid.*
 2. *ibid* p 106
 3. *Collected Poems*, p 141

Similarities between Gurney and Owen do not end with subject matter. There are also aspects of technique and literary craftsmanship worth exploring and comparing from the point of view of each poet's reception and reputation. Owen's work, like Gurney's, had been published in periodicals, as individual pieces, but only three of them in his own lifetime. Two more reached a limited audience when he included them in a very small circulation publication, *The Hydra*, which he edited in Craiglockhart Hospital. Seven poems were published posthumously in *Wheels*, a journal edited by the Sitwells, as a counterblast to Georgian poetry. Owen had certainly planned to publish a selection of his work, but was killed in action before this could be achieved.

Middleton Murry in an article written in 1921 called *The Poet of The War*, reviewing Owen's work when the volume of poems was eventually published, asserts that 'Wilfred Owen was the greatest poet of the war'. (1) This was an opinion widely held, and Frank Swinnerton, in his appraisal *The Georgian Literary Scene*, published some seventeen years later, still regards Owen's work very highly, stating unequivocally that 'with Wilfred Owen, we reach the height of what may be termed strictly War Poetry.' (2). Owen's work was valued for its technical innovation. His achievement was to use with great skill a great variety of linguistic devices - rhyme, pararhyme, assonance, alliteration, and complex internal rhyme schemes - without appearing to distort syntax, or interrupt the flow of mellifluous or effective lines where meaning and content are of paramount importance. Middleton Murry regarded 'those assonant endings [are] indeed the discovery of genius' (3)

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1. *Nation and Athenaeum*, 19th Feb 1921, quoted in Casebook p 60
 2. *The Georgian Literary Scene* p 242
 3. Op cit. p60

Gurney's work, on the other hand, does not appear to have received the same amount of critical attention, although his techniques were often strikingly similar. In *Crucifix Corner*, for example, the mundane and simple language offers a precise description of conditions, in which war condemns itself without words of overt protest. The predominantly monosyllabic diction is the register of everyday speech, with the exception of Gurney's neologism - 'vexture' - which is nevertheless clear about its meaning in that context. On closer examination, however, a careful and technically accomplished set of relationships between words and sounds can be appreciated. There is alliteration, used subtly to begin with, in 'was' and 'water' at the beginning of the first line, and 'carts' and 'came' building up to an emphatic climax in 'vain veritable vexture'. There is a sustained use of assonance in the repeated 'l' sounds in 'regimental', 'fill', 'full', 'rolling', 'chlorinated', which is picked up again in the fifth line, in 'Aveluy', 'valley', and 'billets'. In the following line - 'With time and time a crump there to mark doings', the use of the demotic 'crump' and 'doings' disguises the fact that there is a very effective continuation of the assonantal relationships upon which the first stanza of this poem is founded. Almost every line demonstrates this,

Transport rattled somewhere in southern shadows,
Stars that were not strange ruled the lit tranquil sky,

culminating in the sense of lofty grandeur in the echoing aspirants of the short last line, 'Arched far and high'.

Another poem from the rejected collection Rewards of Wonder, *Half Dead*, illustrates not only the same technique with assonance and internal rhyme, but shows a sophisticated word play. Again, these poetic devices and

intricacies are embedded in the register of the commonplace, and do not appear to be contrived for the sake of poetic virtuosity.

Half dead with sheer tiredness, wakened quick at night
With dysentery pangs, going blind among dim sleepers
And dazed into half dark, illness had its spite.

The opening line exploits the polarity between 'quick'/live and 'dead', and finds a similar resonance between the images of sleep and blindness. 'Half dead' in the first line, is echoed in the third line in 'half dark', which binds the two ideas together, through the archaic sense of darkness as a euphemism for blindness, and the more simple sense of death as eternal darkness. These are merely two examples. His work is suffused with a sense of poetic sensibility and the ability to translate it into sometimes arrestingly vivid or beautiful language.

Gurney is thus capable of a mastery of technique, and complexity of images, and it is necessary to look for the reasons for his marginalisation as a writer, in the light of the examples of Owen and Hopkins with whom Gurney has much in common. Owen's reputation, like Hopkins', rests upon a relatively small body of work, of mature poems. (1) As an officer who died at the young age of twenty six his image as a writer and historical figure has a unity and consistency that remained at a fixed point, with no further output of poetry to suggest development, or the lack of it, or changes of direction. Gurney, unlike Owen and Hopkins, wrote very prolifically, and although it is possible to recognise a maturing of his

1. Many pieces remained unpublished in the British Museum, or in the possession of Wilfred's brother Harold, who disallowed unpublished fragments to be used.

work, and the development of some of the devices and techniques that were characteristic of his style they are not consistent and development is not linear or easy to plot. For example, the point made earlier, that in Rewards of Wonder there is originality and innovation, but it is coupled with a sense of disintegration. Conversely, some of the later poems, written in the asylum are lucid and moving, because they speak of the disintegration Gurney is so often aware of. *The Wind*, written in Dartford in 1929 describes this poignantly. (1).

In the absence of a chronological framework of development underpinning Gurney's poetry, such a huge body of work presents a problem. As has already been discussed, it is too limiting an approach to regard his work as solely war poetry, or poetry of place, or even wholly Georgian, because it encompasses so many modes. There is an ironic dialectic between Gurney's refusal to confine himself to one vantage point or mode of expression and his very real physical confinement. Like Walt Whitman, Gurney's vision is all embracing, all encompassing, and allows, indeed makes use of, everything that contributes to his own lived experience. Inevitably this was often at odds with the literary climate of his own time, and subsequently. If 'the aeroplane and the gramophone are unmentionable in verse' (2), how much more difficult it must have been to accept dysentery and tanks. The multiplicity of Gurney's voices, giving expression to his

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1. P.J.Kavanagh points out that the manuscript is signed I.G. 'Valentine Fain' and says that it is the latest of Gurney's poems, 'if, that is, it is composed by him' (Collected Poems, p 244) Stylistically, it looks like Gurney's work, with the repetition of 'all', the visual awareness of the skyscape, and the slightly archaic 'outrush'.
 2. J.C. Squire, writing under the pseudonym Solomon Eagle, in *Poetry and the Commonplace*, from Essays at Large, (1922), p 125.

various moods, ontological insecurities as well as exultations, make the question as to whether or not he was a 'mad' poet largely irrelevant. It is the fact that there are so many poems, of such diversity, and varied in quality, that presents the problem.

If Gurney as an individual writer was not honoured in his own time, the Georgian movement with which he is identified was much deprecated in its own time. Even one of its own leading proponents, J. C. Squire himself produced parodies of the style and subject matter that had attracted negative criticism of the Georgian frame of mind. In Imaginary Speeches, for example, published in 1912, he included a chapter called 'The Sort of Poems Modern Poets Write, he listed *inter alia* 'The Exquisite Sonnet', 'The Hell-for-Leather Ballad' and 'The-Fine-Contempt-For-Civilisation-and-Geography-very-Fraternal-with-the Elements-Plein-Air-Piece', and offered a verse of his own which ended

The whole air is filled with the
Clamour of innumerable wings.
The sun goes down.
Pop!

1.

In complete contrast to the discursive and commonplace aspects of Georgian poetry, the Imagist movement offered concurrently an alternative. Four annual anthologies were produced, from 1914 to 1917, (2). It was inevitable, however, that the watershed of human experience that was the war should produce a different set of poetic values and criteria. A major pre-occupation was to 'tell the truth'. Herbert Read, for example, who

1. Imaginary Speeches, p 84

2. And a much later one, in 1930, reconvening original contributors after the movement as such had broken up.

identified himself as an Imagist says that he felt keenly the need 'to express once and for all my attitude to my experiences in the first world war' in longer poems like *A World Within a War*. (1). There was a strong sense that something entirely new had happened, and that it demanded, therefore, an entirely new response. (2)

Robert Graves had told Wilfred Owen that after the war he 'must help S.S. and R.N. and R.G. to revolutionize English Poetry'. (3). Although Robert Nichols' poetry was highly acclaimed by his contemporaries as innovatory, with its onomatopoeic renderings of his war experience, his reputation did not last. Sassoon may have been revolutionary in the way he wrote about war, but neither he nor Graves could be regarded as agents of radical change in English Poetry in the way Graves himself had suggested. By the 1930s, which was still within Gurney's lifetime, and with a vast body of his work still unpublished, critics were looking to Auden and Spender and their peers, and the Georgians were viewed uncharitably in retrospect.

The Georgian Poets, a sadly pedestrian rabble, flocked along the roads their fathers had built, pointing out to each other the beauty spots and ostentatiously drinking small-beer in a desperate effort to prove their virility.

4.

Dismissing the Georgians thus, C. Day Lewis sees Auden and Spender

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1. The Poet Speaks, Interview with Herbert Read, 1961, p 195
 2. This was not confined to literature or to England. Throughout Europe there was a growing trend towards modernism and the *avant garde*, seen in the visual arts for example with Picasso, Kokoshka, Chagall, Kandinsky and analogous experimental trends in music.
 3. Wilfred Owen. War Poems and Others. p 142
 4. A Hope for Poetry p 2

attempting to re-establish communication with the past, after the de-racinating effect of war 'tore away our youths from its roots' (1)

Interestingly, he cites Hopkins, Owen and Eliot as 'bearers of the torch'. Although Owen has been regarded as providing a link between the tradition of Hardy and the new generation of thirties poets, and Eliot's influence on the development of poetry is indisputable, Hopkins has no obvious poetic descendents. To imitate the metaphor C. Day Lewis uses with regard to the Georgians, Hopkins travels alone down a narrow *cul-de-sac*, which is visited from time to time by spectators in order to wonder at the strange architecture.

Whether it was Hopkins, Spender and Auden, or Eliot and Yeats, who determined a new direction for poetry during the inter-war years, the fact remains that Gurney was allowed no contribution to that process. From the time of his death in 1938, nothing was published until in 1954 Poems of Ivor Gurney was edited by Edmund Blunden. It was a further nineteen years before Clark's collection was published, and 1982 before P.J. Kavanagh's Collected Poems of Ivor Gurney made a substantial number of previously unpublished poems available. Perhaps Gurney, like John Clare, could have prefaced his work with a quotation from Spenser; 'I pipe to please myself'.

1. A Hope For Poetry p 5

FROM THE LONDON MERCURY LTD
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Dear Sumner

There is a fine poem in the
book - don't think you've
completely excavated it. Do
come out on Thursday
I ever
Yours
Ivor Gurney

"Shanks told me that Squire thought me
the best of the young men below the
horizon, which led to a natural
question as to why he had rejected so
much lately...."

Letter, Ivor Gurney to Marion Scott,
10th October 1919.

By kind permission of Mr Brian Frith

CHAPTER FIVE: Looking There

If Ivor Gurney's poems are expressions of his attempts not merely to understand and bear the joy and pain involved in being human, in a universal sense, but an attempt to come to terms with his own individual existence, it is important to consider not only the content of his writing, but the way language supports this supposition. At the very heart of so much of Gurney's work is a preoccupation with fundamental questions about his place in the world, and the need to transcend his alienation and dislocation in relation to it. The language he uses is certainly all-embracing, from the conversational, colloquial and accessible, to

queer diction that matches the queer but precise content, an unpompous formality that controls shifts of tone and mood ...
.....agonised personal pieces, his exultations, praises, desperations...

1

Despite the fact that Gurney's writing has been neglected, and is 'easier to ignore than to dislike', the critics and writers who have engaged with his work (2) have mirrored Marion Scott and Gerald Finzi in striving to promote recognition for Gurney's achievement. Most have also expressed the wish 'not to re-inforce the idea of Gurney as the 'mad poet''. (3) If an attempt is to be made to examine Gurney's approach to language, where an exploration of aspects of his 'madness' would be a logical inclusion, it is a task to be undertaken with some delicacy. It is important not to discount or ignore this aspect of Gurney's life, especially when his own awareness of his 'condition' , howsoever that is to be interpreted, made a large contribution to his sense of self, which is the essence of his work.

1. Collected Poems p 3

2. Notably R.K.R Thornton, P.J. Kavanagh, Jon Silkin

3. Collected Letters p ix

It is useful to look at the body of work chronologically, to trace the progression of 'a developing consciousness of self', posited as the heart of his writing. Although there is no evidence that Gurney wrote poetry before 1913, (1), his interest and appreciation had undoubtedly begun at a much earlier date. Cheesman's influence had made him at least familiar with a variety of writers, and after his renewed acquaintance with Will Harvey (2) in 1908 had brought him into the orbit of John Haines, he would have been exposed to conversations and discussions in which poetry was an important topic. As a voracious reader the literary influences on his writing are not difficult to recognise, in his aspirations to achieve the clarity of expression or apposite imagery of poets he admired. He has much in common with Edward Thomas, and, although perhaps less deliberately, Hopkins, (for example, *The Dearness of Common Things*.) In the five '*Sonnets 1917*', it was Gurney's explicit intention to offer

'a sort of counterblast against 'Sonnetts 1914', which were written by an officer (or one who would have been an officer). They are the protest of the physical against the exalted spiritual; of the cumulative weight of small facts against the one large.

3

The '*Sonnets*' appeared in Gurney's first collection, Severn and Somme which contains a mixture of style and mood, reflecting the way it was put together. It was published in 1917, while Gurney was on active service on the Western Front, and the process of collecting poems together for publication was carried out by Marion Scott, who continued to send individual poems to magazines and journals, and promote Gurney's work in a way that would have been impractical for him to do himself. Letters

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1. R.K.R.Thornton's chronology in Collected Letters.
 2. F.W Harvey and G. had been at the same school, but had not been friends
 3. Severn and Somme Notes to 1987 edition, p 128

from Gurney to Marion Scott frequently contained poems for her scrutiny, or sought her response to alterations and suggestions.

Gurney's pre-occupation was with the form and content of the pieces he wrote, and the more mundane aspects of punctuation (1) were often left to Marion Scott to revise or tidy up as she saw fit. The aetiology, revisions and editing processes are dealt with in close detail in the notes to R.K.R Thornton's edition of Severn and Somme reprinted in full together with War's Embers in 1987.

The first collection of some forty six poems, not surprisingly includes some that reflect if not idealism, a hopefulness that pre-dates experience. Some of the pieces make their first appearance in letters, often to Marion Scott, and although the book itself came to fruition in 1917, some of the poems were written considerably earlier. (*To the Poet Before Battle*, for example, which R.K.R. Thornton suggests is probably the first of the poems to be sent to Marion Scott, was written before Gurney left England). In general, the notion of idealism in the early days of the war being superseded by disillusion and protest is a misinterpretation, or at best a misguided shorthand that does not convey the diversity of lived experience and beliefs that could have been found existing in parallel at any time during the war. It is more useful to adopt Hilda D. Spear's phrase. "chivalrous obligation", as the prevailing mood of many people drawn into the war process, and much of Severn and Somme is in that vein. To some extent, the first poem in Severn and Somme - *To Certain Comrades* - delivers what a poet might have felt was expected of him. It uses stock

1. He was more meticulous about keeping his own syntax unchanged.

images - the immortality of friendship,

telling future generations about heroic deeds, culminating in

That if we may not live to serve in peace
England, watching increase -

Then death with you, honoured, and swift, and high;
And so - not die.

1

Archaic language and conventional imagery lend a quasi religious tone to some of the poems, or the ideas expressed in them, as for instance in *Serenity*, in the final stanza of *Strange Service* ('Think on me too, O Mother, who wrest my soul to serve you'), and in *Acquiescence* ('Ere he has scorned his Father's patrimony'). Others, however, offer a more oblique perspective on a conventional theme. *To the Poet before Battle*, is a case in point. The first line, echoing the tone of Rupert Brooke's sonnet, *Peace*, transmutes into a dialectical juxtaposition of 'fear' and 'honour'. It was unusual for poetry to admit fear, (2) or to admit, openly to being unmoved by the gathering momentum of the military machine - 'Unstirred by the rattle of the rolling drums'. Far more common were assertions of bravery, or the euphemistic sublimation of fear into anger, against war itself, or symbols of the consequences or personae of war, (the Hun, Fate). It is clear, however, in Gurney's writing, that although the concepts of 'honour' and 'just reward' - even simple 'repayment', provide important motive forces, he does not despise those who cannot rise to the conventional standard of fearlessness attributed to all those who received the ultimate 'honour' of being killed in action. Gurney's world-view is characterised by acceptance of a multiplicity of human qualities and

1. Severn and Somme p 22

2. This was not necessarily the case in poems written by women - see Ouditt, Tylee, Khan et al.

behaviour, and an honesty that acknowledges the brutality 'When mere noise numbs/ The sense of being, the fear-sick soul doth sway'. (*To the Poet Before Battle*) A poignant example of Gurney's complex vision is contained in *To England - a Note*. He undercuts the 'glorious battle' myth, by describing the prosaic reality of tedious chores that made up a large part of soldiers' routine.

I watched the boys of England where they went
Through mud and water to do appointed things.

1

'Appointed things' carries a note of inescapability from doing one's duty, and it is portrayed as a joyless feat of endurance. Even singing provides no joy. Gurney uses the sonnet form to good effect, and the sestet neatly inverts the notion of singing as an assertive or triumphant battle-cry, because the men are singing to 'tell the world in song/How they do hate and fear the face of war'. Gurney, nevertheless was caught up in the adrenalin charged rush of taking part in the fighting. His ambivalence is apparent in a letter written to Marion Scott on 22nd June 1916,

We have come into reserve now, having gone through a strafe which a machine-gunner who had been through Loos said was worse than Loos while it lasted.....it left me exalted and exulting only longing for a nice blighty that would have taken me away from all this...

2

The exultation relates perhaps to survival rather than the taking part, and yet the letter goes on to say that

It was a great time; full of fear of course, but not so bad as neurasthenia.....But O to be back out of it all!

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1. Severn and Somme p 28
 2. Collected Letters p 103

Just as many of the poems juxtapose war and place, Gurney also puts together aspects of war experience and a questioning of his underlying emotional state. In *Bach and the Sentry*, he combines two facets of self and existence in the contrasting roles of musician and soldier. Using a favourite metaphor of stars in a clear dark sky, he describes the lifting effect of imagined music while on sentry duty. In the second stanza, he asks whether a return to civilian life will bring back the oppressive feeling of being 'a sentry hardly waking, / With a dull sense of No Man's Land again?' (1). 'No man's Land' is a particularly apt metaphor for the negation of all that is worthwhile in life consequent upon the neurasthenic state that he so hates. 'Land' effectively invokes a state of mind that functions as 'place' without 'time', that is, a static existence where no progress or development is possible. It is 'No Man's' land, unclaimed because it is outside any desirable territory, and because of its connotations of war, a place that holds traps and terrors. Before the First World War, No Man's Land simply meant the strips of land between hedgerow and road which were often verges wide enough to be used by tramps, gypsies and travellers' camps. Stan Smith refers to Edward Thomas's use of No Man's Land in 'Lob', (2) and points out that in 'a land parcelled up by fences and 'No Trespassing' signs and the new urban sprawl' this was unclaimed land where transient people could stay temporarily. It is as potent a symbol of 'outsider status', even in this domestic context, as it is in the context of No Man's Land in the field of war. *Bach and The Sentry*, then, is a short poem of only two four line stanzas, but a poem in which the soldier/civilian, civilian/soldier images are inverted, and

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1. Severn and Somme p 29
 2. Edward Thomas p 81

which, together, form a whole that is concerned with the uncertainty of existence *per se*, that subsumes even the precariousness of life within the framework of war.

Gurney is in effect marginalised in both states, and his voice is that of an outsider. He is an uneasy soldier, and an unhappy civilian. The sense of being apart from, outside of, detached from, many of the central themes of his poems is characteristic of his work. It is significant that many of his poems are written from a vantage point on the outside looking in, watching. The persona has a ghost-like presence - the spectre at the feast- looking in on 'Home and the tea table'. It conjures up a very visual image of the kind used on postcards popular during the First World War showing over-sentimentalised visions of home, or sweethearts, or religious images, depicted in 'thought-bubbles', or emerging out of clouds, The dream-like quality of Gurney's evocation is emphasised in this piece by contrast with the physicality of 'the smell of trench, trench feeling' and he identifies again with his work as a soldier. In *To England- A Note*, he is watching the boys of England. In *Bach and the Sentry*, he is watching the dark, so often on the edge, at the margin, looking inwards.

This is reinforced in *Winter beauty*, in which Gurney writes of being 'an exile'. The poem was written at Verennes, and sent to Marion Scott in February 1917. Gurney made substantial revisions to the original version, adding a third stanza which contained the neologism 'uprapt', instead of the more conventional 'enraptured'. 'Uprapt' conveys a sense of kinetic energy, of being swept up, in an active way, consistent with the image that follows, of being caught up by winds of beauty and out of control-'not

my own', (1) and the sense of 'exile' is subverted by the passionate and celebratory tone in which the writer describes his 'strong/ Thirst past satisfaction' for beauty. Being out of control, or outside the common run of experience is in this case something to be wondered at and gloried in, providing the obverse of the dark days of Gurney's existence, and of course, a contrast to the overwhelming, and universal, darkness of war. (2)

The poem itself is full of movement - hinted at in the first stanza in the rare collocation of 'blue riotous day', reinforced at the end of the second stanza in 'quivering strings', and given full rein in the third stanza with 'swinging to and fro', rising to an exultant climax in the final stanza. The caesura in the middle of the line, 'Not to be quenched....O lift me, bear me along' heightens the effect of the subsequent invocation to Beauty. Although it is important not to over-read meaning into a poem, or ascribe intentionality where it is not clear, there is often in Gurney's writing a layer of meaning just below the surface that speaks to the reader, whether or not Gurney intended that it should. 'Uprapt', clearly derived from the feeling of rapture that pervades the whole poem, suggests 'wrapped up' in the sense of total absorption in the relationship with beauty.

There are many examples where a word or phrase reminds not by sound or meaning but by a more elusive and less easy to define sense of connection with the superficial or received meaning. In *To the Poet before Battle*, for example, 'When mere noise numbs/The sense of being', 'sense' operates both

1. Severn and Somme p 41

2. 'The very proximity of death at the front inspires the poet with love of life. On Mount San Michele, Ungaretti recalls ...I was in the presence of death....which I learned to know in a new, terrible fashionI exalt almost savagely the will to live, the appetite for life which was intensified by the proximity of and daily contact with death. (Mark of the Beast p 136)

as 'sensation', but at a deeper level akin to 'wisdom' or 'purpose'. Although neither could be substituted directly, the line as a whole conveys the notion that the noise in question is so destructive that there is no sense in continuing to exist. Similarly in *To Certain Comrades*, to 'serve in peace' echoes the stock phrase Rest in Peace, and intensifies the acute awareness of death. Later poems show an increasing use of aggregations of ideas and neologisms, but it must be noted that such devices and techniques are evident in the earliest of Gurney's poems.

Form was important to Gurney, and he shows a familiarity with and understanding of it, harnessing it to his purpose from the earliest examples of his writing. Two poems in Severn and Somme are particularly good examples of Gurney's ability to pastiche standard form - notably the ballad, in *The Ballad of the Three Spectres*, and the carol (*Carol*, with its repeated refrain and use of conventional symbols of holly and ivy.) There are others in the collection that have a simple four line stanza ballad form, but the pastiche is complete in *Three Spectres*, because the subject is also in keeping with the traditional ballad.

One of the reasons why Gurney's work is always interesting is that he does not confine himself to one vantage point or style. This means that in addition to poems whose form is inseparable from theme or content, or poems using archaic or elevated registers, there are also lighter poems written in a conversational tone and register, where the fact that lines conform to a complete and well structured rhyme scheme is not necessarily the first quality to strike the reader on an initial reading. *Letters* and *Strafe* are two such, that were included in Severn and Somme. Gurney called them

Rondels (1) and there were five of them in a letter he sent to Marion Scott on 11th June 1917. In *Strafe*, (originally called *Strafe 2*, because *Strafe 1* in Gurney's letter was about strafing shirts to get rid of lice!) the humour, in 'Here comes a monster like a motor-bus.' and the use of the slang term 'crumps' dominates, and creates a situational irony and casualness that belies the tightness of form. The diversity of viewpoints and styles are clearly consequent upon Gurney's diverse 'ways of being' - the formal enactment of a heterodox identity.

The short poems in Severn and Somme have a lyrical sweetness, often melancholic, giving them a musical quality that illustrates Gurney's ear for euphony in spoken language. In *Song and Pain*, for example, the opening phrase 'Out of my sorrow' is repeated as the second line, giving a wistful emphasis to the statement. The long first and third lines, interspersed with shorter second and fourth lines, in both stanzas, have a similarity to the musical setting of the better known poem, *Song*. Although on the page this poem has short lines of fairly even length, the musical setting has the effect of elongating the vowel sounds in the first line, 'Only the wanderer', but delivers the second line, 'Knows England's graces', with short notes of equal time. In both poems, there is a feeling that Gurney is striving for a musical quality in the structure of the piece, that not only dominates his conscious choice of both vocabulary and

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1. Gurney gave this group the heading 'Rondels. (is it?). It is characteristic of Gurney to conflate ideas, and this probably represents a link between literary and musical terms for him. A *rondeau* is a 10 or 13 line poem with only 2 rhymes throughout, cf Leigh Hunt's *Jenny Kissed Me*. Gurney's *Rondels* are 8 lines, but it is possible that he had in mind the musical *Rondo*, from the same etymological root as *Rondeau* but simply suggesting a piece of music with a leading theme that returns from time to time.

syntax, but is probably also derived from an innate sense of rhythm and balance in language, generated by and appealing to the senses at an instinctive rather than cognitive level.

The musical quality characteristic of Gurney's writing was remarked upon by F. W. Harvey, in his review of War's Embers in the *Gloucester Journal* on 17th May 1919. This second collection of poems, published by Sidgwick and Jackson, and owing much to the entrepreneurial skills of Marion Scott in getting it into print, contains some fifty eight poems. Gurney had originally intended the collection to contain sixty seven poems, and to be divided into two parts. Repeating the sentiment of *Severn and Somme*, they were to be called 'Part 1: Of Gloucester from France/Part 2: Of Gloucester in England' or "A 'Gloucester' in France" and "A 'Gloucester' in England". The history of its eventual title - War's Embers - and the negotiation with R.B. McKerrow about the final selection is well documented by R.K.R Thornton in editorial notes in the 1987 re-print of Severn and Somme and War's Embers. It had a mixed reception, perhaps because it contained, like Severn and Somme, an eclectic collection, hard to categorise or measure against some of the safer and more conventional poetry of the day. P.J.Kavanagh says in his introduction to Collected Poems that 'War's Embers did not mark a great advance', (1) and even F.W. Harvey's review suggested that some of the poems 'show a certain lack of polish, and occasional signs of hasty workmanship'. This may be fair as a general comment, but it would be reasonable to argue although some of the poems may not be polished in their entirety, in some of them, in individual lines even, there is evidence of Gurney's unique vision and originality of expression.

1. Collected Poems p 11

There are more of the longer poems in War's Embers, meandering ruminatively through familiar settings. In *The Farm*, dedicated to the Harveys - 'Mrs Harvey and Those Others' - the creeper covered house is the central symbol of all that Gurney holds dear. It is the epitome of Englishness, standing on 'Brown fruitful good earth', amongst barns, ricks, elms and orchards that represent for Gurney The Good Place. He chooses to picture it in 'the golden sunlight of a late September' - a pre-figuring perhaps of all endings in the image of the end of a summer, mirrored at the end of the first stanza by 'haunted' and the image of sunset. As in so many poems, the persona/Gurney is outside looking in, first of all at the artefacts that symbolise the things he loves the most - 'books, a piano' - and then at the people who inhabit this nurturing space, where 'Peace like cool dew comforted the heart'. The role reversal hinted at in the second stanza, where the house is portrayed as proud of its inhabitants, rather than they of it, is emphasised by oddly inverted syntax.

And friends lived there of whom the house was proud,
Sheltering with content from wind and storm,
Them loving gathered at the hearthside warm.

1

The third stanza continues this,

The house all strangers welcomed, but as strangers kept
For ever them apart
From its deep heart,
That hidden sanctuary of love close guarded;
Having too great a honey-heap uphoarded
Of children's play, men's work, lightly to let
Strangers therein;

'Uphoarded', like 'upwrapt' in the example already quoted, is strong and complete in this coined compound form, as well as creating a half-rhyme with 'guarded' in the preceding line. The notion of hoarding the essence -

1. Severn and Somme p 58

because it implies more than merely memories - of childhood and those children grown into men, accords with Gurney's preoccupation with the 'accretion of human memory' to use Heaney's phrase, as a quality that can be absorbed by landscape and artefacts. Nevertheless, Gurney, like the rooks haunting the elm tree, is outside, and in the final stanza very far away. Role reversal of house and people becomes anthropomorphism, but the feelings attributed to it, 'desolate and left alone' are clearly Gurney's own, 'bedraggled and wet' and in exile from his familiar territory.

The Lock Keeper (To the memory of Edward Thomas), is another contemplative piece.

A tall lean man he was, proud of his gun,
Of his garden, and small fruit trees every one
Knowing all weather signs, the flight of birds,

1

It has a marked similarity to the later untitled poem

How strange it was to hear under the guns
That slow sweet Cotswold voice go droning through
His tales of flowers and trees, his little ones,
All that in years to come he hoped to do...

2

In *The Lock-keeper*, the focus is retrospective - the heritage of country lore and knowledge of the flora and fauna, his inheritance from his father, not of wealth but of skills and sayings. In the untitled poem, Gurney portrays a character, looking forward rather than back, but no less part of the continuum of human existence, as Gurney makes clear in the line 'O surely Shakespeare knew such men as these'.

In *The Lock-Keeper* the strong sense of history and tradition is reinforced in the language itself. 'Yarns' and 'saws' hint at the tone or quality of

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1. *Var's Embers* p 99. There is a much longer development of this theme and character in a poem of the same title in *Collected Poems* p 103
 2. *Stand*, Vol 33 No 2, p 17

his 'tales' and 'sayings', implying a rich colloquialism, and balancing the imaginative and far fetched ('yarns') with the solid and worthy ('wise saws'). There is a subtle shift in tone from the direct and informal, in 'lad' and 'handy', to a more formal perspective, where 'quick' implies not only speed, but a living skill, surviving through generations. This is further developed in the use of 'mysteries', which suggests both knowledge or skill incomprehensible to an outsider, and a resonance with the mediaeval 'mysteries' as guilds and communities associated with a particular trade or craft. The interconnectedness of identity, voice, and being both part of, but on the edge of, a group is clear in his acknowledgement of 'rough fine speech'. Gurney values regional dialect and identifies with the lock keeper because they have a shared heritage that goes beyond language. Gurney nevertheless is able to recognise its roughness because he is part of another world too, where speech is not rough, but has other qualities he also values. His ability to engage with both, emphasises that he does not belong wholly to either, and his acute ear for speech variants, and the way he combines formality and informality, show *who* he is - his identity- and *where* he is - outside looking in.

Gurney shows his respect for craftsmanship in the careful balance and rhythm in the language in which he writes about them. There is symmetry and harmony in 'sail-making, net-making, boat-building' that continues this association. The link with history is carried further in the somewhat archaic 'many a far league hence', but the poem is left looking into the future as well as the past, with the persona/Gurney acknowledging that it would be hard to find another like this man in future travels, 'for many a year' and 'search [ing] for ever and ever'.

Like many of Gurney's poems, *The Lock-keeper* has a formal end-rhyme scheme,

with some enjambements. Where the enjambements occur, the end-rhyming word is one upon which stress falls in the rhythm of natural speech, ('amiss', 'patience', 'hence', 'find') so that the reader has a satisfying sense of form, enhanced by a fluidity of rhythm and pace. The Rondels, discussed above have a similarly successful combination of formal structure and mellifluous delivery, but there are some poems that are less comfortable to read. *De Profundis* is one example, where the metre appears unintentionally awkward, and the lines are difficult to read because the stress falls on the wrong words, or the particular combination of short and long syllables is less mellifluous than usually found in Gurney's writing. The lines are long, and in the first stanza the first two lines

If only this fear would leave me I could dream of Crickley Hill
And a hundred thousand thoughts of home would visit my heart in sleep;

1

are followed by a third line that seems to be a syllable short of the predictable, unless it is read either with a pause as if there were a comma after 'day', or by elongating 'by'. The fourth line compounds the sense of wrenched rhythm by being too long and leaving the reader in a quandary about where to place the stress. If this is one of the poems that provoked Harvey's comment that some of the pieces lacked polish, it is easy to understand the criticism. It does nevertheless, as is almost always the case with Gurney's writing, have isolated lines or insights, that may not redeem the whole poem, but which support the argument that his work cannot be judged on the evidence of a small number of poems. Phrases like the onomatopoeic 'O blow here, you dusk-airs and breaths of half-light', and strong images like sunsets seen as 'Huge bonfires of glory' are memorable,

1. Severn and Somme p 104

despite the poem as a whole being spoiled by cliché, ('...tree bordered lanes, land of blossom and song. '), and clumsy diction, ('Is not for us, the up and down highway where go').

P J Kavanagh says that Var's Embers 'did not mark a great advance'.

A third volume of poems, written, or at least put together as a collection, in 1919, under the title Rewards of Wonder, was not accepted for publication. Kavanagh includes twenty nine of them in his 1982 Collected Poems, enough to show familiar themes and imagery, and to demonstrate again individual lines or phrases of memorable poetic inspiration. They also show, in places, some of the 'queer diction' that Gurney at his best is able to use very engagingly, provoking the reader into looking at the familiar in a different and stimulating way, or colluding with the reader to create mood or emphasis. He uses the device of a strictly controlled tampering with syntax to focus with a crystalline sharpness on aspects of thought or emotion related either to his own moments of epiphany, or in effect, creating one for the reader.

One got peace of heart at last, the dark march over,
And the straps slipped, the warmth felt under roof's low cover,
Lying slack the body, let sink in straw giving;
And some sweetness, a great sweetness felt in mere living,

1

These tend to be a rendering down to the essence, a contracted form of structure or truncating of words, that leave out anything not completely essential to the statement. Where this works, it usually works very well. It is sometimes merely an adjustment, as in *Sonnet - September 1922*, where the contraction of 'And is' to 'And's' in the sestet keeps the pace constant, but is also shifts the stress in that line to its

1. Collected Poems p 84

proper place, emotionally, on 'distressed'. Even in a late poem, *The Two*, 'queer diction' allows the medium to be the message.

And at home at night
Quiet through ^{the} day's roaring shaking and rising
Me has driven to music, great mood to iron-twisting changing:
Withered leaves at next seeing.

1

Where it is not successful, the effect can be clumsy or confusing, sometimes both, as in the last stanza, which is similarly syntactically convoluted, but sounds contrived or self-consciously poetic with the inversion 'Climbed I', and the laboured 'rose-on-thorn come on'. *That Centre of Old*, from Rewards of Wonder, provides another example. The poem opens with a familiar theme,

Is it only Cotswold that holds the glamour
Memory felt of England in the gun-stammer -
Thud , smack, belch of war - and kept virtue by?

2

Lack of punctuation at the end of the first line leaves an ambiguity. It may be that Cotswold holds some kind of attractiveness or enchantment, ('glamour') and the memory of England combines not only love of one's own county but an all-encompassing feeling for England, that sustains the persona through the noise of war. It may be however, that Gurney intended the enjambement to imply a compound 'glamour-memory', where the archaic connotation of bewitching, or affecting by magic is attributed to the power of memory. That is, memory has magical powers to fend off evil, which is implied by the contrast with 'virtue' in the third line. The contraction however, makes this unclear. If the poem is read with foreknowledge of Gurney's work, there is a temptation to assume that

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1. Collected Poems p 208
 2. *ibid* p 73

'virtue' is a contraction of 'virtuous'. Memory therefore becomes the means by which the persona is kept virtuous, meaning undamaged both spiritually and physically by the war. Or does it mean that the bewitching memory of Cotswold confers some kind of protection, and keeps "goodness", (unspecific, but representing a negation of all the evil of war) near at hand ('by').

The next three lines do not clarify the situation, and are not redeemed by the kind of musicality that sometimes conveys meaning first at a felt rather than cognitive level. In this case they are clumsy and not comfortable to read or say.

I do not know, but only that, most unhappy,
The hills are to me what happy I
They were in Somme muckage-baths and east of Laventie.

1

The process of analysing and teasing out meaning is reductive, and yet interspersed with such abstruse phrases are images or expressions used with precision and clarity to good effect. The compound 'gun-stammer' evokes very vividly the noise of machine guns, and the following combination of staccato and plosive sounds in 'Thud, smack, belch of war' conveys onomatopoeically, if not literally, a whole spectrum of sounds that contribute to the deafeningly offensive noise of war. 'Belch', for example, has a dual function. In addition to mimicking the sound of weaponry, it contributes a human dimension to the mechanistic sounds of 'thud' and 'smack', hinting at the involuntary noises of casualties as well as the incidental noise of communal human existence. Similarly, the notion of being able to 'absorb the sky' calls up a

1. *ibid*

poignant image of humanity in a brief interlude of respite from the 'thud and smack', looking up at the clouds and indulging in a moment's mental escapism - 'fancy-tricks' - before having to face the next onslaught. Despite the awkward syntax and lack of euphony at the beginning of the poem, it ends mellifluously

Soft winter mornings of kind innocence, high June's
Girl's air of untouched purity, and on Cooper's Hill
Or autumn Cranham with its boom of colour ...
Not anyway does ever Cotswold's fail - her dear blue long
dark slope fail -
Of the imagining promise in full exile.

The unspirited sounds ('of', 'innocence', 'air', 'untouched', 'and', 'on', 'Or', 'autumn',) combined with the fluidity of n's and m's have a serenity entirely in keeping with the context. In the penultimate line, Gurney again manipulates syntax, 'Not anyway does ever Cotswold's fail..' but this time, the inversion serves to emphasise meaning, and is expanded upon in the second part of the line, '.... - her dear blue long dark slope fail - where the use of monosyllabic words with elongated vowel sounds determines the slow and even pace, but also when spoken, tends to have a falling cadence that Jon Silkin refers to as a 'self-auditing completeness.'

That Centre of Old is a poem that illustrates in microcosm much that has been problematic in assessing Gurney's work. There are bright glimpses, flashes of brilliance, embedded in a murky background. It makes the poem as a whole unsatisfactory, but fragments of it unforgettable. This is not to suggest that Gurney was wilfully obscure. The impression gleaned from reading his own observations about alterations made to poems, or comments to Marion Scott about his intentions, suggest quite the contrary; that his own vision was strong and derived often from

forms of speech or literary influences with which Gurney was familiar although his readers may not have been. There are poems that are confused and disordered, particularly some of the later poems in the Gurney Archive, clearly dating from periods of mental disturbance. There are also, as P.J. Kavanagh points out, often several versions of poems, or later additions or alterations which sometimes detract from the original, and "it would hardly be possible, and certainly unfair to Gurney, to print everything he wrote."

It is at this point that an exploration of the links between Gurney's language and his mental condition becomes relevant. There may be a case to be made that some of Gurney's idiosyncratic use of language and tortuous syntax is due to his condition, which was variously described as neurasthenia, shell shock, or, in the City of London Mental Hospital at Dartford, as 'Delusional Insanity (Systematised)', for which the current terminology would be paranoid schizophrenia. Research by Morice and Ingram in 1982 suggests that characteristics of speech in people who are schizophrenic are quite specific, and consistent enough to provide a diagnostic tool in assessing the condition. They cite telegraphic speech, the use of neologisms, misuse of auxiliary verbs, cloze technique, (1) and fewer ties using grammatical conjunctions but more lexical ties. (2 tea-stuff).

There is no doubt that all these variants are present and indeed often characteristic of Gurney's writing. He frequently leaves out definite

1. The effect of regular word deletion on the comprehensibility of a text. Gurney uses this frequently, sometimes resulting in confused lines.
2. e.g. Tea-stuff, Dutch-sort, Like-Stroudway bridges.

and indefinite articles, but the sense is rarely obscured. Sometimes it adds to the immediacy of the poem, giving it the quality of a diary, written in haste, as dictated by circumstance. In,

Darkness, shot at: I smiled, as politely replied -

1

and

Sentry here and there. How the trench wound now! Wires
Hindered, thistles pricked, but few guns spat their fires.
Upward a little ... wider a little, the reserve line reached

2

for example, both use form to illuminate content. The harsh and staccato 'pricked' and 'spat', emphasise the hostile image of thistles and guns, whereas the omission in

Clear lamps and dim stars,
Worry of heart-ache,
Are poor things should make
A consolation for the trees and bars
Of cloud on stars,

3

is more likely to be a deliberate liberty with syntax for the sake of achieving the desired effect in metre.

Gurney's use of compound words is interesting. The first impression is that they are simply an idiosyncratic substitute for conventional adjectives or descriptive phrases. A more careful examination, however, suggests that, paradoxically, they compress the ideas they describe, allowing a complex description to be reduced to minimalist statement. In *La Gorgue*, for example, describing landscape, "With a mill, and still canal, and like-Stroudway bridges", Gurney encapsulates in three

1. Collected Poems p 102

2. *ibid* p 85

3. *ibid* p 106

Neologisms occur frequently. Sometimes it appears that they provide little more than a convenient rhyme, 'vexture/mixture' in *Crucifix Corner*, and 'dancy' in *Riez Bailleul*. Others, like 'tentaculous', and 'coolish' seem to have been coined out of Gurney's exuberant and uninhibited approach to language - the same trait that allowed him to mix registers and take risks with rare collocations, idiosyncratic juxtapositions between lines as well as with syntax. A greater number of pseudo-neologisms in Gurney's writing lend an archaic tone. Words like 'joyed', 'foredone', 'enwreathed', and the strange 'escapen' and 'hurten', are not coined words, but an alteration or adjustment to their conventional form. It is part of Gurney's skill that he can manipulate both vocabulary and syntax to create a sense of portentousness and ceremony, or hint at Elizabethan courtly diction.

Looking at Morice and Ingram's premise about schizophrenic language, it is clear that some of the characteristics they regard as significant are present in Gurney's language patterns. The key factor however, is whether or not these features are the result of deliberate choice, or occur because the writer or speaker is capable of no other. In Gurney's case there can be no doubt tht his 'queer diction' was a conscious and carefully worked out choice. Where he employs these tactics, meaning is almost invariably clear. In some of the unpublished poems, that were written in periods of greatest mental stress, the internal logic of the work breaks down in the ordering of thoughts - the deep structure, of the poem - whereas almost without exception, the poems in all the published collections and some still unpublished in the Archive, show an internal framework upon which language is built in

in a comprehensible, albeit unconventional, way. In fact, Gurney's idiosyncratic style is dependent upon, not falling short of 'competence'

- Chomsky's term to denote

tacit knowledge on the part of native speakers who have mastered or internalised the implicit conventions and rules of a language system which makes possible the production and understanding of well-formed and meaningful sentences.

1

What may at first appear to be merely odd, could perhaps only be produced by a writer who is both familiar with, and skilful in, the conventions of language, (2), to subvert and manipulate them to serve his own purpose. Conventional syntax is often made subordinate to rhythm in Gurney's work, not necessarily to formal metre, but to the rise and fall of natural speech patterns. It has also been suggested in a paper published by *L'Université de Toulouse-Le Mirail*, given at a conference on *Les Poètes-Combattants Anglais de la Grande Guerre*, that the dislocation of grammar and syntax is a device used to express the chaos of Gurney's (and others') vision, and that rupturing the logical links between words reflects the disorder in an existence traumatised by war.

Isaac Rosenberg, David Jones et les vers-libristes dépouillent la parole de ses dehors formels et lui restituent une qualité primitive qui moule l'expression sur l'émotion brute. Quant à Ivor Gurney, il a, dans ses poèmes d'ancien combattant disloqué la grammaire et la syntaxe pour exprimer le chaos de ses visions. L'omission de mots corrélatifs, la rupture de l'enchaînement logique, l'écart entre le relatif et son antécédent reflètent les égarements d'un être traumatisé.

3

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1. A Glossary of Literary Terms p 104
 2. Gurney was interested in William Barnes' work on dialect, had a strong sense of musicality in spoken language, and wrote a small number of poems in French. (In Gurney Archive)
 3. Un Sursaut de Poésie. p 409 in Les Poètes-Combattants Anglais de la Grande Guerre.

If dislocation is a technique deliberately used to reflect the ugliness of war, its counterpoint can be found in the way Gurney deals with beauty and goodness in his life. There are times when his language soars into an expansiveness of thought or image analogous to a brief improvisation in music, adding to the "feeling" of the piece, having a structural relationship to the main body of the work, and returning to the central theme. This is particularly effective when a poem opens with images of war but shows Gurney's awareness, even *in extremis*, of the world's natural and universal beauty.

On the east horizon's dim loveliest shape upheld.
To mix with music in my thought. and forget sickness -
To drown sorrow deep that on me was then masterless -
Hunger and weak body and tired of needed sleep.
For Argo or Sirius in the east skies or for Regulus.

1

Gurney's poems are full of an acute sensory awareness. The visual sense is very strong, in his recreations of images of Gloucestershire, held as pictures in his mind's eye whenever he is away from it, but all the senses are made to contribute to Gurney's perception of the world he inhabits. He tastes the night dew, streams sing tunes of broken silver, and the dead soldier becomes 'that red wet thing' in a phrase of striking and memorable physicality. There is a blurring of boundaries, in some of the descriptive phrases Gurney uses, that suggests that for him synaesthetic imagery was not an artifice contrived for poetic effect, but was a direct expression of his lived experience. It is

1. Collected Poems p 82

particularly noticeable that he frequently finds a sense analogy between visual stimuli and music. Sometimes this is specific - relating a colour to a specific chord for example, or a more simple response, as in 'autumn Cranham with its boom of colour'. In *Songs Come to the Mind*, this is explained as an essential part of Gurney's creativity,

Songs come and are taken, written,
Snatched from the momentary
Accidents of light, shape, spirit meeting
For one light second spirit, unbelievably.

1

Shape and light are thus as important as musical stimuli as they are to Gurney's visual sense. (2)

Passionate Earth, dedicated to John Haines, is a good example of the 'sensory overload' characteristic of Gurney's celebratory poems.

Where the new-turned ploughland runs to clean
Edges of sudden grass-land, lovely, green -
Music, music clings, music exhales,
And inmost fragrance of a thousand tales.

3

'Clean' and 'sudden' are given a subtly different quality, used in this way too. The rare collocation of 'sudden' and 'grass-land' is only slightly different from the notion of suddenly seeing or reaching grass-land, but Gurney confers a sense of wholesome ('clean') vitality to the inanimate landscape, which contributes to the vibrant and celebratory description that follows.

1. Collected Poems p 72

2. It should, nevertheless, be acknowledged that synaesthesia was fashionable. Many of Gurney's contemporaries used synaesthetic imagery (eg Thomas) and musicians used the symbolic value of colour as a basis for composition. eg Bliss, *Colour Symphony* (based on the heraldic symbolism of primary colours) and Scriabin for example.

More complex, if it is approached from the point of view of untangling the sensory references, is the synaesthetic imagery in *Fire in the Dusk*,

Colour to stir tears in tenderest skies;
Music of light. Your Autumn beeches shall
Set passion blazing in a heart until
Colour you gave be fashioned in formal line

1

There is a suggestion of rain in the image of tears and skies, but in linking 'tenderest' with sky there is a notion of feeling and emotion. Gurney uses a similar collocation in *Crickley Hill*, when he refers to 'that tender-coloured ending of a day', which may suggest that for him, 'tender' has a connotation of specific colour, and is not merely a qualifying term. There is an argument, however, for simply responding to the musicality of the language and Gurney's own passionate sensory awareness.

Gurney's synaesthetic images are not all celebratory, however. Some of the most effective reflect the misery and physical hardship he endures during the war, or simply physical discomfort. 'A toothache sky, a cruelty without frost' is one example, adding another sensory dimension to a poem whose visual imagery of clouds is impressive.

Winter keeps high pale skies and cirrus wisps,
Winter puts pressed-flower clouds out and all over sky clasps
A frozen expressionless dull steely cloak of cloud
Under which no brave bird complains aloud:

2

1. Severn and Somme p 61

2. *ibid*

If Gurney's poems are pigeon-holed, as has sometimes been the case, into poems only concerned with war, or topography, there is a danger that these qualities will appear disparate and quirky, whereas on re-reading Gurney's writing as an exposition of a developing consciousness of self at given points in place and time, aspects of style and form can be seen to be neatly interlinked. Furthermore, the significance of the relationship between the nature of the message and the circumstances under which it was given expression can be used constructively, rather than to encourage a reductive and narrow interpretation of Gurney's mental condition. (1).

It is important, too, to recognise that place, time, and circumstance demanded differing responses from Gurney, and one voice would be inadequate to the task. Gurney the poet, Gurney the musician, Gurney the soldier and Gurney both in and away from Gloucestershire all contributed to an expansive, generous, inclusive and all-embracing body of work. The following chapters will explore some of the ways of being and ways of seeing that suggest a complex and heterodox identity.

1. Often wrongly attributed to shell-shock.



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WHT/HK

28th February 1975

Mrs Joyce Finzi
Yew Tree Cottage,
North Heath
Chieveley
Berkshire

Dear Mrs Finzi

Sorry to trouble you again so soon, but as I was going through some more of the Gurney manuscripts I discovered a very interesting last page to the song entitled "All the Words That I Utter" (W.B. Yeats). This last page contains only the final bar of the song, but also has a lot of very interesting scrawls by Gurney in which he signs himself by a whole series of names which indicate very clearly his disturbed state of mind at the time, I wondered if I might have your permission to reproduce this page when I write on the subject, with of course, acknowledgements put in whatever form you would like them.

If before seeing the page, you would like to inspect it I will arrange to have a photocopy sent to you.

Since I last wrote to you I have been in correspondence with Mr Peter Bayley, the Master of Collingwood College in Durham who having heard of my interest in Gurney, has written telling me that he and Michael Hurd are going to write a book about Gurney's poetry and music. I think it quite likely they will ask me to write a section on Gurney's mental illness.

Kind regards.

Yours sincerely

W. H. TRETHOWAN

Finzi/Trethowan correspondence prior to Trethowan's article, 'Ivor Gurney's Mental Illness', *Music and Letters*, July 1981.

Chapter Six: Strange Hells.

The idea of war, potent root of myth and symbolism, and wars as specific incidents in history, had been as much a part of Victorian life as for any other generation. The Boer War had been physically remote, but had, according to D.W. Harding in an article on *Propaganda and Rationalisation in War*, provoked very strong feelings.

At that time it appears, the British public did feel jubilant at the suffering of the enemy. J A Hobson speaks of jingoism fed by the most violent appeals to hate and the animal lust of blood.

1

He also points out that British propaganda has always been aimed at interpreting its cause as one of humanitarian ideals against barbarism. Despite public interest and awareness of the Boer war, and mass celebrations at such events as the relief of Mafeking, the most recent wars had been distant and involved, often, cultures and people that seemed equally remote from the British masses. Now, with fighting on the Western Front, it was frighteningly close to home. It was psychologically closer to home, too, in the fact that 'the enemy' was of similar European stock. War as an abstract notion, or the subject of epic poetry depicting heroic deeds in ancient civilisations, or adventure stories, offered no language by which to understand some of the practical manifestations of the First World War. 'War' after all, in the poetic tradition had meant anything from border skirmishes to diplomatic posturing. Eric Leed in No Man's Land talks about the integration of warfare, trade, and normal social life in "primitive"

1. Scrutiny, Vol. iv, No. 1, June 1935.

(that is pre-industrialised) society and quotes Roger Caillois' comment that

Wars in primitive society ...lack impressiveness and magnitude ...interludes , expeditions for hunting raiding or vengeance. They constitute a permanent state that forms the fabric of existence.

1

The critical response to the poetry and verse that was produced in its millions in literary interpretations of the war, varied enormously, even in its own time. Contemporary critics were divided. Yeats distanced himself from many of his contemporaries by deliberately excluding all First World War poetry from The Oxford Book of Modern Verse 1892 -1935

of which he was the editor. In the introduction to his selection he confessed to

a distaste for certain poems written in the midst of the great war; they are in all anthologies, but I have substituted Herbert Read's *End of a War* written long after. The writers of these poems were invariably officers of exceptional courage and capacity.....their letters are vivid and humorous , they were not without joy - for all skill is joyful - but felt bound, in the words of the best known, to plead the suffering of their men.

2

He argued that 'passive suffering is not a theme for poetry' and that the poets who wrote directly of the war experience were not detached enough from the experience itself to allow language and form to transcend it in the objective way that poetry demands. A pre-occupation with form and style must inevitably be at odds with the attitudes expressed not only by critics but by writers, who, like Owen professed

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1. No Man's Land p 41
 2. Oxford Book of Modern Verse

The language Gurney uses in this retrospective poem is strong and assertive. The plosives in 'bear', 'brings on', 'base' and 'bring down' emphasise this. They are neatly balanced. 'Bear' and 'brings on' are reflected in 'base' and 'bring down' in the following line. He speaks of 'agony', when many writers or historians described the aftermath of the war, or even the way it was conducted at the time, in terms like 'mismanaged', 'deception', 'inability to comprehend'. The agony of false history shows Gurney's refusal to compromise, and is a much more effective way of describing how ordinary people ('folk') must have felt. To 'bring on' and 'bring down', have connotations of Divine Wrath, or at the very least, something portentous, again reinforcing the strong imagery and emphasising the helplessness of the personae ('we') of the poem. This is not, however, a passive voice. It offers the challenge, in 'Tell the truth', 'Make our lives loved', but the language becomes more fluid, in the echoed 'ls' of 'tell', 'lives', 'loved', and the long vowels in 'hope', 'peace', and 'heart's peace', using both form and content to show different values and aspirations.

For the reading public, buying war poetry was often an act of remembrance as well as patriotism. Perhaps, too, it was an attempt to understand some of the realities of war of which they had no first hand experience. For those publishing some of the hundreds of posthumously produced slim volumes of verse, often with little recognisable literary merit, it was an act of validation. This was a way of saying that a loved one had not died in vain, and finding a tiny shred of immortality, attempting to dignify what must otherwise have seemed like completely purposeless death and loss, with the invocation of 'sacrifice', 'nobility' and 'for the love and safety of those at home'.

Writing verse was also part of the propaganda machine that became increasingly sophisticated during the course of the war. Patriotic verses appeared regularly in newspapers, (sometimes in response to competitions, but frequently commissioned and again with varying degrees of literary merit). A typical example is a poem that appeared in The War Budget, a popular fortnightly bulletin published in magazine form throughout the war. Lord Derby had introduced conscription on January 27th 1916, and this poem was published some weeks later in the volume that appeared on April 6th 1916. It was written by a woman, Regina Miriam Bloch, and begins with an epigram quoting Lovat Fraser "Rome repeatedly made peace with the Barbarians only to find them at last thundering at her gates."

It has a refrain to chide the slow to join up, ending the second stanza with 'Who would let the Blonde Beast conquer,/ Who would shirk and stay at home?'

The poem epitomises the propagandist verse, relying on stock images of brutality and playing on a mixture of fear and nationalism. It offers simplistic choices between 'Attila and Christ', and a simplistic rhyme scheme of end rhyming couplets, to gain popular appeal with a wide audience not a particularly literary one. It has a rousing, marching rhythm and employs all the devices to persuade its readers to join up. It invokes the touchstone of history and a sense that since there has always been war, it is part of the human condition. It is xenophobic, ('The Assyrian cold and cruel', 'Turkish hordes') in a general way, and specifically with regard to Germans ('Huns', 'the Blonde Beast'). It uses portentous and elevated language, ('O ye', 'wars of blood-red lords') and religion to put pressure on young men to enlist. It takes a

moralistic stance, implicit from the beginning since the title of the poem is *The Slackers*, but rising to a crescendo of moral exhortation, in demanding that 'shirkers' join up or forgo the opportunity of resurrection. It offers 'the garden of a better place than this' as consolation to those who will die. It is typical of the jingoistic verses of its kind, and compared with some of the privately printed volumes, and even with poems published by established poets, because this kind of verse appeared in mass circulation periodicals, it reached a huge audience.

It needs to be acknowledged that writing verse was a fashion, a mode of expression that could be compared with the kind of writing that is very much a part of present day prison culture for example. It may be true that most of it has little in common with what is regarded as 'good literature', but it illustrates that a subconscious need to find a language outside everyday speech to give expression and meaning to a painful situation is an almost universal phenomenon. It is interesting that in a culture and social organisation dominated by macho images and emphasis on male power structures, an interest in poetry would be considered effete and provoke peer group derision outside that environment, and yet 'inside', verses that are popular attain the status of currency, being passed around and traded to be sent to wives and girlfriends (1). This situation has a resonance with many contemporary accounts from the First World War, where soldiers 'borrowed' phrases from each other to impress those at home.

1. Personal observations from working in prisons.

Examples of popular verse can also be seen in the countless numbers of postcards produced with chromolithographed photographs fading into a mist overprinted with verse at the bottom. These were often issued as a series, to be collected like cigarette cards. They serve as another illustration of the way verse was used as propaganda, in that many of them were exhortations to men to join up, and do their duty, but also emphasise the fact that rhyme and rhythmic language were stirring, or expressive of emotions too difficult to convey an informal register. (1).

War poetry then, meant many different things. For Yeats it was an extravagant expression of emotion not to be confused with literature. For the State, and other agencies that were part of the 'war industry' it was a vehicle for propaganda. For many women, writing about their experience both on the Home Front and abroad, the war gave rise to a body of writing that has been sadly neglected. (2). For many present day readers however, the poetry of the First World War means almost exclusively poetry written by 'soldier poets' either during the war itself or as a direct result of it. With increasing interest in poets like Ivor Gurney and Isaac Rosenberg, 'soldier poet' no longer means 'officer poet'.

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1. A typical example is "Farewell! My Soldier Boy! (2) *"We shall not say "goodbye" laddie, just au-revoir, farewell!/Good luck to all your comrades and you, 'mid shot and shell;/It's hard to let you go, but oh, my love, the joy/When you come marching homeward, farewell, my soldier boy."* Number 4886/2 of a series produced by Bamforth and Co.
 2. There is very little available of the poetry or novels of the First World War written by women. Few poems by women were included in anthologies, and most of the collections by single authors did not go beyond the first print run.

As writers, soldier poets drew on traditions that pertained to 'war' itself - the universal qualities of heroism, nobility, and adventure, as well as fear and destruction. As writers from the early twentieth century, they brought with them the sensibilities, values and aspirations that owed much to the direction being taken by writers who were influential, as well as techniques and styles developing within groups or 'movements' on the eve of the war in 1914.

It was a mixed and paradoxical inheritance. Movements in Europe, in the United States, and in Gurney's England, had been looking in very different directions to find form and expression for their times. There is much in Gurney's work that has to be identified closely with the Georgian ethos, when discussed in relation to his poetry of place and landscape (see next Chapter), but important though it was in the Edwardian era on the eve of the First World War, it was by no means the only influential movement. Futurism, as a movement primarily concerned with the visual arts rejected the hypnotic, and it claimed, stultifying, effect of the past and looked to 'a life of steel, fever, pride and headlong speed' to replace it. (1) A manifesto drawn up in 1914 attacked movements and sentiments that had at their very hearts the romanticisation of history and tradition, sometimes constructed for the purpose, typified by the Pre-Raphaelites, the Aestheticists like Oscar Wilde, ideologies that underpinned the interest in garden cities, and the arts and crafts revivals. They wanted change in the form of a Machine Age, not in a mundane and utilitarian format reproducing the industrialisation process, but a situation where technical achievement is accorded respect as a kind of beauty separate from mere function. ('a racing car is more beautiful than the Victory of Samothrace') (2). A parallel in literature was the Imagist stance against the 'kettles and

firelight' cosiness of the Georgians. The Imagist pre-occupation with tightness of form, avoidance of the merely decorative in language, precision and clarity based on everyday speech not elevated poetic diction, and the freedom to take any subject as a matter suitable for poetic expression, may in fact have had more in common with trends in poetry written in the trenches than is at first recognised. Certainly rejecting elevated 'poetic diction', in favour of the direct and accessible in the common register of everyday speech was a development acknowledged in poetry as the war progressed.

Paradoxically however, the upsurge of patriotism observed when war was first declared opened the floodgate to a stream of often mawkishly sentimental verse. Frank Swinnerton commented that it had provoked

articles by professors, near-professors, and literary romantics who detested Realism, Futurism, *Blast*, and tranquility. They said with one accord, that the war would prove the salvation of English letters. It would purge us of evil humours, and release a stream of pure poetry which had been too long muddied by science, meticulousness, and nonsense.

3

The Times Literary Supplement reviewing Ivor Gurney's War's Embers on August 7th 1919, predicted that

Shocked and bewildered by so monstrous an eruption as the war minds with any touch of mysticism in them threw their trust upon that which is outside reason. We shall find in the next decade probably a good harvest of mystical poetry.

4

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1. Umberto Boccioni, quoted in *The Arts in Britain in WW1*, John Ferguson p 11
 2. Ibid.
 3. Frank Swinnerton, *Background with Chorus* p 175 quoted in The Georgian Revolt Robert H Ross, Chapter on War and the Georgians p141
 4. *Times Literary Supplement*, Untitled review, 7th August 1919.

The Georgian movement continued to produce and publish under the aegis of Edward Marsh, throughout the war, but the war itself inevitably affected the way writing was to develop in subsequent years. It is impossible to know what direction literary styles might have succeeded the Georgians had the war not happened.

If it was impossible to predict what direction literature might take in the years ahead, and impossible to determine retrospectively how it might have been otherwise, one thing that can be noted is that expectations were different at the onset of war from those held as the war progressed.

Anthologies of verse were produced from a very early stage in the war - the first appeared in 1914, and in elevated language entirely congruent with the kind of poetry it contained, the anonymous author of the introduction says,

In the stress of a nation's peril some of its greatest songs are born. In the stress of a nation's peril the poet at last comes into his own again, and with clarion call he rouses the sleeping soul of the empire. Prophet he is, champion and consoler.....here to strengthen, comfort and inspire.

1

It is too simplistic a view to regard the early outpourings as necessarily idealistic and later writings as cynical, disillusioned and condemnatory. It is possible to find examples throughout the whole war period where quasi-religious modes of expression, or archaic diction offer little criticism of external events, but reduce the mess, the untidiness, the mutilation and deaths to symbols of sacrifice. They present a sanitised version of the physicality of war, perhaps as the only way of co-existing with it. This is not to say that there are no changes in tone, because of

1. Songs and Sonnets for England in War Time, London 1914. Introduction pp v-vi, quoted in *Casebook*, p 31

course there are perceptible changes and developments, but they are more likely to be the result of personal experience, than a consistent trend across the whole genre of war poetry.

Frank Swinnerton gives the example of Robert Nichols and Gilbert Frankau,

Neither rendered, or sought to render, what to other and later soldier-poets was the dreary monotony of hopeless routine or the shocking waste of young life and young enthusiasm.

1.

Of Nichols he says

He did not reach the stage of protest; perhaps he would never have reached it, so sanguine and thrilling is his temper.

2

Although Swinnerton's critical writing started with a study of George Gissing in 1912, and he was an influential literary critic, The Georgian Literary Scene was first published in 1935, some 17 years after the end of the First World War, and is not contemporary, in the sense of *immediate*, criticism. It also serves as an interesting illustration of the way fashions change. Swinnerton for example makes not even a passing reference to Ivor Gurney, but clearly admires Nichols' attempts at onomatopoeic renderings of the noises of battle, but Dominic Hibberd writing the introduction to Poetry Of The First World War forty six years later, says that Nichols is remembered for his trench poems and they are often considered to be embarrassingly bad.

A new reading of Gurney needs, therefore, to set his work against the background of 'war poetry', 'Georgian poetry', and 'War as an historical

1. The Georgian Literary Scene, p 240
2. *ibid*

event'. Ivor Gurney referred to himself as a 'War Poet', and that is how he is often described and remembered, notwithstanding the fact that his early reputation was that of musician. The term serves as a suitable peg upon which to hang at least one area of discussion of his work, whilst acknowledging, and indeed emphasising, that the breadth and focus of his oeuvre is denied if he is regarded *only*, or *primarily*, as a war-poet. It is more useful to consider the label of 'War Poet' as evidence of Gurney's pre-occupation with identity, than to use it to categorise his poems.

Gurney himself felt that poets should acquit themselves well in the theatre of war. In his poem *To The Poet Before Battle*, a sonnet written in response to Rupert Brooke's war sonnets, it clearly matters very much to him that poets should be seen to play their part,

Remember thy great craft's honour, that they may say
Nothing in shame of poets. Then the crumbs
Of praise the little versemen joyed to take
Shall be forgotten; then they must know we are,
For all our skill in words, equal in might
Make the name of poet terrible in just war.

1

It is an early poem, published in the Royal College of Music Magazine in 1915, before being published in Severn and Somme, which was Gurney's first collection of poems published by Sidgwick and Jackson in 1917. There is a sense of solidarity in his collective treatment of poets, that perhaps mirrors the solidarity of people who enlisted as an occupational group (2)

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1. Severn and Somme p 23
 2. From boiler-makers to stockbrokers. In April 1915, for example the 10th Royal Fusiliers was largely recruited from the London Stock Exchange. (*The War Budget*, 24th April, 1915. Enlistment was also done on a regional basis, until legislation later in the war (1916)

It also has interesting resonances with the sense of community associated with mediaeval crafts and guilds. With Gurney a sense of tradition is never far away.

This is not a poem that idealises war, but there is a paradoxical tone to it, offering as it does, on the one hand, not quite a pastiche but perhaps something that could be regarded as an ironic riposte to Brooke's elevated diction in *Sonnets 1914*, combined with a sincere plea to recognise the equal right to respect earned by poets. In a letter to Marion Scott, dated August 3rd 1915, this is explained,

The sonnet of R.B. you sent me, I do not like. It seems to me that Rupert Brooke would not have improved with age.

1.

In Gurney's poem there is a process, if not of idealisation of war, a recognition that even within a situation mostly bad, some good or the potential for good, can be extracted from it. It is a poem that hovers on the brink of being idealistic, and provides an example where knowledge of the context in which it was written, and the writers own comments help to make judgement easier. Words like 'battle', 'crown of honour', 'bugles' and 'just war', are stereotypes and euphemisms that serve to distance the reader, and perhaps the writer, from the actual experience of the war. It is a device sometimes used as a deliberate refusal to engage with war and the war process, but can equally be born of ignorance and inexperience, a fact reflected in the early work of many poets, prior to being engaged on active service. (This was the case with Gurney in 1915, and it was to be another nine months before he and the 2/5th Gloucesters went into active service.) The poem manages to combine stereotypical language with the very

direct and descriptive 'When mere noise numbs/The sense of being, the fear-sick soul doth sway,'. It also uses the onomatopoeic 'tattle and rattle of the rolling drums' in the version Gurney wrote to Marion Scott, although this appears in both the Kavanagh collection and Severn and Somme as 'rattle of the rolling drums'.

However, Gurney's somewhat oblique point of view - writing about what war does in terms of valuing poets - lifts this poem out of the ordinary. In the contrast between 'poet' and 'little versemen', Gurney is acknowledging that for some people in some circumstances, not all experiences born of war are bad. The small crumbs of praise that so pleased those writers who were only versemen, not really poets at all, will be replaced by real praise for the worthy poetry that will somehow be the by-product of war. Implicit in this sentiment is the suggestion that war will make men more honourable and therefore better poets. This echoes the view widely, but not universally, held and promoted amongst the reading public of the day, that anything written out of the experience of war must be valued not only in terms of historical and personal witness, but as worthy literature too.

It is also highly likely that Gurney had seen the satirical verses poking fun at poets, published in periodicals like the New Statesman, and the Egoist.

At the sound of the drum
Out of their dens they come, they come,
The little poets we hoped were dumb,
The little poets we thought were dead,
The poets who certainly haven't been read.....

1

Robert Ross suggests that although attributed to 'Herbert Blenheim', this was a nom-de-plume for John Squire or possibly Richard Aldington.

1. The Georgian Revolt p 142

The book itself, Severn and Somme has an interesting preface. The title page gives the epithet *Private, of the Gloucesters* under the author's name, giving it the appearance of so many similar soldiers' volumes, but the preface is written very informally. It has an almost conversational style,

This book stands dedicated to one only of my friends, but there are many others to whom I would willingly dedicate singly and in state, if that did not mean the writing of forty books of verse and dedications - a terrible thing for all concerned.

So that, under the single name and sign of homage and affection, I would desire such readers as come to me to add also:

To my father and mother; F.W. Harvey (also a Gloucestershire lad); To Miss Marion Scott, whose criticism has been so useful, and she so kind, in spite of my continued refusal to alter a word of anything; the Vicar of Twigworth; Herbert Howells (and this is not the last time you will hear of him); Mr Hilaire Belloc, whose "Path to Rome" has been my trench companion, with "The Spirit of Man"; Mr Wilfred Gibson, author of "Friends", a great little book; many others also, including Shakespeare and Bach, both friends of mine, and, last but not least, my comrades of two platoons of the -/- Gloucesters, who so often wondered whether I were crazy or not.

1

There is a marked contrast in style and tone in the humour and informality of Gurney's preface compared with the preface to The Undying Splendour by J.W. Streets, which is referred to by Dominic Hibberd in The Casebook as typical of its kind, and which was published in the same year as Severn and Somme. The preface was written by Galloway Kyle of The Poetry Review,

Here the soul of young England is revealed. Here we see the wakening to duty and the Vision Splendid which led noble spirits by a horrible road to the redemption of a world grown grey with doubt and timidity and evils too grievous to be longer borne. Here the Kitchener's men become articulate, and in passionate sincerity a son of the people with that perfected utterance and intensity of emotion which distinguishes poetry above all literature and redeems from decay the speech of the Divine in man to men, concentrates in a few sonnets the feelings, experiences, aspirations of the youth who have marched through death

1. Severn and Somme Preface p19

to the moral and material salvation of Europe. Here is one of the finest of the countless examples of the heroic in literature provided by the war - literature translated into action, action infused with calm seriousness and interpreted into poetry.

1

Sergeant Streets was a Lancashire coal-miner before the war and had 'sought before the war to give literary expression to the life he knew [in] a long poem dealing with coal-mining' (2) . Galloway Kyle undercuts his paean of praise for 'perfected utterance' and the redemption from decay of the Divine in man to men, when he goes on to say that

This realism - no pseudo-stuff, artificially sought out for literary purposes - was developed by the war.....

3

It is perhaps inevitable that since Sergeant Streets was missing presumed dead, the introductions to his small volume of poetry should have an elegiac quality. Gurney was very much alive and fortunate enough to be able to write his own preface, but nevertheless, the lighthearted and conversational tone, drawing the reader into a kind of collusive relationship with his act of dedication to a longer list than simply to the 'one friend' - Margaret Hunt, must have taken the reading public at least mildly by surprise. It is also typical of Gurney that Bach and Shakespeare are regarded as 'friends', just as readers and some of the people he has

1. The Undying Splendour p v

2. Fussell reminds readers that in addition to educational reforms giving rise to an unprecedentedly literate generation, they were also often, 'literary'. The pre-occupation with 'self-improvement' and self education manifested itself in an eagerness for the the classics and literature in general, through the agency of organisations like the National Home Reading Union and Workmen's Institutes (p 157)

3. Op cit. p vi

included in the additional dedication are addressed in a tone that is on the one hand almost, but not quite, addressing them directly, but also a vehicle for Gurney's musing out loud ("Ah, would they only retaliate in kind"). There is an ingenuous honesty too, in the comment that his fellow Gloucesters often wondered whether he was crazy. It is the small differences, juxtapositions of ideas and comments that most writers or readers would not have placed together that have made it difficult to categorise and classify a poet like Ivor Gurney.

One way of interpreting Gurney's war poetry is to regard him not as a critic and protester about war in the way that Sassoon or Owen have been read. This is not to say that Gurney was *uncritical* of the war and its effects, but to recognise that for Gurney protest is rarely the starting point. What appears to happen, is that Gurney lifts war images when he is in the midst of war and turns them to his own purpose - just as he does when he is in Gloucester, and his local surroundings provide the impetus for his poetry. P.J. Kavanagh has described Gurney in an ecstasy of frenzied creativity, and it seems that he takes to hand, avidly, whatever is available.

The combination of *Severn and Somme* is an apt one, and in many poems, including later examples, poems about place are war poems, and poems about war are poignantly effective poems about place. *Strange Service* is a case in point. There is nothing in the poem that speaks specifically of war. It has a gloomy and foreboding presence - 'to do your dreadful service', and 'wrest my soul to serve you/In strange and fearful ways'. are threatening. There is also a poignant sense of being separated from, and outside of,

all that is dear and secure. This comes from the deep fondness not only for the physical landscape of hills and water meadows, but a fondness implied for the concept of England, the Mother, in a patriotic sense no doubt brought to the fore for many writers with the onset of war. The imagery of the second stanza, of dreaming, 'meditating', 'secret beauty' is emphasised by long slow vowels, and the nurturing sheltering qualities attributed to the Mother Country are reinforced by the closed and completed end lines in each stanza - 'miraculously shining', 'safe in its bosom', 'and uses consecrate'. Even in the first stanza, although the sense of the run on third line is about alienation, (by being 'beyond your borders'), the inevitable slight hiatus between this and the short line 'And your enfolding seas', allows the reader to separate one from the other, and be left with a comforting and safe image of 'enfolding seas'. It conveys, in a subtle way, both regret at being beyond safe boundaries, but the opportunity to take comfort from knowing that they exist, and are by implication, timeless and permanent. The reader is left with a strong sense of security in the lingering images of protectiveness that close each stanza. This makes the veiled reference to war all the more effective, because it operates, as it must have done in life for those about to go into active service, as a hidden threat. The completeness of end statements is continued in the final stanza, but the image with which the reader is left, is a prophetic hint of betrayal, a prediction of the impossibility of a happy ending.

Parts of the poem become trite, for example 'shy and tiny streamlets /Safe in its bosom, offers consistency in emphasising security, and has a continuity with the image of motherhood, but is expressed in a disappointingly mundane way, between the meditative second stanza, with its

sense of wonder and beauty, and the very visual 'skyscape' imagery in the fourth stanza. There is a similar shift of tone and mood between the fourth and fifth stanza, which moves from the highly imaginative and unconventional 'skies and rushy sky-pools/Fragile mirrors easily broken by moving airs', to the rather pompous effect of 'Think on me too, O Mother, who wrest my soul to serve you'. It is a poem of mood, moving from observation, to meditation to elation to resignation. The catalyst is the shadowy presence of War.

A similar dark presence casts its shade in *Time and the Soldier*.

How slow you move, old Time;
Walk a bit faster!
Old fool, I'm not your slave...
Beauty's my master!

You hold me for a space...
What are you, Time?
A ghost, a thing of thought,
An easy rhyme.

Some day I shall again,
For all your scheming,
See Severn valley clouds
Like banners streaming.

And walk in Cranham lanes,
By Maisemore go...
But, fool, decrepit fool,
You are SO SLOW!!!

1

Again, there is no direct reference to war, except in the soldier of the title. It has a Shakespearean sense of time, and resonances with Donne, anthropomorphising Time as an old fool, exhorted to walk faster. This is undercut in the second stanza, when the persona of the poem, the soldier,

1. Severn and Somme p 38

who is clearly Gurney himself, admits that the idea only interests him for a time, but again what is left unsaid speaks loudly, and the reader is left with the uneasy knowledge that although in war soldiers may be distracted for a time, the war itself is ever-present. There is regret, and a sense that philosophising is ineffective in the shadow of war, and the stanza ends in self-deprecating musing speculation that perhaps it is only 'an easy rhyme'.

'Time' however, is neither ghost nor Cronos/fate, but war itself. (Or perhaps more precisely, it functions metonymically for 'the time taken up, or wasted, by war'). It is therefore an untrustworthy, perhaps malevolent force, ('scheming'), to be overcome if Gurney is to return to his beloved Gloucestershire, and he is, typically, specific in naming favourite places. He yearns to see familiar skies, or more accurately, clouds over familiar places, and this description is given a subtle resonance by describing the Severn valley clouds 'like banners streaming', suggesting not a mechanised and muddy war, but evoking an image of war stylised as mediaeval pageantry. Gurney compared this poem to the writing of W.H. Davies, "but stronger: and one of my best". (1)

These oblique perceptions and eloquent omissions are characteristic of *many* of Gurney's poems, but not all. He has the ability to surprise, with his directness as much as with his uniqueness of vision. The relatively few poems of Gurney's that have become better known by being included in anthologies or appraisals of First World Poetry, have tended to be in this category, although there is often no distinction made between poems Gurney wrote during the war, and the war poems he wrote after it had ended. John

1. Severn and Somme p 124

Lehmann, for example in The English Poets of the First World War uses *The Silent One*, *The Bohemians* and *To His Love*. Of these, the only one to be published during the war was *To His Love*, in War's Embers, and it provides an interesting transition from the 'silent' depiction of war, to an engagement with the physicality of death and destruction described in a spare and unconventional way.

To His Love

He's gone, and all our plans
Are useless indeed.
We'll walk no more on Cotswold
Where the sheep feed
Quietly and take no heed.

His body that was so quick
Is not as you
Knew it, on Severn river
Under the blue
Driving our small boat through.

You would not know him now...
But still he died
Nobly, so cover him over
With violets of pride
Purple from Severn side.

Cover him, cover him soon!
And with thick-set
Masses of memoried flowers -
Hide that red wet
Thing I must somehow forget.

1

This poem may refer to Gurney's friendship with F.W. Harvey, with whom he walked the Cotswold hills, the Gloucestershire countryside, and sailed in their boat, the 'Dorothy'. Although there are several versions of

1. *ibid* p 76. This is one of several poems that are more widely known through appearing in anthologies. They have therefore received some critical attention. It is important as a war poem but it is also a poem that raises questions of gender and identity and will therefore be re-considered in a later chapter, looking at it from a different perspective. Similar treatment is given to *Buire -au-Bois* and *Sonnet-September 1922*.

this poem in manuscript and typescript, (One incorrectly dated, but later amended by Marion Scott), R. K.R Thornton says in the notes to his re-edition of War's Embers, that Gurney 'knew by this time that Harvey was in fact in a German prison camp'. The poem had originally carried the subtitle "On a dead soldier", suggesting a much less personal poem than would have been the case had it been dedicated, as many of his poems were, to a named person, in this case Harvey. It is probable, given the autobiographical nature of the first two stanzas, that Gurney did indeed write this poem, or at least conceive the idea for it, when he thought that Harvey was dead. There is evidence in the Archive material that there had been several experiments with the second stanza, ('His body that was so quick/Is not as you/Knew it. And I am sick [deletion]/Still at the [deletion].)and he had abandoned a continuation of the flower imagery in the third stanza. The final version combines a strong sense of place, with a poignant comment on what war does, not only to those who die, but to those who survive.

The reader is told immediately that the object of the poem is no longer. There is no ambivalence or slow build up to the news because it is announced unequivocally in the first line, 'He's gone', and emphasised with the hiatus produced by punctuation. The rest of the first five line stanza offers regret for what might have been, and the reference not to topographical detail, but a simple rural image, characteristic of so much of Gurney's writing. The second stanza hints at what must have been a common fact in a war that produced the millions of badly mutilated casualties that happened at the Somme, Ypres, and daily wherever there was shelling and trench warfare. It does not describe the reality of death, or wounding, but pulls back, and again evokes a familiar memory/image. The

third stanza repeats the apparent reluctance to say what has happened, and goes only so far with 'You would not know him now...' but then admits that he has died, and died nobly. There is an interesting use here of the symbolism of violets, often used to represent shyness and modesty, but in this case given the rare collocation of 'pride'. This is reinforced by emphasising their colour - purple - which suggests connotations of mourning as well as nobility.

The key to the poem is in the final stanza. The first line ends on a rising and stressed note, (Cover him, cover im soon!), where the repetition with the addition of 'soon' lends a sense of panic and desperation, revealing the powerful feelings of the persona of the poem, hitherto trying to find ways of conveying the information objectively, but overtaken by memories too distressing to be remembered and too distressing to forget. There is a sudden revelation in 'Hide that red wet/Thing' that explains the reticence of the earlier part of the poem. 'Red' and 'wet', used like this express by association wounds and mutilation. By not attempting to describe what it looks like, or find similes or metaphors for injuries, the reader is left with an impression of complete unrecognisability, emphasised by the depersonalisation of 'Thing'.

There is a similar poem in the Archive, unpublished, that provides a useful comparison with *To His Love. An Ending* also focuses on one dead soldier. Although the lines are longer, the poem has the same rhythm and pace as the other poem and the sequence of thought ('he's dead, he was once full of action, set against landscape/nature, bury/hide him'). In the second poem however, the basic ideas are treated expansively, with conventional images, and a suspicion of mediaeval courtly imagery, in 'lance' and 'pennon',

that suggests glorification of the war.

An Ending

His body lies so still that swift was in flight
As any summer's swallow: and blind to the light
His eyes are that saw with blue eagle glance
The smallest pennon borne aloft on farthest lance.
That pride of him, that power laid low in the dust
Death on him has put strong edict, the dread 'must'
And he has obeyed thereto, as all must sooner or late;
Will ride no more to clatter of hoofs through the gate;
Will take no more the first soft breathings of Spring
With welcome surprisal, nor hear the bird sing
Any more in the midnight brake or see far hung
May's crescent of silver in clear heaven swung.
For these are of earth, far off he may recall
The twin wonders sacred of dayspring and night-fall
With longing hardly to be borne scarce supported
So strong his love was, his faith so great hearted
While we the unworthy watch that pageant change
Of fresh and ruddy odour of pride, the Seasons range;
And he naught knows of any wonder of wide skies
Or May's hedges foaming, fast-closed are his eyes,
Hands folded, limbs loose, pallid unwilling,
His burial awaiting with hot heart stilled;
Passionless, uneager, a story is done.
Let us pile earth to hide him from his Father the Sun,
Raise a stone of honour, weep, turn, and begone.

1
Although the first stanza mirrors the second stanza of *To His Love* / 'His
body lies so still that swift was in flight' and '*His body that was so
quick*', the inversion of syntax, which continues in the next lines give it
an archaic tone, consistent with the lance and pennon imagery, but making
it less direct than the much starker, undecorated / *To His Love*. As a war
poem, *An Ending* is conventional, using the notion for example that the
survivors are 'the unworthy', and the description of the body - 'fast-
closed are his eyes, / Hands folded, limbs loose, pallid, unwilling' - has
more in common with Larkin's *An Arundel Tomb* than the kind of death that
must have been all too evident on the Western Front.

not italics

1. G.A. 42.2 (33)

'Unwilled' is curious in this context, although probably evidence that *with* Gurney often thoughts appeared to embody complex clusters of ideas, based on both cognitive and aural links. 'Unwilled' is effective as a means of expressing that the life-force has gone, (the 'will to live'), but it also has connotations of powerlessness, that reflect the earlier idea that in war, there is 'the dread 'must'' that has to be obeyed, so that personal power and will are subjugated to 'Death's .. edict'. Although there is no date on this poem, it is clearly related to *To His Love*, and therefore probably also relates to F.W. Harvey. If this is so, then 'unwilled' takes on a subtler resonance, as the image of Will Harvey, divested of the qualities that make him who he is, by the destructive force of war. This is the kind of wordplay seen in Shakespeare, and Gurney's letters contain many examples that show his familiarity with this kind of device.

If the cluster of ideas notion is valid, a further dimension to 'unwilled' is the link with the 'lance', 'pride', and 'power' images in the fourth and fifth lines, where in conjunction with this phallic imagery, 'unwilled' takes on the connotation of 'unmanned'. There is a strong sense of repressed or sublimated sexuality in *An Ending*. The body is portrayed very specifically as a dead body, but there are strong hints of physicality and bodily awareness in 'blue eagle glance', 'soft breathings', 'hot heart', and the negatives that simply emphasise their opposite, in 'passionless' and 'uneager'. Juxtaposing 'Love' with 'Faith', and 'strong hearted', in the sixteenth line is an attempt to offset the notion of sexual love, and align it with the 'good' and 'pure' emotions of faith and bravery. At the end of the poem, the burial is conducted with military terseness, reflected in 'Raise a stone of honour, weep, turn, and begone. The need to 'hide him

from his Father the Sun', (1), is dealt with conventionally, 'Let us pile earth', compared with the sensuality of being covered with 'thick-set/ Masses of memoried flowers' and violets of *To His Love*.

To His Love, then, is a war poem that treats the same subject in a much more original way. There is an ambiguity about the stance and perspective of the persona, but the physicality and sensuality of the poem are undeniable, and as statement about death in war it conveys not only the vileness of bodies reduced to an unrecognisable red wet mass, but the searing loss of someone close. Comparing these poems not only highlights the point that Gurney was not a poet with one fixed vantage point or one mode of response. These two pieces are both undeniably 'war poems', but Gurney is dealing with what is probably the same incident, and certainly with the same emotions in two very different ways. The result is one poem where the voice of the soldier speaks more loudly, and death has its official headstone. In the other, the voice of the lover/friend is able to articulate the extreme hurt of losing 'His Love'. Paradoxically, the soldier voice uses the more expansive description, and poetic diction, and the lover voice uses a spare simple tone. (2). As R.K.R. Thornton points out in his editorial notes Gurney had rejected the obviously sentimental by deleting

Blue bells of rich, bright trumpet
Of daffodillies, grace
On grace from most tender musings.

3.

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1. The aural ambiguity of 'Sun' in conjunction with Father is typical of Gurney's 'clang' associations, referred to in Chapter 5.)
 2. This parallels neatly the denial of reality, the wrapping up of the unacceptable, that occurs in relation to place, where 'Arcadian Recourses' deny the reality of appalling destruction in the real surroundings.
 3. Severn and Somme p 139

The fact that these are both 'war poems', but that they offer two subtly different perspectives, shows the formal enactment of the ability, indeed the necessity, for soldiers to keep a part of their existence in parenthesis. (1). Many poems that protest about the war are predicated on the belief that there is a gulf between civilians and soldiers. (2). Gurney's poems however, illuminate the dislocation and individual's inner struggle between civilian identity and soldier identity. (3).

Looking at these two poems together illustrates the difficulty in addressing Gurney's work in a compartmentalised way. The poem *To His Love* is dealt with here as a war poem, but one which embodies the problems associated with identity and Gurney's ontological diversity. It shows how incomplete it is to separate out his poems, or deal with them thematically, and this one is dealt with again in Chapter 9, looking at aspects of identity. Although inevitably some of the critique will overlap, it highlights the necessity to be willing to engage with Gurney's poems from several perspectives in order to understand his work more fully.

The co-existence of two realities shown by comparing the two poems above, and with reference to *Bach and The Sentry*, raise questions about Gurney's treatment of the war in poems written after his return to England, and civilian life. Sassoon writes about the repression of war experience, as well as the horrific and lasting consequences expressed

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1. David Jones' *In Parenthesis* is one of the few works to address this overtly.
 2. Sassoon, for example in *Glory of Women*.
 3. See also comments on *Bach and the Sentry*, in Chapter 9.

in lines like

Those whispering guns - O Christ I want to go out
And screech at them to stop - I'm going crazy;
I'm going stark, staring mad because of the guns.

1

Gurney's relatively early war poem (November 1916) shows the dilemma of what it might be like to try to assimilate war experiences into the fabric of everyday life again. In his case of course, it is also an oblique comment on his own underlying psychological state. Gurney nevertheless predicts the consequences in *Camps*, written in August 1917 in the last line of the first stanza 'We are haunted for ever by the shapes of wars.'

Less complex are poems like the first poem in Severn and Somme. To Certain Comrades, deals with the issue of loss and death in a cooler and more distant voice. This is not to suggest that the poem itself is any less sincere or heartfelt, simply that it is a war poem that has more in common with others of the genre, and one which is a useful example with which to offer an alternative to the homoerotic perception of First World War poetry. It was dedicated to two of the soldiers in the 2/5th Gloucesters who had been killed in action. Gurney wrote to John Haines on 22nd June 1916,

Well the Whatisnames - our gallant regiment - have been
in it a damn sight more than ^{what} they expected, by the Lord.
We are hardened veterans, fed up to the neck, muddy to the
eyes, for the weather is execrable. And like Justice Shallow
we have had losses. Two of the nicest chaps in the whole
crowd killed. And of our very best lieutenants more gone
than I like. So it goes with us. I pray for a nice blighty
very sincerely, but take all possible steps to prevent my
getting one, as is the manner of men.

2

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1. Penguin Book of First World War Poetry p 133
 2. Collected Letters p 106

R.K.R Thornton identifies E.S and J.H. as Private E. Skillern and Private J. Hall who were killed in action on June 21st. (1).

Gurney was adamant that Severn and Somme should have this as the first poem. The only stipulation he made to Marion Scott in discussions about publication, was that this should be the first and it should end with the Sonnetts, in between he was happy to leave to her judgement. The poem itself was originally called *To the Fallen* and dedicated to E.S. It underwent several minor changes (2)) and was published in the RCM Magazine (Vol 12, No 3) in the midsummer term of 1916.

Despite being an early poem, it is a direct and accessible statement. Gurney avoids the use of 'thee' and 'thou', and connects with the reader rather than distancing himself, by using the very direct and, in effect, collusive, 'we'. He avoids the stereotypical uses of 'noble' , and although he uses notions of 'glory' and 'honour' they are presented in a much more prosaic way than in poems like the 1917 Sonnets or *To The Poet Before Battle*, for example. In this poem, he writes of 'plain strength', truth of heart', splendid coolness', which all imply a much more realistic view of war, born of experience. Oxymoron is used as a device to put notions of glory into a different perspective, and it becomes 'sad glory' and 'glad in their sorrow'.

1. Typographical error in notes to Severn and Somme gives date of death as 21st June 1917 not 1916.

2. Discussed in Notes to Severn and Somme p 118

Perhaps the most striking point about much of Gurney's war poetry, written during the war itself, is the way in which he evokes the grinding wearisomeness of endless tasks and endless physical discomfort. This is not to say that the tone is always bitter or complaining, although those tones are there as part of the orchestration. The effectiveness comes from memorable lines that observe situational ironies, and describe them in an original way. In *At Reserve Depot*, for example,

The passers-by carelessly amused will see
Breakfastless boys killing the patient sack.

1

and in the five *Sonnets 1917*,

Pain, pain continual: pain unending;
...
 Grey monotony lending
Weight to the grey skies, grey mud where goes
An army of grey bedrenched scarecrows in rows
....
Seeing the pitiful eyes of men foredone,
Of horses shot, too tired merely to stir
Dying in shell-holes both, slain by the mud

2

there is an unremitting grimness that destroys just as surely as shells. In the second example, men are reduced to a situation no better than animals, and it is the endless grey mud that kills. These are the qualities that led Blunden to regard Gurney's as one of the most authentic voices of war on the Western Front.

Some anthologists have implied that Gurney's delusions blurred the boundaries and that in his later years, he wrote as if the war was still going on. This is patently not the case. Although his poems about war,

1. *Severn and Somme* p 66
2. *ibid* p 50

written retrospectively, have a wealth of detail that gives them a sense of immediacy, and are so often written in the first person, so that Gurney is always attached and involved, they are certainly not written as if the war had not ended. They re-create what it felt like, and in doing so, Gurney often uses similar techniques to those he uses in his earlier poems. In *Swift and Slow*, for example, he uses army slang 'tweedle-dees and handy-danders, and in *On Somme*, he recreates the memory of the noise of these missiles in the repetition of 'thudding and thudding', to convey the fear they produced. Even the memories of quieter times however, have enough close detail to make them seem very close, as in *Signallers*, remembering 'the grease and skilly of line-cookhouse tea', and the terrible irony in

Signallers, gentlemen, all away from the vulgar
Infantry - so dull and dirty and so underpaid,
So wont to get killed and leave the cautious signallers
To signal down the message that they were dead.

1

Some of Gurney's most evocative poems about war were the later poems, as if in the same way that happened with novels written about the war, many were produced after a period of years in which to process the experience . (2). Poems like *The Bohemians*, or *Varennas* chronicle the tedious incidents of army life, but with great humanity. There are accounts of people who 'Preferred their hair long, putties comfortable' and of petty wangling - 'Lying about chocolate to C Company hammering the gate/Pitying them for their parade^s all the morning through', that convey the minutiae of human existence during the war as effectively as the poems that were written while it was happening.

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1. *Collected Poems* p 175
 2. It is a myth that no significant fiction appeared in the immediate post-war period, but many of the most interesting and well known ones appeared during the 1920s. (ref. Hugh Cecil's paper at 1984 WW1 Archive Conference, Sunderland.

The most significant aspect, however, with regard to Gurney's war poetry, as with everything else he wrote, is the weaving together of his war experience and his sense of 'spoiled identity' (1). He constantly reiterates his feelings about the omnipresence of his 'neurasthenia'. In *Riez Bailleul*, for example, as well as being taking part in the mundane aspects of existence, shown in the prosaic description of looking out over cabbage fields and hearing the noise of cooking, he is painfully aware of being 'sick of body and heart,/ Too sick for anything but hoping that all might depart-' and says that 'This is not a happy thought, but a glimpse most strangely/Forced from the past, to hide this pain and work myself free'. Even the thudding of shells in *On Somme*, he acknowledges 'was illness' own'. This does not make the poems any less effective as war poems, but it makes it vital to re-read them as something more than that; they are statements of his ontological diversity and evidence of his constant striving to make a coherent wholeness out of a multiplicity of co-existent possibilities.

1. Goffman's term, see Chapter 9.

Tragedy of the Trees: War's Living Memorials



A page of war-wrack. In the first picture is a soldier trying to make himself at home at Earthquake Corner, determined that war's crumbling ruins shall not interfere with his personal tidiness. On the right is one of nature's memorials of the war, battered and twisted but still alive to point out the path of destruction. Officially, the bottom scene is a village, but actually not one stone is left upon another.

"You cannot think how ghastly these battle-fields look under a grey sky. Torn trees are the most terrible things I have ever seen. Absolute blight and curse is on the face of everything." Severn and Somme p 48
Photographs from THE WAR BUDGET, November 16th 1916.

CHAPTER SEVEN. Ypres - Minsterworth.

*Landscape may exist, rock and tree and red earth,
and the shine of water. But it is a very personal
affair, the affair of one man and the world.*

1

Ivor Gurney's poems of place are affairs of the heart, the soul and the mind. The whole of his being is wrapped in a sense of place that encompasses far more than locus, focus or temporary resting place. It is a complex nexus that expresses Gurney's openness to beauty, (and pain at its destruction), values, spirituality, as well as location.

Gurney, like Hardy, creates poetry out of the place names themselves. The same names appear again and again, - Crickley, Maisemore, Minsterworth, are part of his poems so often, if not as the subject as an aside, a fleeting comparison, a memory, that it is impossible to read Gurney's work without having a strong sense of location. Gurney fixes a large proportion of his work very firmly in Gloucestershire. Even the territory outside and beyond takes Gloucestershire as its reference point - it is the land that can be seen from the Gloucestershire hills,

Singing a mile off in the young oaks that wake to look to Wales,
Dream and watch Severn ...

2

or it reminds Gurney of Gloucestershire,

The copse was like a Cranham copse with scythed curve -
In a month violets would bloom, but no Birdlip swerve
Meet our eyes.....

3

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1. Places of the Mind p 98
 2. Collected Poems p 191
 3. ibid p 132

Despite the apparent specificity of naming places that become hauntingly familiar even to the reader who has never visited them, Gurney's poems of place are never 'topographical' or 'geographical' in style. Indeed, most of the minutiae of detail other poets use to describe a specific location are usually missing from Gurney's poems. F.W. Harvey for example, in *After Long Wandering*, and *My Village* gives a clearer picture of some aspects that typify particular parts of Gloucestershire and could apply to no other

.....the splendid hush
When the Great Bore (grown breathless) 'ere he turns
Catches his wind; and nothing on the thick
Tide moves; and you can hear your watch's tick.

I love old Minsterworth. I love the men:
The fishers and the cider-makers and
All who laugh and labour on that land

1

Edward Thomas's *Adlestrop* for example, looks to the distant 'farther and farther, all the birds/Of Oxfordshire and Gloucestershire' but focusses on small details too, in 'the bare platform' and the wild flowers at its edge. He suggests location in *But These Things Also* by attention to small detail

The shell of a little snail bleached
In the grass ; chip of flint, and mite
Of chalk; and the small birds' dung
In splashes of purest white.

2

It is in the choice of words like 'flint', and 'chalk', that he suggests the type of landscape he is describing, and gives readers other clues

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1. F.W. Harvey: Soldier, Poet p 12
 2. Poetry of Place p 116

about the appearance of the terrain in 'bleached'. But, evocative though small details may be, a pre-occupation with lichens is not in itself enough, as Grigson demonstrates eloquently in his essay on *Meanings of Landscape* in Places of the Mind, and Gurney rarely takes this approach. Ironically, the poems where he gives the most attention to small visual details are often those 'urban' rather than 'rural', for example *London Dawn*, which probably has more in common with Eliot than with Hardy

Lockhart's shows lively up Blackfriars Lane
Motors dash by
With 'Mirrors', 'Mails', 'Telegraphs', what not?
South shore of Thames on London shows a blot
And first careful coffee-stall is withdrawn.

1

In a short article in *New Statesman and Society*, Colin Ward asks the question "Why do we love or hate or feel a resigned indifference towards our immediate physical environment: the house, street, town or city?" He argues that this is an important question, but one which has been marginalised in academic disciplines. He quotes (in a neologism that would not have looked out of place in one of Gurney's letters!) the term *topophilia*, coined to describe an emotional attachment to places, and, significantly, goes on to point out that although there is

denunciatory literature about what went wrong with post-war towns and cities, and while pre-war urban sensations are buried in nostalgic fantasy, there is only a highly specialist collection analysing our feelings for places. We have to rely on poets, novelists, travel writers and topographers.

2

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1. Collected Poems p 61
 2. New Statesman and Society, 21st May 1993, p 26.

This suggests that the poetry of place needs to be examined in wider terms, and Gurney's work lends itself to this kind of scrutiny.

Firstly, Gurney uses place names in a way that is both celebratory and incantatory. He invokes the names of places he loves almost as though he were invoking the names of 'the old Gods'. There is a similarity here with the way William Empson describes Wordsworth's response to Nature.

Wordsworth seems to have two main ways of symbolising Nature, which correspond roughly to father and mother. The mountains of Westmoreland are symbols of morality, the proper and therefore natural way of life, the permanent tradition of the country ...they tend to be addressed as local deities.... and behind them is God. Nature as a whole appears pantheistically as the nurse of all life.

1

If Nature, place and nation are not synonymous, they are both interwoven and symbiotic. Just as Nature and Westmoreland are touchstones for Wordsworth, Nature and Gloucestershire are for Gurney. For both it is the sense that it is their own territory, and they feel part of it, that gives Nature in their own part of the world such power.

Many of his poems and letters address places directly, ('O Framilode', 'O lovely city') or express Gurney's attachment in jubilant and spontaneous outbursts, sometimes included parenthetically, as in

From Crickley seen or Cooper's, my dear lane
That holds all lane-delightfulnesses there
(O Maisemore's darling way!)
Framilode, Frampton, Dymock, Minsterworth...
You are the flower of villages in all earth!

2

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1. Some Versions of Pastoral p 188
 2. Collected Poems p 52

It becomes a quasi-religious tone in some poems, as for example in the unpublished *Palm*,

Will they not gather willowherb when the heat
Of the summer makes Severn like a low street.
Priests, let us gather wealth of Michaelmas daisies
At the true time - to give God and Gloucestershire praises.

1

The priests, it is clear from the earlier stanzas, are devotees of Gloucestershire, not ministers of religion. (In fact, the reader may feel that were it not for considerations of euphony, God would have taken second place in the fourth line!). Praising his beloved Gloucestershire verges on worship, but frequently carries with it a note of supplication, as if Gurney is asking for something in exchange. This is apparent in many poems that invoke England the Mother.

The metaphor itself is a common one that became a visual and literary cliché during the course of the war. (1). England is the Mother-Country in countless patriotic verses by well known poets as well as the hundreds of would-be poets who used this image. Gurney uses stereotypical imagery and language in some of the early poems, for

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1. Anthropomorphism of England/Britannia, portrayed as a nurturing sheltering force, as well as deified, and therefore to be honoured, was a common image in cartoons (eg Punch, *The War Illustrated*, *The War Budget inter alia*). This was mirrored in portrayals of France as a Joan of Arc figure, and often, 'brave little Belgium' as a female but heroic waif. Germany was almost invariably depicted as male, aggressive, or pictured as a bear or monster. Nevertheless, the relationship with a female figure was problematic because it was 'she' who was responsible for sending soldiers to war in the first place. Some theorists, (see Gilbert, Gubar, Leed), suggest that later in the war, notions of England/Mother as haven and respite become confused, and death itself is regarded as 'friend' and 'haven' to be desired and deliberately sought, because the certainty of it is preferable to the strain of not knowing when and how death will happen.

example in Severn and Somme, in *Afterwards*, ('Those dreadful evidences of Man's ill doing/ The kindly Mother of all shall soon hide deep'), in *Strange Service* ('Think on me too, O Mother, who wrest my soul to serve you'), and very specifically in *England the Mother*, ('We have done our utmost, England, terrible/And dear taskmistress, darling mother and stern'). Used in this way, England becomes a power rather than a place, and in later poems there is a sense that the demands for recompense and honour have become symptomatic of Gurney's mental condition.

Certainly Gurney's patriotism, and desire to serve his country, is inextricably bound up with his feeling for his county. For him, England is Gloucestershire, and Gloucestershire is England - homeland is homeland. Separation from it was poignant and painful, and Gurney was homesick before he had left the country, writing to Marion Scott in 1915, from Chelmsford

Well, my 5 days leave is past and over, and Gloster's delicate colours, long views and sea breezes are the whole breadth of England away. That soil bore me and *must ever draw my dreams and* must for ever be home to me. It is to be torn up by the roots for me to live flatly in a flat marsh like Essex....

1

The French countryside sometimes held its compensations. Writing to Marion Scott on October 8th 1916, he says

But how good to see ^{the} poplars against the clear west!
There's a great Autumn wind raging outside, and freezing my feet in this barn. "Le Matin" and "Le Petit Parisien" flap about helplessly and the chicken feathers ruffle up. A day to love, and to walk the Cotswolds in. How the leaves must be flying on Cranham, and up and down and round in swirls on Portway! Painswick Beacon will stand as high and

1. Collected Letters p 42

immovable as ever, and Birdlip too; I can do without them. But O for the wild woods and the leaves flying!

1

"I can do without them" was for Gurney a rare note of bravado, but his appreciation of beauty and craftsmanship gave him a genuine admiration for aspects of France not always shared by his fellow soldiers.

how well and lovingly they build! France will not erect ugly little tinpot churches all over her tiny towns, but will have one great church worthily built in an open space. Our men do not speak well of the French towns, but all their comminations and cursings come down to the simple ground-objection that there are no picture palaces. They will remember the quiet grace of these farms, and towns and villages, when apres le gore, they reach their own badly built, evilly conceived, wilfully-carelessly planned conglomerations of houses, and see vistas of grey depressing slate roofs, and terrible fever-visions of desirable villas.

2

His fellow soldiers may not have shared Gurney's appreciation of French architecture and landscape, but they shared the homesickness he so often confesses in his letters. Commenting with humour and affection about the execrable musical taste of the men in his unit, he says

they are given to singing the most doleful-sentimental^f songs. One of the worst of which is a lamentable perpetration called "For he's a Ragtime Soldier", which they love to sing on the march after being relieved. We are all fed up. How fed up you must gather from the fact that anyone who mentions home is howled down at once

3

1. Collected Letters p 153

2. *ibid* p 140

3. *ibid* p 125

A strong identification with 'home' was reinforced by the practice of enlisting men from areas and keeping them together. An anachronistic idiosyncrasy in legislation in the 1907 Act (Territorial Forces) made it illegal to transfer men from one unit to another. Early in the war, therefore, there was a strong sense of regional solidarity. Battalions later lost their particularly local quality as heavy casualties had to be replaced by conscripts from elsewhere. For example in the 1st Buckinghamshire Regiment in early 1916, seventy per cent of men were from Buckinghamshire, but after replacement of casualties in 1917/18, only thirty eight per cent were from that area. (1). Gurney's pride in the 2nd/5th Gloucesters is made clear in many of his letters and poems, (2), and his comradeship with men who shared a common heritage is nowhere more apparent than in *Crickley Hill*.

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1. Dr Ian Beckett, The Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst in a paper given at the First World War Conference, Sunderland Polytechnic, September 1984. Propaganda was also a factor in strong regional identification. For example postcards with slogans like "I had rather be a doorkeeper in the County of than dwell in the tents of the Huns" were mass produced with the space crudely overprinted with each county's name to appeal to soldiers' regional loyalties.
 3. Despite Gurney's disclaimer in the Preface to Severn and Somme that "those who buy the book (or even borrow) to get information about the Gloucesters will be disappointed".

The poem is interesting because it shows the pluralism of Gurney's vision. It is a war poem that is undeniably celebratory in tone, and the focus is on Gloucester. The war context is implicit only by the inclusion of Buire-au-Bois and 'a soldier'. In fact the poem is so determinedly looking away from the kind of spoiled landscape that must have been very close, both geographically and in the mind, that it suggests, in Paul Fussell's words,

a way of invoking a code to hint by antithesis at the indescribable; at the same time, it is a comfort in itself, like rum, a deep dug-out, or a woolly vest.

1

In *Crickley Hill* however, it is more than whistling in the storm. Firstly, the idealised pastoral images represent the Good Place in a direct and obvious way, but they are also part of Gurney's identity as well as his home. In a study of landscape and the poetry of John Clare, John Barrell suggests that

It is fairly clear that what Clare wants to do is to twist these two strands of meaning into one, by saying that his childhood was so bound up in the old landscape that when the landscape disappeared his childhood disappeared with it.

2

For Gurney, childhood was not the ideal state that Clare remembers, but in its place he has what for him was the period of his greatest happiness 'with friends on roads/White in the sun'. Meeting the soldier at Buire-au-Bois, is like looking at himself. It confirms and endorses his appreciation of place and Nature, and in doing so confirms his sense of self-worth.

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1. The Great War in Modern Memory p 235
 2. The Idea of Landscape and the sense of Place 1730- 1840 p 112

An unpublished poem in the Gurney archive, untitled, but intended for publication in Songs from the Second Fifth, has a very similar theme, but is suburban in its detail.

How strange it was to hear under the guns
That slow sweet Cotswold voice go droning through
His tales of flowers and trees, his little ones,
All that in years to come he hoped to do...
The things he'd plant, the sheds he'd build, contraptions
Cunningly plotted, curious adaptations ...

1

Many poems, like *Crickley Hill*, link France and England. It might appear that he is seduced by the poetic possibilities in the names themselves. They are often used as titles for poems - *Above Ashleworth*, *On Foscombe Hill*, *Laventie*, *Riez Bailleul*. Many of the best poems weave together the qualities Gurney holds dear, whether at home or in France, and inevitably each reminds him of the other. "Riez Bailleul in blue tea-time/Called back the Severn Lanes", just as later a "high white morning" at home in England reminds him of France - 'I suppose France this morning is as white as here/...Back behind at Robecq there with the day free.'

Although Edmund Blunden in his introduction to Poems of Ivor Gurney, acknowledges that 'a host of poems given in this book will show, in a subtle series of reminiscence, catching many details and tones which had combined in the quality of seasons and moments, anguish and relief never

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1. Gurney Archive 20.6, MS version G.A. 52.7, TS version, Marion Scott with corrections by IBG GA 64.11. 'Vlameetinghe, August 1917' Fussell quotes a comment from A Private in The Guards where the RSM describes his men as "Gardeners camouflaged as soldiers", and says that even in the trenches the English idea of domesticity was inseparable from the image of a well-kept gardening allotment.

again to occur', he damns with faint praise, or at best seriously undercuts, his apparent appreciation of Gurney's writing, when he goes on to say

It is not a serious disadvantage, surely, that these poems here and there contain a place-name or a war-term which is now unfamiliar or obsolete
.....Such places, if we at length visit them, are not the places Gurney knew once 'like a passion' and always had in mind; those exist only in his poems as 'part of the music he heard'.....

1

Blunden emphasises Gurney's characteristic delight in the uniqueness of both experience and visual beauty, (which perhaps explains his pre-occupation with 'skylscapes', as the constantly changing configurations of cloud formations, and different qualities of light, superimpose the new and different on the familiarity and stability of the landscape), and says that

The manner of Gurney's writing is already that of one perceiving a local and limited experience as sharing in the mystery of 'never again', *nous n'irons plus*, and giving to the names of some Flanders farm or cluster of cottages the value of a legend.

2

Yesterday Lost is perhaps one of the best examples.

What things I have missed today I know^{very} well,
But the seeing of them each new time is miracle.
Nothing between Bredon and Dursley has
Any day yesterday's precise unpraised grace.
The changed light, or curve change misty
Coppice, now bold cut, yesterday's mystery
A sense of mornings, once seen, forever gone,
Its own for ever: alive, dead and . . my possession

3

-
1. Poems by Ivor Gurney Introduction.
 2. *ibid*
 3. Collected Poems p 110

The first two lines express two antithetical ideas of familiarity and novelty, well defined by the comma at the end of the first line, and full stop at the end of the second. It has the directness and cadence of conversation until the omission of the indefinite article before 'miracle', giving the sense of 'miraculous' rather than 'a miracle'. The difference is significant, because it implies newness, and freshness, that are qualities that are repeated, daily, ('each new time') and therefore although wonderful, become commonplace. It is a poem of paradox, an extended oxymoron summed up in the last line - 'Its own for ever: alive, dead and in my possession.' As a poem of place this work contains little that is specific - even the reason for his pleasure is undefined - ('things', missed today, but familiar) somewhere between Bredon and Dursley. It is in the spare but effective evocation of mists, changing qualities of the light, changing the appearance of a coppice from one day to the next, 'A sense of mornings' that the reader is made aware not only of the landscape, but of a sense of wonder in response to it. The language has a directness and apparent simplicity that belies its syntactical complexity, for example in the third and fourth lines. 'Nothing between Bredon and Dursley has/Any day yesterday's precise unpraised grace' is clear and accessible in meaning, but sophisticated and craftsmanlike in structure, making use of the accent in unpraised to ensure that the line flows easily. The punctuation of the fifth and sixth lines, together with the repetition of the hard 'c's' in 'curve', 'coppice' and 'cut', indicate another completed unit of thought which is again expressed in the rhythm of natural speech. The final two lines, which express paradoxically, both loss and continuity, are expressed in a sophisticated echoing of three states, that is both aurally pleasing

and evidence of Gurney's craftsmanship in achieving a sense of balance and harmony between 'once seen' and alive: 'for ever gone', and 'dead'; 'its own for ever' and 'my possession'. The dialectic of change and continuity are also fundamental to Gurney's sense of being, and the concurrence of three mutually exclusive states in the last line, expresses a complex sense of ontological heterodoxy.

For Gurney, then, in so many of his poems, place and emotion are metaphors for each other, and if this is the case, Severn and Somme are inextricably connected. This is sometimes quite specifically stated, as in *Ypres - Minsterworth*, 'O wind of Ypres and of Severn/Riot there also,...'. It could hardly be otherwise, because the way the war was conducted, with several days in the Front line followed by several days in the French countryside 'resting', soldiers were subjected to a constant dislocation of realities, alternately surrounded by the horrors of warfare, and the 'faint continual haunting charm' of Northern France. It was a bittersweet way to become acquainted with beautiful countryside, and Gurney recognised it.

Now we are nestled in a village under a huge rock: or
so it seems, after much regular country: the place
reminds me of Birdlip and Crickley, but O tis ruddy
cold.

1

Nevertheless such beauty gives rise to sadness, and in a letter to Marion Scott, dated 1st February 1917, Gurney wrote

Ah, but this sunlight, this cold, and these elms
remind me so vividly of Minsterworth, and are so
sharply different to the present business that I
cannot get used to them. They and I are out of place.

2

-
1. Collected Letters p 209
 2. *ibid* p 196

Appreciation of such beauty is derived not only from its intrinsic qualities but also from the fact that it reminds him of home.

Conversely, his consciousness of beauty juxtaposed against the ugliness and destruction of war made Gurney 'sick of heart'. Damaged trees in a damaged landscape represent the wholesale damage to life and sanity. In the new edition of Severn and Somme, R K R Thornton quotes Gurney's letter to Marion Scott, written on 10th March 1917, after a long period of active service.

Trees

("You cannot think how ghastly these battlefields look under a grey sky. Torn trees are the most terrible things I have ever seen. Absolute blight and curse is on the face of everything.")

The dead land oppressed me.
I turned my thoughts away,
And went where hill and meadow
Are shadowless and gay.

Where Coopers stands by Cranham,
Where the hill-gashes white
Show golden in the sunshine,
Our sunshine - God's delight.

Beauty my feet stayed at last
Where green was most cool,
Trees worthy of all worship
I worshipped ... then, O fool,

Let my thoughts slide unwitting
To other dreadful trees, ...
And found me standing, staring
Sick of heart - at these!

1

It can hardly have been the case that torn trees were the most terrible thing Gurney witnessed, but it is a poem of the moment, and dead land, dead trees are acceptable metaphors. There is a close parallel here

1. Severn and Somme p 48

between the strong visual image of both landscape and Nature violated, and the paintings of Paul Nash, official War Artist also on the Western Front. With Gurney however, there is a greater sense of personal hurt. Nash assimilated the experience differently and 'wanted to paint for painting's sake, because the infernal landscape had a beauty of its own that he could see and was eager to capture'. (1). Gurney, writing from a point of attachment is not oblivious to beauty, but sees it only when he has his back to the Front line, and is looking towards the French countryside, because there he can feel connected to the 'goodness' and 'beauty' of home.

It suggests that 'place' in the context of poetry, needs to be understood as a synthesis of location and values, and it is useful to explore this further in notions of 'regionalism'. A sense of tradition and shared culture is often very firmly associated with a particular region. Beliefs, practices and language often have regional variations, and become part of the system by which 'place' is understood and defined. John Heath Stubbs addresses the question of regionalism in The Darkling Plain, (2), and states that it "manifests itself in May-day carol and harvest song, in children's rhymes and dance games, in ballads, humorous or moralisingin certain hymns and spontaneous expressions of piety, and lastly, traditions, in the rhymed epitaph. Even the most cursory reading of Gurney's *oeuvre* shows examples of all of these.

1. Wilfred Owen Introduction by Dominic Hibberd p 47 and see also The Arts in Britain in World War One p 113

2. The Darkling Plain p 62

He often uses the ballad form, occasionally as a simple and direct expression of a typical subject of ballads - lost love - in *Song*, and with more subtlety in *Generations*. He also uses the form in deliberate pastiche, in *The ballad of the Three Spectres*, (1), where he takes elements of folk culture as the basis for both form and content. The ballad form undercuts the bitterness that could otherwise be attributed to this poem, speaking as it does, about the fear and uncertainty of life at the Front, but also about envy of soldiers who got a blighty, even if it was only a temporary respite. The second spectre embodies the pessimism that death is inevitable, and in the fourth stanza, even worse than early death, the possibility of reaching almost the end of the war and then to die. The final stanza holds a huge burden of unease tempered by resignation. Nevertheless, there is humour, largely due to its parodic form. It contains many of the features of traditional folksongs - for example the opening phrase, 'As I went up by..', the sequence of the 'The first said', 'The second said..' and so on. It has regular ballad four line stanzas with end rhymed lines, although not rigidly adhered to. Much of the humour lies in using the stresses and rhythms of folksong, particularly in 'nice Blighty', which in Gurney's own version in a letter to Marion Scott had emphasis in the upper case 'Nice Blighty'. It is impossible to avoid manipulating the pronunciation to 'Nice Blightee', and emphasising the wry humour Gurney no doubt intended. It is a poem that leaves no room for doubt about Gurney's feelings about the war, but he appears to have been pleased

1. Collected Poems p 33, of *The Twa Corbies*, traditional, which Gurney set to music, and also John Drinkwater, *The Three Lechers*, 1917, and Walter de la Mare, *The Three Strangers*, Georgian Poetry 1918-19

with the poem, writing to Marion Scott "Not so bad eh?", "Is it Border-Ballady?" (1)

Gurney's 'regionalism' is never chauvinism. This criticism was levelled at Ted Hughes, Geoffrey Hill and Philip Larkin in a critical essay by Seamus Heaney in which he says

The poets of the mother culture, I feel, are now possessed of that defensive love of their territory which was once shared only by those poets whom we might call colonial - Yeats, MacDiarmid, Carlos Williams. They are aware of their Englishness as deposits in the descending storeys of the literary and historical past. Their very terrain is becoming consciously precious.

2.

Although his celebration of Gloucestershire leaves no doubt about its supremacy for him, he respects beauty, form and craftsmanship in all things, and expects people from other places to value such qualities and aspects of their own cultural heritage. This is clear from comments in his letters as well as implicit in many of his poems

Welsh soldiers received us with tales
And songs, and courtesy like the Earth's and I
Have made Her great Song; and loved Her vales
And Mountains, Her song and poetry -
Heard voices that mazed and that magicked me.

3

Although Gurney sometimes uses form in a conventional way, particularly ballad, sometimes his poems deal with traditional subjects from the perspective of an observer as well as the persona. He is both inside the poem and outside. Heath Stubbs refers to children's games and dances as an example of an aspect of folk tradition that has influenced poetry. *Hedges*, a short poem of two stanzas, in simple aabb rhyme, observes the childhood

1. G.A. 41.66 23rd February 1917

2. The Poetry of Place p 12

3. Collected Poems . . . p 248

custom of picking, and chewing, young hawthorn leaves, supposedly tasting like bread and cheese. The imagery is pastoral, but the diction is fresh, simple and, as is often the case with Gurney, the point of view is an oblique one. He is portraying, literally, an onlooker, watching children at play, and yet the poem is also introspective about the making of poetry. The same theme is dealt with more expansively and delicately in an earlier poem, probably written between 1917 and 1919.

Crocus Ring

O show to me a crocus ring
That dances round a bush of green,
And I will make a lovely thing
To match the magic seen.

And swift the words should run to place,
The rhyming fall inevitable,
The crocus come to show its face
In sound set well.

Children should read with bright-eyed wonder
And long to dance as flowers do,
Or fairies, in and out and under
Brambles and dew.

Clap hands and call for country going.
But O how false does memory
Play with a golden circlet growing
Round a March tree!

1

The simple ballad form and uncontrived rhymes are a vehicle for a more complex metaphor about creativity. Ostensibly, the first stanza takes as its subject a stereotypical image - a circle of flowers. There are often connotations of magic - a 'fairy ring' - associated with circles of grass or toadstools, and Gurney refers to this in the last line in 'match the magic', but he will match it by creating a poem as 'magic', or pleasing, as the circle of flowers. The next stanza employs a complicated set of cross

1. Collected Poems p 58

references in its metaphor. The croci were 'dancing' in the first stanza, and now he states that the words 'should run to place', so that the reader holds the image of crocus and words together, moving in a perfect pattern ('the rhyming fall inevitable). If this is successful, the poet implies, ('sound set well'), the crocus ring will be conjured up so vividly that children will want to dance too when they read it. The strong visual images of children, dancing, magic, country superstitions, are vital to this poem, but it is one which in its entirety goes beyond the merely pastoral or regional, and place is undefined but becomes a region of the mind. (1).

If regional values are celebrated in abstract aspects of culture like ceremony, superstition and customs, they are also embodied in artefacts. There is evidence throughout Gurney's writing of his interest in buildings that have a symbolic link with the values he reveres. ('*Kilns*', barns, for example *The Dancers* see below, cathedrals in many of the Gloucestershire poems,) The distinctions between what is regional, what is specific to a particular region, and what is Englishness, are not always easy to define, nor it is always necessary to do so in relation to Gurney's poetry. Wiener quotes Horne's comment that 'Things that are rural or ancient are at the very heart of southern English snobberies'. With regard to Gurney, 'snobbery' would be too pejorative a term, and 'preoccupation' would be a better interpretation, but it would be fair to suggest that many of Wiener's comments are useful in constructing a framework by which to understand Gurney's work. 'Englishness' thus described depends on ignoring the products of the Industrial Revolution and looking at the archetypal

1. cf Rupert Brooke and 'Avons of the heart'.

romanticised historical aspects of English life. This Gurney does in *The Dancers*.

The dancers danced in a quiet meadow
It was winter, the soft light lit in clouds
Of growing morning - their feet on the firm
Hillside sounded like a baker's business
Heard from the yard of his beamy barn-grange.
One piped, and the measured irregular riddle
Of the dance ran onwards in tangling threads...
A thing of the village, centuries old in charm.
With tunes from the earth they trod, and naturalness
Sweet like the need of pleasure of change.
For a lit room with panels gleaming
- They practised this set by winter's dreaming
Of pictures as lovely as are in spring's range...
No candles, but the keen dew-drops shining...
And only the far jolly barking of the dog strange.

1

The key lies in the eighth line - "A thing of the village, centuries old in charm". The image is of rural and traditional values, and although the place is not specified that does not detract from an understanding of the poem. Its generic, pastoral Englishness derives from 'quiet meadow', the 'baker's business' placed in a 'beamy barn-grange', and it becomes positively Hardy-esque in the description of the musicians and the 'tangling threads' of the dance. It avoids cliché by heroically avoiding linking the piper and dance with 'fiddle' and making a much more interesting image of the music as 'measured irregular riddle'. (1) It also avoids the ballad form and uses enjambement - '.....clouds/Of growing morning', '...feet on the

1. This is one of many examples where Gurney leads the reader towards an entirely predictable, clichéd rhyme and then avoids it at the last possible moment. It has been suggested that unusual combinations can produce a resonant and more satisfying form of language - a hypothesis put by Keyser and Halle, that a 'disciplined fluidity, in which phonological quirks and vicissitudes keep the ear from being cloyed by the sense of orderliness it nonetheless craves and discovers' and similarly by John Dewey who claims that it is the discordant in art that produces a tension and excitement. (Abrams, *The Skewed Harmonics of English Verse Feet, Language and Style*, Vol. 16, No. 4, (Fall 1983)

firm/Hillside sounded'. It is characteristic of Gurney to take a simple sometimes cliched subject, and create a fresh and interesting poem.

The Dancers is a poem full of nostalgia. Some of the things for which Gurney is nostalgic are nineteenth or twentieth century constructs - (the Harvest Festival is the nineteenth century equivalent of the Ploughman's Lunch) - and some of the nostalgia for things past, evident, particularly, in Georgian Poetry, owed more to fashion than history. Hobsbawm suggests that as the economy lost some of its dynamism the 'pretence that the Englishman is a thatched cottager or country squire at heart' took root. Georgianism was only one manifestation of this trait, and it is clear from Gurney's own accounts of what he was reading, what he admired in other people's writing, and many of the poems by other poets he chose to set to music, that the ethos that underpinned Georgian tastes and values were very much his own. But for Gurney, in his own writing, nostalgia, Englishness, and love of Gloucestershire are more clearly focussed on his own locality than in many of the truly Georgian poets' work. (1) For example, the Georgian Anthologies of 1916-1917 and 1918-1919 contain many poems that refer in a general way to rather grandiose notions of myth, legend and place, or simply play with the euphony of names, from W.J. Turner's 'Chimborazo, Cotopaxi' in *Romance*, to *Atlantis* (Gordon Bottomley). Many poems make references to classical Greece, Olympia and the gods.

Gurney's gods, too, were often the old gods. Many of his poems include the gods and heroes of mythology - in *The Bare Line of the Hill*, George Chapman - *The Iliad*, and *Andromeda over Tewkesbury* for instance, but in many of

1. Gurney's poems were not included in the Georgian Anthologies.

the poems there is a greater sense of specific place and Gurney's awareness of the historical events and people who have contributed to giving that place its characteristics.

The Coppice

There is a coppice on Cotswold's edge the winds love;
It blasts so, and from down below there one sees move
Tree-branches like water darkling -

.....

The coppice of thin and great trees as nobly set
Against Wales for Cotswold, as it were the gate
Of Britain watching Britain, refusing ever
To acknowledge Rome; great shapes by older barrows;

p199

There is also a feeling that religion has been replaced by a reverence for history and continuity expressed through his feelings for Gloucestershire and his sense of place.

The bare line of the hill
Shows Roman and
A sense of Rome hangs still
Over the land

p121

This poem ends with a shift of focus from the distance to the foreground both literally and as a metaphor of time, to the buildings and flowers of the present,

The regal and austere
Mantle of Rome is thrown

As of old - about the walls
Of hills and the farm - the fields.
Scabious guards the steeps.
Trefoil the slopes yield.

1.

Not only the Romans, but the Danes, Normans and Saxons too left their mark on the banks of the Severn, as is shown in *Kilns*, and Gurney shows his way

of looking at prosaic artefacts, like 'Old troughs, great stone cisterns bishops might have blessed/ceremonially and worthy mounting stones', and letting his imagination dwell on the lives lived around them. He communicates a strong sense of continuity, a sense of being part of history, and a one-ness with people from other ages in the way emphasises that the landscapes, skies and seasons that are so much part of his experience were the same for them too. It emphasises Gurney's constant awareness of heritage and history as an essential part of himself, and fixes his identity very firmly in the ground his ancestors walked and worked on, so that place becomes in effect a part of his genetic inheritance.

Kilns is a particularly good example,

Kilns

Severn has kilns set all along her banks
Where the thin reeds grow and rushes in ranks;
And the carts tip rubbish there from the town;

.....

I think of the countless slabs gone out from all of them;
Farmhouse, cottage, loved of generations of men,
Fronting day as equal, or in dusk shining dim;
Of the Dane-folk curious of the sticky worthy stuff;
Kneading, and crumbling till the whim wearied enough.
Of the queer bricks unlearned hands must have made.....

1

Gurney's sense of the Romans, Danes, Anglo Saxons and Elizabethans all contributing to his Gloucester heritage, whether it be in the cries of the 'straining crews/(Norse, Phoenicia, Norse, British? immemorial use), in *The Lock Keeper*' or his appreciation of a fine old tithe-barn or 'Peter's

1. Collected Poems p 126-7

Place'- the cathedral- make his poems of place much more interesting statements than those of many of his contemporaries. It is impossible to dissociate Gurney from his country and his county, but it is also important to recognise the urban/rural dichotomy as a dichotomy of values and regions of the mind. In many of the poems ostensibly about familiar countryside, or celebratory poems, or poems comparing the landscapes of France and home, there is a subtext concerned with the symbolism of the pastoral.

In a war that was characterised by mechanisation, the first industrialised war, the countryside represented psychic peace. Many writers have observed that noise was continual and debilitating in the battlefields. It was also thought to be one of the significant factors in shell shock, as a combination of noise and vibration causing not only concussion, but in many cases tremendous internal damage (1). Leed describes industrialised war as an extension of the process of industrialisation itself

It was easy to see in the blindly crushing mechanism of war the dark side of modern production described by Marx.

Here we have, in place of the isolated machine, a mechanical monster whose body fills whole factories and whose demon power, at first veiled under the slow measured motions of his giant limbs, at length breaks out into the fast and furious whirl of his countless working organs.

2

1. Often there was enormous physical damage causing ruptured spleen, liver etc, which would not necessarily be immediately apparent, but addig to the toll of deaths as significantly as visible injuries. ^

2. The Great War and Modern Memory p 35

One of the potent myths of the war was that the contrast to this noisy mechanised hell was the healing tranquility of the countryside and 'nature'. Hospitals of all kinds made beds available for the treatment of physical injuries, but for officers particularly, convalescence after the emotional traumas - for war neurasthenia was often in rural surroundings, felt to have therapeutic qualities. (1)

In reality, the rural pastoral setting of Northern France was as much part of the theatre of war for soldiers on the Western Front, despite the fact that in civilian consciousness, the countryside was a place in which to be made whole, to forget the war. As Leed states

Both the pastoral and technological motifs in the war literature are bifurcations and redefinitions of the problems that the realities of war present to combatants: the problems of potency, mobility, and visibility.

2.

Gurney captures this cognitive dissonance in poems like the bleak *Sonnet - September 1922*. It is neither simply a war poem or a poem of place, but it lends itself to interpretation as a synergistic combination of the two, and is discussed at length in another chapter. Its significance as a poem of place is that it portrays 'The Good Place', which together with its inhabitants are being destroyed by mechanised brutality, described in a series of rare collocations and surprising images that show Gurney at his most craftsmanlike, and most difficult to classify.

1. See for example Ash. E. *Nerves and the Nervous* 1921, "On the whole, the most suitable climate in England for a nerve-patient is hilly, well wooded country; where the hills protect from cold and irritating winds, and the trees lend their soothing influence- always well marked on persons of nervoustemperament- to the recovery of health. There is no need to specify particular places for the most beautiful countryside, with the utmost quietude and the most soothing influences of nature can be obtained with little trouble, and without going far away from home. (p 93)

2. *No Man's Land* p 123

There are some of Gurney's poems of place or location that embody so much of his talent, craftsmanship and pre-occupations, but which do not fall easily into categories of 'nature' poems', 'regional' poetry, or 'Gloucestershire' poems. They are, like the syntheses of war and place, place and values, strange meetings of visual imagery and emotion. P.J Kavanagh admitted in the introduction to Collected Poems that he was 'determined to help him escape the limiting tag of 'local poet'. He also values and admires Gurney's ability to write effectively about seasons, the effects of clouds, dawns, sunsets and qualities of light, and observes that 'if he has to be given a locality, he could with more justice be called a sky-poet'.

To some extent the subject of 'skies' was a touchstone to Gurney's generation. Georgian poetry is incandescent with sunsets and moonlight, and Fussell cites the influence of Ruskin, 'leaked down abundantly', even if not consciously adopted. He quotes C.S.Lewis

the sky was, and still is, to me one of the principle elements in any landscape, and long before I had seen [skies of all types] named and sorted out in *Modern Painters* I was very attentive to [their] different qualities.

1

and Max Plowman

Was it Ruskin who said that the upper and more glorious half of Nature's pageant goes unseen by the majority of people?... Well, the trenches have altered that. Shutting off the landscape they compel us to observe the sky; and when it is a canopy of blue flecked with white clouds..., and when the earth below is a shell stricken waste, one looks up with delight, recalling perhaps the days when, as a small boy, one lay on the garden lawn at home counting the clouds as they passed.

2

1. The Great War in Modern Memory p 54

2. *ibid*

Gurney goes beyond the stereotypical expressions of 'blue flecked with white' and achieves some of his most effective poetry in describing skies. He conveys not the somewhat negative attempt to avoid unwelcome sights at eye-level by gazing upwards, but a much more positive interest in, desire to engage with and use creatively, the stimulus he felt in the changing shapes and qualities he saw. There are as many powerfully evocative descriptions of wet or winter skies as there are cosy pictures of 'afterglow', as in for example *London Dawn*:

Sodden great clouds began to sail again
Like all-night anchored galleons to the main
From careful shallows to the far-withdrawn
Wide outer seas of sky.

1

and, in *Strange Service*,

.....your skies and rushy sky-pools
Fragile mirrors easily broken by moving airs...

2

There are night-skies, where with childlike simplicity, things hidden by darkness no longer exist, or are threatening in their unpredictability.

On The Night

On the night there are shown dim few stars timorous
And the light is smothered in a cloak of fear.
Are these hills out? Then night has brooded there
Of dark things till they were no more for us.

Gone are the strict falls, there is no skyline boundary,
The stars are not resting or coming to rest.
What will dawn show? A land breathing calm of breast,
Or a frightened rock-wheeling plain once bed of the sea?

3.

-
1. Collected Poems p 61
 2. Severn and Somme p26
 3. Collected Poems p111

Even when there are signs of Gurney's mental deterioration and disintegration, he is capable, often, of creating phrases that illuminate. In an unpublished poem, *The Sudden Storm*, he creates a sense of exhilaration in being completely at one with the weather

Who but I walked thr hills to see the lightening....

.....

Where great sound and great light fell in avalanches
Flat on the open spaces - or kept off by the branches,
Glorying the spirit to fulness, and great gladness of dark days.

1

There is also of course, much that is conventional in the imagery Gurney uses, but he often manages to take conventional notions and symbols and use them in an innovative way. In *Winter Has Clouds* quoted above, for example, 'dull' and 'steely' are stock adjectives for describing winter skies. Gurney, however, rescues the line from cliché by building up to a crescendo, word by word, in which 'dull' and 'steely' have value in the alliterative use of the 'l' sound in 'expressionless dull steely cloak of cloud'. The lack of punctuation dictates the pace, and the commonplace image of no birdsong is

1. G.A. Unpublished notebook. T.S. 21 (B5)
23. L
42. 2 (3) (38)

expressed very imaginatively. ('no brave bird complains aloud.') This is followed by one of Gurney's most striking examples of synaesthetic imagery in 'A toothache sky, a cruelty without frost....'

A similar process happens in Gurney's use of symbols and symbolic values. Poetry of the Edwardian era, particularly of the Georgians, contained many botanical references not only as a simplistic representation of the polarities between wild and civilised, rural and urban, contemporary and historical. ("Strawberres that in gardens grow/Are plump and juicy fine/ But sweeter far as wise men know/Spring from the woodland vine" 1) ("Very old are the woods:/And the buds that break/Out of the briers's boughs/...Through what wild centuries/Roves back the rose", 2) or a continuation of traditional associations, for examples, herbs with healing or mood, ("Vervain...basil...orison.../A language lost; which when its accents cease,/Breathes, voiceless, of a pre-Edenic peace." 3) or Shakespearean/Elizabethan connotations. Other layers of meaning became associated with references to flora and landscape, gardens, cultivation and related activities as a direct result of the war, and often function metonymically, as in Katherine Tynan's *High Summer*,

Pinks and syringa in the garden closes,
And the sweet privet hedge and golden roses,
The pines hot in the sun, and the drone of the bee,
They die in Flanders to keep these for me.

4

Fussell writes at length about the use of roses, and particularly poppies, which have become synonymous with war casualties. Gurney frequently makes it

1 Georgian Poetry 1918-1919 p 81 Robert Graves, from *Country Sentiment*.

2. Georgian Poetry (Penguin) p 60 Walter de la Mare, from *All That's Past*

3 Ibid p 65 Walter de la Mare from *Incantation*

4 The Forgotten Army p22 Katherine Tynan from *High Summer*.

such conventional symbols and subverts the most obvious interpretations

into something more complex. For example, in *Sonnet - September 1922*, he takes the very obvious images of ploughed earth and poppies, but presents them in a way that demands the reader's attention and reconsideration. Gurney exchanges passive disturbance of the earth for an inversion where it is 'the earth that ploughs', (1) and instead of the poppy as a symbol of blood, it is the blood of the poppy, metonym for destruction, that is shed. This is neither a war poem or a poem of place, but it lends itself to Gurney's ability to take the familiar, the commonplace, the conventional, and offer an oblique perspective or a new way of seeing what has been seen many times before, take many of his poems beyond those of his Georgian contemporaries. As a poet of place, his work shows great sensitivity to all aspects of the physical environment. He celebrates exuberantly and cheerfully, the myriad factors of history, tradition, and human intervention that have shaped his surroundings, and he is prolific in his criticism where human fallibility has damaged and despoiled. He is also a poet of subtlety and delicacy, as shown in *Sea Marge*

Pebbles are beneath, but we stand softly
On them, as on sand, and watch the lacy edge
Of the swift sea

Which patterns and with glorious music the
Sands and round stones. It talks ever
Of new patterns.

And by the cliff-edge, there, the oakwood throws
A shadow deeper to watch what new thing
Happens at the marge.

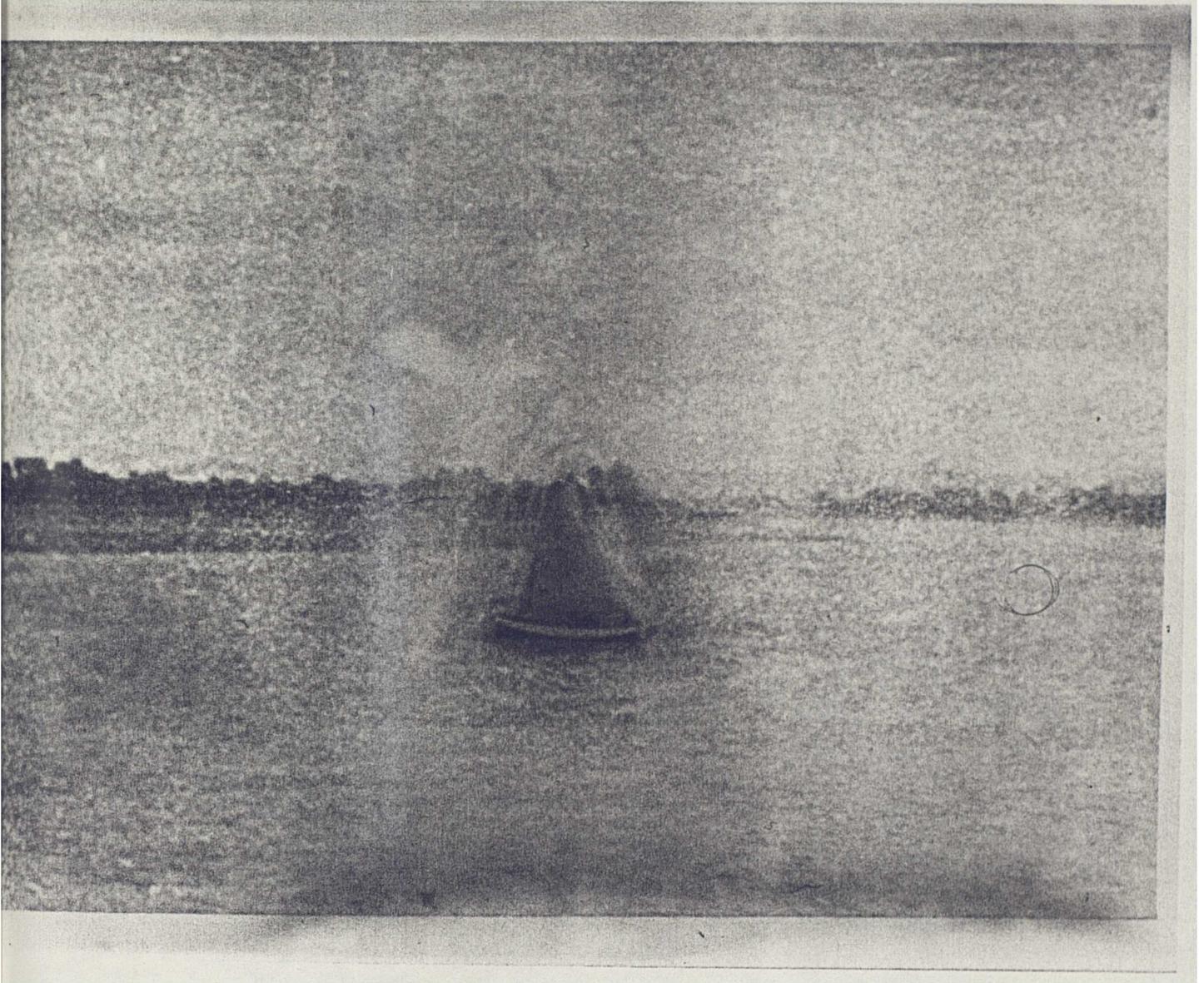
2

In this gentle and ruminative observation of the ever-changing nature of the sea, there is a haunting sense of being always at the edge of what is happening, with no control, and no permanence, only able, like the oakwood

1. Altered in the MS version in Gurney's hand, from 'earth is ploughed'
2. Collected Poems p214

to watch from the shadows. This is a different landscape, and as a landscape of the mind, it illustrates again the duality that is almost always there in Gurney's poetry. It is in the variety of diction and imagery that Gurney's poems achieve links with tradition, but at the same time create a new perception and purpose. He has not yet been given due recognition, and to describe him as a war poet or local poet is to underestimate his art and ability.

'DOROTHY', circa 1910



If there are shallows on the left hand, stones and stakes on the right, and a sand bank somewhere, one's pleasure is spiced, and always a furious gust may come down from left of Barrow Hill....But there are orchards and spits of pasture, far Cotswold with white scars to look at, the best clouds in England, and a chance of elver fishing at the Equinoxes; to say nothing of eeling in summer.

from On Sailing a Boat on Severn G.A. 12.3(1)

Photograph supplied by the Royal College of Music,
from *Ivor Gurney: His Life and Works* by Don Ray.
(Photograph supplied to D. Ray by Gurney Family)

Chapter Eight: Songs Come to the Mind.

When Walter de la Mare contributed to the January 1938 issue of *Music and Letters*, honouring Ivor Gurney after his death on the last day of the old year, he offered two tributes. One refers to the view expressed by Sir Charles Stanford, whose pupil Gurney had been at the Royal College of Music.

Stanford knew that there were greater musicians about than himself, and was handsome to and about his abler pupils. He told me that one of them, whom I knew, was perhaps the most promising composer alive.

That referred to Ivor Gurney.

1

The second comment is his own response to Gurney's work,

I have known composers with a fine literary sense and poets who loved music but could neither compose nor play. I have known no man save Gurney who had the double creative gift that Rossetti had in *his* two arts.

2

Comparisons have been made with Campion, who was also a poet and composer, but the comparison is superficial, endorsing the surprised tone of de la Mare's comment above, and reflecting the culture of specialism that has made it difficult to accept, in post-renaissance years, that an artist can be equally talented in two fields. Gurney himself sometimes helps to further the notion that one strand of creativity must be dominant, in a letter to Ethel Voynich, in November 1915, when he says,

It is a fact that makes me think, that though I have had more training in music than verse, yet a sonnet comes far easier to me than a prelude.... perhaps it is because I am compelled to think of and have more to do with books than music

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1. *Music and Letters*, Vol XIX, p 7.
 2. *ibid.*

but it is certainly true that arrangement of words comes with less effort than the other. But it is probable that work would alter that.

1

In other examples, however, he clearly regards himself as a musician, and this is a fundamental part of his identity. This is not merely the way he defines himself and presents himself to others, but is inextricably bound up with the way he feels at the deepest level of existence and self awareness, as for example he shows in a letter to Herbert Howells, shortly after receiving the news that F.W. Harvey is missing.

I have had rather a blow lately, and need music to express my feelings, and let off steam. F.W.H is almost certainly dead, and with him my deepest friendship, as far as that does pass with death; a very little with me.

2

Any critical attention Gurney's work has attracted so far, has been compartmentalised, and dealt with either poetry or music, but rarely looked at them in conjunction. Michael Hurd's biography refers to songs and dates some of the compositions, but does not look specifically for connections.

This thesis, centrally concerned with Gurney's self awareness and identity, will include observations about Gurney's music as well as poetry, as part of a spectrum of creativity, manifesting aspects of self, rather than as polarised, or competing, elements. It must be stressed that it is beyond the remit of the thesis, (and the ability of the writer) to undertake a

1. Letters p 58

2. ibid p 136

technical analysis of Gurney's music. This is the job of the musicologist. It is the aim, in this Chapter, to explore the interrelationship between words and music that was so important to Gurney; to draw out aspects that are significant to the central argument, that he expressed a complex identity through both music and poetry; and to illustrate some of these points with reference simply to listening to some of the songs. Where recourse to analysis beyond the scope of the writer's own observation is appropriate, this will make use of Professor Stephen Banfield's Sensibility and English Song, which has provided invaluable material, and unpublished work by Dr. N. Sirbaugh.

Music is another language, and in Gurney's case, one in which he was fluent and through which he desired to communicate his intense need to create beauty. In this medium too, the very essence of his being, manifesting in many voices, sought reinforcement and validation, striving perhaps for immortality. He had received some degree of recognition for his literary achievements with the publication of Severn and Somme, and War's Embers, but music was as much a driving force as poetry as a mode of self expression. Each had been dominant at different periods in his life, sometimes for practical reasons, but rather than regard them as competing forms, it could be argued that they are in fact inextricably interwoven in Gurney's consciousness and creative process.

It has been noted that Gurney's poetic language, in Pater's terms, aspired, whether consciously or unconsciously, to the condition of music. He frequently manipulates syntax or employs neologisms in order to achieve a euphony in strange juxtapositions, as well as to produce a satisfying rhythm. He has an instinctive sense of what is harmonious, predictable

and satisfying to the ear. (1). He uses this both simply, to produce a melodic line, and subtly, to undercut expected patterns, both techniques he uses in his music. The fact that he uses 'Song' in the title of so many poems reinforces the notion that the two forms were closely related in his creative process,

Songs come and are taken, written,
Snatched from the momentary
Accidents of light, shape, spirit meeting
For one light second spirit, unbelievably.

2

Anthony Hopkins asserts, in Understanding Music, that

At moments of high emotion or when we wish to project sound over distance, the human voice 'aspires to the condition' of song...Children unwittingly go very near to song when they call to each other from quite small distances...These sounds then involving variation of pitch and the prolongation of vowels, are the source from which song, and therefore melody, springs - there being surely no question that vocal music, however primitive, came before instrumental.

3

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1. It has been suggested that some phonological relationships regarded as wrong from the point of view of convention and habit can seem intuitively to be right, and that the result of this unusual combination produces a resonant and more satisfying form of language. This is dealt with at length in the Halle and Keyser hypothesis, noted in relation to specific characteristics in Gurney's poetry. There is a direct analogy between this and the predictability of sequences of notes in music, and conventions in harmony and chords. It is characteristic of Gurney's song settings as well as his poetry, that he subverts expectation of the conventional and then surprises with unusual harmonic combinations.
 2. Collected Poems p 72
 3. Understanding Music p 27

and more specifically, that

If we analyse the components of an instrumental piece by Mozart or Haydn, whether Sonata, Concerto or Symphony, the melodic line, however elaborately decorated, will essentially be vocal in conception. Mozart's slow movements in particular tend to be sublimated soprano arias, but the natural stress and accentuation of even quicker themes will correspond to the syllables of language.

1

Hopkins is speaking in evolutionary terms, but it suggests that a desire for, and ability to create, both rhythm and harmony exists at an instinctive level in the individual, although this will be affected by cultural and linguistic factors. (2) Gurney's talent lay in his ability to weave together both spoken and musical language in a way that did not distort the fluidity of either. His intuitive recognition of complete compatibility of form was commented upon by Marion Scott,

By an instinct deeper than reason he knew that the music for these old ballads must make its effect by means parallel to those of the verses in which the vocabulary of simple words is displayed with tremendous force.

3

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1. Understanding Music p 19
 2. Cecil Sharp suggests that 'although folk-songs of different nations differ from one another, and they all differ in certain respects from art-melodies, yet they are one and all constructed upon the same fundamental and scientific principles.' English Folk Songs p 35
 3. Quoted by Nora Sirbaugh, Lecture Recital, 'Ivor Gurney and his vision of Gloucestershire', Peabody Conservatory of Music, John Hopkins University, USA, 10th January 1994.

Gurney is often quite specific about what he is trying to achieve. In *Song*, for example,

My heart makes songs on lonely roads
To comfort me while you are away
And strives with lovely sounding words
Its crowded tenderness to say.

1

'song', implying music, and 'lovely sounding words' - speech- are used as if they are indistinguishable. The theme is repeated in *Crocus Ring*,

O show to me a crocus ring
That dances round a bush of green,
And I will make a lovely thing
To match the magic seen.

And swift the words should run to place,
The rhyming fall inevitable,
The crocus come to show its face
In sound set well.

2

There is a sense of vitality and movement in the imagery of dancing, and words that 'run to place', and it is clear that Gurney 'hears' the poem as a spoken thing, rather than 'sees' it written on a page. 'Sound set well', not only suggests a piece well-crafted, but has the implication of setting to music. Although *Crocus Ring*, of course is a poem not a song, it is characteristic of Gurney's work that there is a blurring of boundaries, and it has a resonance with the folk song tradition noted by Cecil Sharp, with whose work Gurney was familiar, where words, music and dance were so

1. Collected Poems p 54

2. *ibid* p 58

intertwined that he says,

Singers have often said to me "When I were young I used to dance thicky zong, but I be too old now" - an interesting survival of the days before the sister arts of singing and dancing were divorced. "The Keys of Heaven" is a song that often used to be danced and sung with dramatic action by a man and his wife.

1

Gurney was familiar with the folk tradition, in its broadest sense, as a practitioner as well as a student of music, in that he was known to perform songs for the Chapmans for example, (2) or in local inns when he was out walking. Many of the verses he chose to set to music were traditional in style even if they were 'composed' pieces in folk song form (Salley Gardens, for example) rather than pure folk song handed down by the oral tradition as defined by Sharp. It suggests that this aspect of Gurney's creativity represents a tapping into heritage, race memory, and a collective consciousness, and finding a voice to speak for a whole community. It is directly analogous to his recurring pre-occupation with the Danes and Romans, and sense of the continuum of history in his poems. The choice of poems he set to music suggests that this particular 'voice' Gurney used, was not only a collective voice, speaking on behalf of of what he saw as a synthesis of tradition and community, but was the product of a sense of personal responsibility to maintain unbroken links with a musical heritage that was specifically English. The question of 'Englishness' and the expression of national identity in music is an important one, and will receive more detailed attention below, but analogies and comparisons with aspects of folk music provide a useful starting point.

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1. English Folk Song p 106
 2. Stars p 5

Cecil Sharp's distinction between Folk-music and what he calls Art-music, gives an interesting perspective on Gurney's music. Sharp suggests that

Art-music, then, is the work of the individual, and expresses his own personal ideals and aspirations only; it is composed in, comparatively speaking, a short period of time, and, by being committed to paper, it is for ever fixed in one unalterable form.

Folk-music, on the other hand, is the product of a race and reflects feelings and tastes that are communal rather than personal; it is always in solution; its creation is never completed; while, at every moment of its history, it exists not in one form but in many.

1

The point that needs to be drawn out here, in quoting Sharp's definitions is that both genres offer forms of self-expression, representing both 'I' and 'We'. It is fundamental to an understanding of Gurney's *oeuvre* to recognise a multiplicity of voices, and he combined elements from a variety of sources, both in music and language, in order to express his heterodox vision. He composed conventional instrumental music and song settings that owed much to the influence of what Cecil Sharp would have regarded as 'Art-music', but the part played by the influence of folk-music, as a less abstract, and more intuitive form should not be under-rated. This is particularly marked in the treatment of song.

Gurney's method of song-setting has much in common with the organic development of traditional songs, in that he worked from memory, carrying a store of favourite poems in his head, composing the settings while out walking, (2) or in the case of a small number of settings, while in the

1. English Folk Song p 15

2. 'I have walked miles of Gloucestershire ways, with him singing aloud phrases that would go into "the next song" - Herbert Howells. Music and Letters, Jan. 1938 p 15.

trenches on active service on the Western Front. (1) The words were thus not always entirely true to the original poem on occasions when Gurney's memory was not accurate, or when he made small alterations to words or lines in order to achieve his own desired effect. This is explained in the preface to the published editions of his songs, and the poet's own words included as well as Gurney's version. Marion Scott explained in the preface to Ten Songs published in 1938, shortly after Gurney's death, that

Gurney himself wrote swiftly when putting his ideas on paper and was not at all careful or consistent about phrasing and expression marks, except occasionally, when preparing a work for publication. He also had a habit, each time he re-copied a song, of making alterations or permutations, some small, some rather considerable in the music. These were not all revisions. Quite often they occurred because, when he wrote out a song again from memory, his mind had meantime changed the details unconsciously.... Similar mental processes were at work in him over the words he used. When he meant to set a poem, he liked to carry it around with him, either copied into his pocket notebook or else absorbed direct into his memory. When the work of the actual setting came along, he depended almost entirely on memory. As a result he did not always reproduce each word with literal exactness, though the main contents of the lines remained secure and true to the poet's intention.

2

This is the process Sharp describes in the mutation of traditional songs over time, or from region to region, where individual singers have either mis-remembered, adapted or embellished the received version. In a later collection of Gurney's songs however, Michael Pilkington suggests that

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1. Although it is often stated that *In Flanders* was written in the trenches Gurney corrects this in a letter to Marion Scott, on 26th March 1917, when he points out 'By the way 'In Flanders' was not written in the trenches, but at Crucifix Corner, if you know where that is.'
 2. A First Volume of Ten Songs, Preface

minor changes were not accidental,

These changes, like those in many of Gurney's other songs, would seem to me to be not merely a matter of faulty memory, but more the instinct of a poet-composer changing, whether consciously or not, a phrase effective when read into one effective when sung: as for example the altering of "and when I crumble" to "and when I die" in his setting of Walter de la Mare's *An Epitaph*.

1

Other composers had been known to make more radical alterations - for example, Stephen Banfield refers to the fact that "Tennyson settings were at one time the virtual monopoly of John Blockley, who even obtained the poet's permission to alter *Enoch Arden* for his purposes." (2)

The relationship between words and music may have been, for the most part, a harmonious one, but it was not necessarily so between composer and poet. Housman for example, whose poems were set to music more often than any other poet of his time, said that composers "regard the author merely as a peg to hang things on" (Banfield, p244), an asperity reflected in the letter he sent to his publisher, Grant Richards, which implies that he had been approached by Gurney for permission to use his poems.

Mr. I.B. Gurney (who resides in Gloucester Cathedral along with St. Peter and Almighty God) must not print the words of my poems in full on concert programmes (a course which I am sure his fellow lodgers would disapprove of); but he is quite welcome to set them to music, and to have them sung, and to print their titles on programmes when they are sung.

3

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1. *Ludlow and Teme*, Stainer and Bell, p 1
 2. *Sensibility* p 8
 3. *Ordeal* p 26

Gurney makes frequent reference to folksongs in his letters, registering his enjoyment both on hearing the familiar and on learning something new. In a letter to Will Harvey, for example, written in early 1914, he refers to a young Irish boy staying at 15 Barclay Road, his lodgings in Fulham, who "last week [he] sang me a delicious folksong I had never known before. It will go to Sir Charles tomorrow." (1) The interest in folksong, in collecting, and recording for posterity, traditional music that had hitherto been kept alive by the oral tradition, paradoxically, owed much to the scholarship of a German exile, Carl Engel, whose seminal work, An Introduction to the study of National Music, was published in England in 1866. His comment in a series of articles that appeared some ten years later in the *Musical Times*, states that

It seems rather singular that England should not possess any printed collection of its national songs with the airs as they are sung at the present day; while almost every other European nation possesses several comprehensive works of this kindit certainly appears singular that English musicians should have neglected to investigate the national songs of the different provinces of their own country. . . .surely there are English musicians. . . .who might achieve good results if they would spend their autumnal holidays in some rural district of the country, associate with the villagers, and listen to their songs

2

This pre-dated the revival of interest that has more often been attributed to Cecil Sharp as its instigator. For the purposes of this study, the rival claims of Sharp and Engels are immaterial, but what is significant is that so many of the most influential musicians and composers in the early years of the twentieth century saw folksong and its traditions as fundamental to the essence of English 'art-music'. It is no coincidence that these were

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1. Letters p 10
 2. The English Musical Renaissance, p 63

also the dominant figures at the Royal College of Music and Gurney's tutors. Parry and Stanford were founder members of the Folk-Song Society in 1898, and Vaughan Williams spent an average of thirty days each year, during a ten year period, on 'field work', travelling and collecting material, culminating in the finding of over 800 songs. Gurney no doubt absorbed some of the stylistic influences of such composers, especially since they echoed so closely his own values and interests. ("Our young men must write on a diet largely composed of Folk-Song and Shakespeare", in a letter written to Marion Scott, 3rd Aug 1915, (1), and "Beethoven, Bach, Mozart, Schubert seem to be left high above war-mark, with folk-song and Palestrina and our madrigals" in an earlier letter to Marion Scott, dated 9th May 1915. (2)(3)

In later letters, it is clear that the privations of life on active service in the trenches was made briefly more bearable in moments of epiphany such as the meeting with the Welsh soldiers recorded in Gurney's letter to Ethel Voynich in June 1916.

C. and I crawled into a candle-lit dugout, and so met four of the nicest young men you could meet, possibly. They knew folksong. And one of them sang 'David of the White Rock' and 'Slumber Song', both of which Somervell has arranged, and both beauties.

4.

Somervell was also a tutor at the royal College of Music, and by 1916 had set over one hundred and twenty songs, many of which would have been known

1. Letters p 23

2. ibid p 19

3. Stanford's frequent advice to his students was to 'enjoy Palestrina for twopence', which was the bus fare from the Royal College of Music to Westminster Cathedral where there were often performances of his music.

4. Letters p89

to Gurney. The fact that Gurney responds to the traditional folksong rendering by two fellow soldiers, but holds in parallel an awareness and appreciation of the refined or embellished 'art-music' version illustrates not only the multiplicity of his vision, but the breaking down of boundaries between what, for some, would have been two very different kinds of music.

If, however, there were boundaries or distinctions to be made between 'art-music' and 'folk-music', the Georgian pre-occupation with nature, landscape, and country matters was very effectively nourished by the 'pastoral historicism' inherent in folk-songs that not only celebrated the same subject matter, but had the added charm of being old and part of an ongoing tradition. (1) Georgian sensibility provided a bridge or a channel of communication between the two forms. The synthesis of the traditional, Georgian poetics and music that was sometimes allusive, sometimes pastiche, or sometimes the development of well-known motifs, was a large factor in what came to be regarded as the English Musical Renaissance. There were of course, similar developments and interest in 'national identity' in other countries. (2). Direct comparison could be made for example with Stravinsky's striving for 'Russian-ness', which

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1. Georgian values were not always highly regarded. Hassall refers to 'a combination of false rusticity and simplicity, glibness of feeling and a studied lucidity of style that was merely modish'
 2. eg Smetana, earlier and particularly Dvorak whose empathy with indigenous music embraced not only his native Czech folk songs but led to a subtle incorporation of both negro and American-Indian elements in the work he produced when he lived and worked in USA.

became, as shown in *Svadebka (Les Noces)*,

a uniquely conceived pre-occupation with the substance and rhythm of Russian popular verse, and with all the peculiarities in pitch organisation

1

The effect was 'unmistakeably Russian, and unmistakeably Stravinskian', and Stravinsky himself wrote, in explanation, that

My wish was to present actual wedding material through direct quotations of popular i.e. non-literary verse...
...Even the proper names in the text such as Palagai or Saveliushka belong to no-one in particular. They were chosen for their sound, their syllables, and their Russian typicality.

2

There are two important extrapolations to be made here. One is that a pre-occupation with national identity manifests itself as much in music, albeit in an abstract and therefore less recognisable way, as it does in literature; secondly that the very quality of 'English-ness', or 'Russian-ness' in music derives in large measure from the structure of the language itself. (3)

In The English Musical Renaissance 1860-1940, Robert Stradling and Meirion Hughes explore the relationship between music and nation, from a cultural and political perspective. They raise questions about the economics of

1. The Music of Stravinsky. p 158

2. *ibid* p 155

3. This endorses the premise offered by Hopkins, quoted earlier in this section, that any music 'however elaborately decorated will essentially be vocal in conception.' This clearly does not necessarily apply to later atonal or serial music which was written deliberately to subvert conventional musical norms, and to create a different set of relationships between notes.

patronage, performance and publication of music, and questions of class, gender and marginalisation, all of which are pertinent to ask with regard to Gurney's circumstances. The central issue for the purposes of this study, however, is to look more closely at the notion of national identity in relation to Gurney's music, (1), and the words he chose to set, to approach them together as ontological statements.

The quality of 'Englishness' is hard to pin down, especially when it is applied to the abstract art of music. It must be acknowledged that classical music had been dominated by German composers, probably from the early eighteenth century, and Germanic influence was omnipresent. Attempts to re-habilitate English music were instigated largely by George Grove, in the second half of the nineteenth century, and focussed on the Royal College of Music, an institution first conceived as the National Training School. Emphasis in his seminal Dictionary of music and Musicians, gave much attention to leading figures in English music, both past and present. Grove's attempts to reclaim 'Englishness' in music could on occasions appear absurd, as for example in a campaigning speech appealing for funds for the development of English Music, he refers to the thirteenth century song, *Summer is icumen in*,

This tiny glee, which is the germ of modern music, the direct and absolute progenitor to the oratorios of Handel, the symphonies of Beethoven, the operas of Wagner is a purely English creation, dealing with English sights and sounds - the cuckoo, the blooming meadow...the pastures of Berkshire.

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1. This must be restricted to a consideration of song settings, because it is impossible to obtain recordings of most of Gurney's instrumental music and it is rarely performed. Secondary criticism will be quoted where appropriate, but is not offered as primary research.
 2. The English Musical Renaissance p 23

Such sweeping claims are clearly ludicrous, but in placing the heart of 'Englishness' in the pastoral mode he is affirming the values central to the most significant composers in the English Musical Renaissance, as well as pre-figuring the values and pre-occupations seen later in the Georgian movement. (1). Nevertheless, to transpose these elements into music without words, to reduce them in effect to their essence, requires points of reference by which they can be conveyed and understood, which in turn requires a shared understanding of musical conventions. This is evident in the language of the music critic. For example, Bernard Benoliel describes Parry's *Symphony No. 3 in C (The English)* thus,

He achieves perfectly what he sets out to do: to create an exuberant English equivalent to the Mendelssohn *Italian*, and Schumann *Rhenish* Symphonies. The structure and developmental procedures resemble the *Italian*, with nods to Beethoven 4 and 8, but the themes are all thoroughly English in their rhythmic cut.

This, he suggests, is set up in the first movement by a ²'dance-like, open air quality'. (3).

Drawing together the threads emerging from the discussion above, it can be seen that 'Englishness' in music relies heavily on pastoral, (4) rhythm determined by linguistic considerations, (which would include both pace and stress), and reference to traditional motifs, used in folk-song or other traditional forms of song or music. All of these elements are fundamental to Gurney's music, and indeed to his poetry. Furthermore, there is an

1. The term 'Georgian' is itself ambiguous, because although derived from the monarch during whose reign it arose, as logical follow-on from 'Victorian', it had a resonance with the 'georgics'

2. Benoliel, B. 1990 Sleeve notes to London Philharmonic Orchestra recording, Chandos Records Ltd.

3. *ibid*

4. Often the clue to content was given in the title to the piece, eg *Over the Hills and far away*, (Delius), *The Woodnymphs*, (Sterndale-Bennett).

added dimension when the music in question is a song-setting, because there is inevitably a degree of symbiosis in the relationship between words and music.

It is interesting to examine Gurney's selection of poems he considered to be suitable subjects to set to music. Many of the poets whose works he chose were extremely popular with song writers both before and after Gurney's time. Poems by Housman and de la Mare for example were much in demand with composers, and some individual poems were set in many different versions. (1). Stephen Banfield lists Gurney's earliest musical song settings as *Mandalay*, and *Who hath desired the sea?*, both by Kipling, and composed some time around 1904, although the former exists only as a fragment. Out of a total of 311 of Gurney's songs, the majority are settings of Georgian poets (or those whose theme and subject were in a similar vein even if they had not been included in Edward Marsh's Georgian anthologies.) Poems by Housman, W.E. Henley, Bridges, Masfield, W.H. Davies, W.W. Gibson, de la Mare, and Edward Thomas are frequent subjects. Of the older material, Shakespeare, Campion, Nashe and Fletcher are examples. There were folk-songs, like the well known *Edward, Edward*, and *The Two Corbies*, and settings of several poems by Yeats which have a

1. To give some idea of the immense popularity of some poets - de la Mare's poems, for example, were set by Bantock, Benjamin, Berkeley, Bliss, Britten, Browne, Burrows, Bush, Carey, Clement, Davies, Finzi, Gibbs, Gurney, Head, Hely-Hutchinson, Howells, Keele, O'Neill, Peterkin, Rawsthorne and Sykes; Housman's by Ainsworth, Andrews, Bax, Berkeley, Bliss, Boughton, Branson, Burrows, Butterworth, Clarke, Cripps, de Beer, Dyson, Ettrick, Finzi, Foss, Gardiner, Gibbs, Gray, Gurney, Hamilton, Head, Herbert, Holloway, Ireland, Lambert, Ley, Lutyens, Manson, Marillier, Milvain, Moeran, Orr, Peel, Priestley-Smith Proctor-Gregg, Rose, F.G. Scott, Somervell, Symons, Stewart, Taylor, Thomas, Vaughan-Williams, Warlock, Whitaker, Woolley, Young.

resonance with folk-song form. What they have in common is that they almost all reflect a sensibility archetypally 'English'. (1). There are few translated works set to music, notably Heine and Sappho, and several of the latter, (*The apple orchard; The quiet mist; Soft was the wind in the beech trees*, for example) have a universality and pastoral tone that is completely compatible with the 'Englishness' of the rest. If this quality is inherent in the content of most of Gurney's songs, it is reinforced often by the form. Gurney was interested in traditional form, and set nine madrigals, (2) one of which, *Tears, (Weep you no more, sad fountains)*, was included in the *Five Elizabethan Songs*.

Looking at the range of Gurney's songs (3), and taking into account what is known about his interests and the people who influenced him musically and in literature, it could reasonably be concluded that he is both claiming and proclaiming his 'Englishness'. This is not only a declaration of his own individual identity. It is a representative identity, a voice that speaks on behalf of his community, as has been suggested above in an analogy with his poems. He is aware, too, of his own part in the gathering

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1. *Edward, Edward*, is a border ballad, of which Gurney set several. *The Two Corbies* has many variants in both Scottish and English tradition eg *The Three Ravens* which Gurney parodies in his poem *The Three Spectres*. Yeats' 'Irishness' is not being denied, but the term 'British' cannot be substituted in this context, in relation to the developments taking place in English music. 'Englishness' implies a state of mind, rather than topographical accuracy about the provenance of the ballads in question.
 2. There are more madrigals set by Gurney than any other composer in the English musical renaissance.
 3. Sensibility pp 456 - 462. (Appendix 1)

momentum of National Music. In a letter to Marion Scott, in October 1915, he writes

I am glad that you like the song. My own opinion is that only 'Erl-king' and 'Doppelganger' equal or surpass 'Edward' and 'The Twa Corbies'.....As my health and spirits improve, so within me I find a store of poetry, an accumulation of pictures - dead leaves, Minsterworth Orchards, Cranham, Crickley and Framilode reach. They do not merely mean intensely to me; they are me, points from which my soul, as our armies at Lens and Champagne, will make irruptions and declare as I hope Music to be as much an English as a German art.

1

It is clear that the inspiration for both poetry and music is grounded very firmly in the sense of 'Englishness' that he feels is such an important part of his identity. It is a natural extension of his pride in being a 'son of Gloucester', because for him Gloucestershire represented the epitome of 'Englishness'. The sense of regional and national pride was of course sharpened by the war, when the threat of being damaged or taken over by another nation made everything more precious, as well fuelling the nostalgia provoked simply by separation from familiar surroundings. Looking at Gurney's work in relation to a national musical trend, however, provides only an overview, and to use one of his own metaphors, a view of the stars rather than one particular lamp. As an individual, as well as proclaiming and celebrating his 'Englishness' in music, he is also showing what kind of Englishman he is, and as is seen in the poems, his sense of self is complex and many-faceted. It is necessary, therefore, whilst acknowledging Gurney's place as one of many composers in a given period choosing from a relatively small and predictable pool of material, to recognise what qualities, devices and characteristics were particularly his own. In order to do this, a small number of songs will be used as examples.

1. Letters p 46

Perhaps the most transparent, and the easiest to classify, are the five drinking songs. Three of these are associated closely with F.W. Harvey. *West Sussex drinking song*, written by Hilaire Belloc, was dedicated to Harvey, Gurney's own drinking companion during their times together in Gloucestershire, and later in London. Harvey is reputed to have had a fine baritone voice, and performed this song frequently when he was a prisoner of war. There are several versions, the first written before the war in 1913, but another was produced in 1921, and 'Comrade to many in captivity' added to 'FWH' in the dedication. Masfield's poem, *Captain Stratton's Fancy*, was also dedicated to Harvey in the 1920 version, with a further reference to his captivity. ('to F.W. Harvey, singer of this song in many prison camps.') *In setting In Praise of Ale*, Gurney took Harvey's own words. These 'tavern songs' or 'drinking songs' express very vividly the sociable, playful, humorous and lively aspects of Gurney's nature that his friends and contemporaries describe, and which is apparent in his letters and some of the poems. In addition these songs represent quite effectively and specifically Gurney's companionship with his friend, but they are also accessible pieces. As Herbert Howells acknowledged,

'Captain Stratton's Fancy' went the rounds of many a prison camp in Germany, and is a tune for plain men to sing.

1.

Although they are accessible, and were taken up by 'plain men', it would be inaccurate to suggest that Gurney's songs are 'classless', when the genre to which they belong could be regarded as esoteric, grounded in a cultural elitism, and of interest to a relatively small number of people. Nevertheless, Gurney's songs, encompassing a wide range of form and style,

1. *Music and Letters*, January 1938 p15

demonstrate his ability to cross boundaries, and his need to be free from the constriction of only one vantage point. Eight settings of Shakespeare and the nine madrigals noted above, whether or not they were set to a tune that 'plain men' could sing, imply a familiarity with 'high art' that has more to do with education and familiarity with the conventions of music, than the intrinsic content of the verse. The classic madrigal form, had its roots in Italy in the fourteenth century, but is associated more often with a flowering in the early sixteenth century that influenced the English Madrigal school, later in the century. Although the content is, typically, pastoral, (1), the form is tightly constructed, and, as with any secular music of that period, would have been available only to the wealthy. Thus the madrigal represents the antithesis of the folk -song, but Gurney has an empathy for both. His appreciation of folk music elements, representing perhaps, for him, the traditional, an 'Englishness' close to the earth, and a continuity with earlier generations, shapes his work significantly. Similarly, knowledge of form and structure (necessary in the construction of a madrigal - a process that could be regarded both as an intellectual exercise and an exercise in craftsmanship) gives rise to the refined and perhaps rather more contrived examples of composition. What is missing is any sense of identification with the kind of popular music with which young men of his class background would have been familiar. This adds to the sense that Gurney was not only turning his back on his own lower middle class background and culture, but that he was seeking not merely one but several alternatives.

1. It is not clear whether the term itself derives from *mandriale* - a pastoral poem, or *matricale* - suggesting a poem in the mother tongue.

Of the many voices Gurney uses, however, the Georgian voice is the one with which he identified most closely, and through which he gives glimpses of his own sense of self. Walter de la Mare, in his contribution to the appreciation of Ivor Gurney in *Music and Letters*, in 1938, claims that 'he has never set bad words'. This claim may appear to disregard criticism from some quarters that Georgian poetry was dull and parochial, but whether or not the Georgian poems Gurney chose to set had literary merit, it was held by many that they provided the basis for a felicitous combination of words and music. As Vaughan Williams observes,

Gurney takes his place as a pilgrim on the great highway at a lucky moment. Most of his songs belong to the years 1917-20 and are settings of the "Georgian" poets, of which body he is himself a distinguished member. These writers had just rediscovered England and the language that fitted the shy beauty of their own country.

Gurney has found the exact musical equivalent both in sentiment and in cadence to this poetry; he and his contemporaries have at last discovered that English poetry cannot be forced into the procrustean bed of German, French, or Russian musical formulas.

In the bad old days of "Come into the Garden Maud" the composer rode roughshod over the poor poet. Parry and Stanford changed all that, but their musical settings of English poetry with its meticulous observance of accent and stress were apt to be a little self-conscious. It was reserved for the "Georgian" poets to let their music flow unconstrained and spontaneously into the channels laid down by their contemporary poets.

1.

Vaughan Williams' "flowing" metaphor is appropriate in relation to Gurney's style, (2), characterised often by a gentle meandering fluidity, where the accompaniment follows the vocal line quite closely. In addition to the

1. Music and Letters, January 1938 p14

2. This refers to Gurney's mature style. His early works were characterised, to use Finzi's interpretation, by 'an incandescence' and energetic plans to write operas based on Yeats' plays, Synge's *Riders to the Sea*, and a music-drama about Simon de Montfort.

musical parallels, there is often a close harmony between the rhythm and stress of natural speech and the musical rhythm of the setting.

It has been suggested that Gurney's experience as a chorister helped his instinct for vocal placement, and it is characteristic of his settings that they produce an almost perfect combination of open vowel sounds and musical notes which can be sung in a way that enhances the sense of the line at an emotional as well as a cognitive level. This may well have begun with an appreciation of the 'musicality' of the poems he chose. Housman's *A . Shropshire Lad* is a particularly apt example, as the review in *The Times* noted when it was first published.

...the essentials of thought and music ... are there in no niggard measure...his gift of melodious expression is genuine

1

There are pitfalls however, as Stephen Banfield points out, when composers try to 'superimpose anything on the balance of opposing forces perfected in the poetry', and that

a musical setting of Housman seems bound to tell the tale at least twice by emphasising one aspect of the poem : either the flow of the rhythm at the expense of the hard sentiment of the words ... or the basic meaning at the expense of the sense of smooth continuous movement.

2.

When Gurney is successful, he finds a finely poised balance between the two elements, which combine synergistically to create a third level of understanding of the subject.

1. Sensibility p 241

2. *ibid.*

Achieving this balance rarely involves distorting the natural cadence of speech. Although Gurney sometimes changes words, he rarely repeats lines or phrases to suit the musical structure, (a device often used to make a poem fit a more rigid musical form). He frequently sets words simply with one note to a syllable, (as is usually the case in folk-song), which makes them very comfortable to sing, and allows a balance between words and music where neither needs to dominate the other. In a simple setting, therefore, when he deviates from this, it is usually for specific effect. *Black Stichel* is a good example, where single notes accompany the first line, and the beginning of the second, but change to produce a mimetic effect by extending 'blowing' to three rising notes on 'blow' and falling a semi-tone on the last syllable. This device is repeated powerfully when 'the wind was blowing from the North', lending emphasis to its bleak and stormy quality, and enhanced by modulation from the initial key. As Herbert Howells points out,

His very finest songs are not only settings of [their] poems, but they form the subtlest existing musical commentary upon them.

1.

Again, to use *Black Stichel* as an example, in the fourth stanza, which is the heart of the poem, there is a brief hesitation, the exact counterpart of a caesura in a line of poetry, (2), followed by a repetition of the main melodic line. This is given a poignant and disturbing tone, because at

1. *Music and Letters*, Vol XIX, p 14

2. It must be recognised, however, that questions of tempo and delivery depend largely on performance, and Gurney did not always specify precisely what his intentions were. The argument above is justified by the musical phrase that follows the caesura, see below.

the point where the ear predicts the replication of the earlier melody the rising line subverts expectation by refusing to follow the obvious pattern, and ends on a note a semi-tone lower. The result is that a song that begins, ostensibly, by using the wind as an objective correlative for the emotions in a direct, perhaps stereotyped, way, undergoes a subtle change. As Nora Sirbaugh pointed out in her lecture recital, *Ivar Gurney and his vision of Gloucestershire in music, at The Peabody Conservatory of Music*, (1), this is Gurney's acknowledgment of the effect of the war.

It is an oblique acknowledgement. Unlike Sir Arthur Bliss for example, who specifically 'looked for some poems to set which would in some measure convey the emotions of those first months of the summer of 1914', (2), Gurney did not often seek to create music for poems about the war. The exceptions are *The dying patriot :Day breaks on England*, by Elroy Flecker, which Gurney set to music at some time around 1919, and A.E. Housman's *Epitaph on an army of mercenaries*, in 1918. The latter is from the collection Last Poems, published in 1922, and its ironic theme - that the mercenaries joined up for money but were repaid by death - had a resonance with Gurney's pre-occupation with the lack of honour and reward given to soldiers especially those who were poets or musicians. Other Housman poems Gurney set, often pre-dated the First World War. A Shropshire Lad, was published in 1896, which meant that it even pre-dated the Boer war, but

Housman's themes - the passing of first love, the parting of friends, the loss of youth, unpredictable and meaningless death - must have struck a powerful emotional chord with a nation that was losing an entire generation of young men to the trenches.

3

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1. Op. cit.
 2. As I Remember. p 30
 3. The Works of A.E. Housman, Introduction, p ix

Gurney writes, often very graphically, about the war in his poetry, but little about the love, courtship, loneliness and loss of youth - elements that form a continuous thread through Housman's verse. Gurney, on the other hand seems to be more at ease expressing these emotions through his music, but letting other poets' words make them articulate on his behalf. As Stephen Banfield points out, Gurney is using his music to create the environment, and the words to superimpose thoughts. Other critics have made less favourable comments. Peter Pirie, for example, says that

The impression that one receives from his choice of poets is that he responded warmly to a certain kind of verse, but had no intellectual centre.

1.

This misses the point. Gurney is more concerned with being than analysing.

As Anthony Storr states

it appears that some creative people spend their lives trying to discover and consolidate their own sense of identity, and that this provides the motive force for their creative endeavours.

2

Self knowledge in this context is more akin to 'feeling' than 'reasoning', and Storr illustrates the point by quoting Aaron Copland,

Why is it so important to my own psyche that I compose music? What makes it seem so absolutely necessary, so that every other daily activity, by comparison, is of lesser significance? And why is the creative impulse never satisfied;[?] To the first question...the answer is always the same - self expression. The basic need to make evident one's deepest feelings about life...Why must one always begin again? The reason for the compulsion to renewed creativity, it seems to me, is that each added work brings with it an element of self-discovery. I must create in order to know myself, and since self-knowledge is a never-ending search, each new work is only a part-answer to the question 'Who am I?'

3

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1. Stand, Vol 30, No.3 p 24
 2. The Dynamics of Creation p 275
 3. *ibid*

Self-expression, as an important part of self-knowledge, is of fundamental importance, and for Gurney this meant expressing beauty as well as emotion and meaning. The 'long sweeping lines' of *Severn Meadows* are wistfully melodic, reflecting the wistfulness in the meaning of the words, and echoing the inflection of the spoken words. Gurney is not striving for deep philosophical meaning, but for simple, effective, and most important, beautiful, expression of emotion. To be a 'creator of beauty' was of paramount importance, and despite the fact that he was marginalised both as a composer, and writer, many of his songs are regarded, by those who know them, as possessing the aesthetic qualities Gurney so desired to achieve. *On the idle hill of summer*, illustrates this, as does *Sleep*. The tenor, Gervase Elwes, said of *Sleep*, written when Gurney was still a student, that it was the most beautiful song written by an Englishman. and the same song inspired Gerald Finzi to research and promote Gurney's music. Even Pirie, whose analysis is, on the whole, very critical of Gurney's achievement, undercuts his own argument when, in referring to some early recordings of the songs, he allows that

these records convey something of those elusive gifts
that remain when criticism has done its worst....

and that

Two or three songs - 'Latmian Shepherd' (Shanks), 'All Night under the Moon' (Gibson), 'You are My Sky' (Squire) almost convince one that one is in the presence of a great song writer.When Gurney does find his poem, the tempo is usually slow, there emerges from the result an elusive magic.

1

Looking at Gurney's song settings as manifestations of his desire to create music of lasting beauty, quintessentially English, to celebrate and honour

1. *Stand*, Vol 30, No 3 p 25

his county and country, it is not surprising that he chooses not to reproduce the sounds of war. He does not engage with the mechanistic and brutal aspects of the war by adopting discordant or stark techniques in his music. (1). What he offers instead is the antithesis to its harshness, in producing many songs where both words and music are life affirming. Although the songs of love and loss discussed above are important, often poignant, and adopt a conventionally melancholic tone, they are rooted firmly in the bucolic/pastoral tradition, that accommodates loss as part of a cyclical pattern of existence. The closeness of death for Gurney's generation, and the awareness for him, as an individual, of the fragility of his mental stability, forces to the surface of both collective and individual consciousness, questions about the meaning of existence and the value of life itself. These are not articulated in a coldly intellectual way, but are implicit in the subject matter of many of the poems, and the musical treatment Gurney gives them.

A great number of the song settings are of poems that portray 'nature' (interpreted loosely, to encompass flora, fauna, seasons, skies and landscapes) as the key to human existence. The qualities symbolised by the natural world are touchstones for Gurney. On the one hand continuity and renewal represent a form of immortality, and because so many facets are, for Gurney, inextricably connected with Gloucestershire and 'Englishness', they not only confirm his place and identity, but offer him, too, the hope of immortality. Many of the songs, therefore, are celebratory in tone,

1. The First World War had provoked radical changes in the visual arts as well in the perception of poetic diction and subjects suitable for poetry. Although Gurney was not one of them, many composers responded by pursuing the avant garde and modernist techniques.

sometimes employing simple mimetic elements to add colour and texture to the melodic theme. In *Spring*, for example the opening chords are the falling thirds of familiar cuckoo song, and this is repeated in the refrain. Rather more subtly, in *The Fiddler of Dooney*, the end of the last stanza ('wave of the sea'), is underpinned by a fluid musical accompaniment that extends into a rippling postlude.

Not all the song settings are as successful. Even the people who supported and promoted Gurney's work acknowledged that some of the music was problematic. As happened with the poems, many of the song settings suffered later revision, and some songs appear in several versions, where Gurney returned to favourite poems as the subject for song. Some of the songs (for example, *I went with my father ploughing*) include subtle modulations that may be difficult to memorise. Such changes may fit the sense of the words, but can be difficult to sing, in that it is often easier to sing accurately a big change, or no change, than a very minor adjustment in key. To some extent, Gurney's songs suffer by comparison with other song writers. His contemporary, Butterworth, for example set many of the same Housman poems that Gurney chose. Butterworth, however, died in 1916 leaving only thirty one songs, and, according to Stephen Banfield, 'little compositional dross.' The good fortune that preserved so much of Gurney's output, was also paradoxically his misfortune, in that little was destroyed, even when it was not as good as his work at its best. Gurney's style of composition has been compared to that of Peter Warlock, and again the comparisons when both have set the same poem, have not always been favourable. Marion Scott

also suggests that much depended on the performance of the songs.

Gurney himself, when singing, kept remarkably close to his own written rhythms, and his word-cum-note values are rich in their expressiveness. He never used a melisma or other ornament without it having some special meaning in relation to the words, and his melismatic passages, which are in the direct line of descent from those of Beethoven, Wagner, and Parry, should always be sung very beautifully and not treated in a perfunctory or apologetic style. Another thing to remember is that Gurney kept the life of a song unbroken from start to finish: even when there were rests or silent bars his mental tension never flagged. Yet there was never any rigidity. *Indeed rigidity and dry tone are entirely out of keeping with Gurney's own playing and must never be applied to his songs.*

1

She went on to say that when Gurney played his own songs, they

'were often a lovely wash of sound forming the background to the voice. The effect cannot well be written out - it was too spontaneous.

2.

Such individuality, and dependence on an empathetic performance makes the critic's task a difficult one, and in addition to a 'looseness' of style there are often structural and organisational flaws directly analogous to the flaws in Gurney's poetry. They reflect the mental deterioration of the asylum years and a tenuous grasp on both reality and the ability to sustain ordered thought. A tendency to lose the tightness of structure present in the opening bars or melodic motif may also have been exacerbated by Gurney's experience as an organist, where improvisation, and somewhat unstructured repetitions are accepted techniques for filling in gaps of indeterminate length during a service or as the congregation enters or leaves.

1. A Third Volume of Ten Songs, Introduction.

2 *ibid*

Sometimes, a piece may simply miss the point. This has been suggested in the case of Gurney's setting of F.W. Harvey's poem, *In Flanders*. the musical structure is st^rangely at odds with the sense of the poem. Harvey is expressing acute homesickness for the familiar Gloucestershire landscape, because he is writing in Flanders, from a point of separation. The tone of the musical setting, however is celebratory, (1), which works well enough with the lines

To see above the Severn plain
Unscabbarded against the sky
The blue high blade of Cotswold lie;

2

But where Harvey refers to the flat lowlands of Flanders, 'Like a huge imprisoning O', which should provide a contrast to the glorious and beloved landscape of Gloucestershire, Gurney's musical treatment gives that line the same kind of celebratory tone, as if he has misread it as an all-embracing O, relating to Gloucestershire, not the alien landscape of Belgium.

It would be invalid not to acknowledge that the quality of Gurney's music varies, but given that there is such a huge amount of material, both music and poetry, that is competent and well-crafted, it would be reductive to dwell on the more obviously flawed pieces. It is characteristic of Gurney's work, too, that even in pieces that are flawed, there are individual lines, phrases, or sequences of notes that have an originality or brilliance that cannot be ignored. The exmple given above, *In Flanders*, is a case in point,

1. F.W. Harvey, Soldier, Poet p 92

2. "Tell Herbert that the Malverns in 'Flanders' are the Malverns. As I stand off from the song, the hills swim in sunlight like that, to the plucking of harps and a sustained sound of wood and strings." Letters p197

because the first part of the poem, rising to an emotional climax with 'The blue high blade of Cotswold lie',

is peculiarly apt as an image of the contour of the Gloucestershire hills and their spirit of freedom, and as such holds the key to much of Gurney's melodic inspiration as a Georgian rural composer.

1

For Gurney himself, his relationship with music provided not only moments of epiphany, but lasting solace, and the expression of his innermost self, apparent in a letter to Marion Scott,

The day has been springlike on the whole, and last night's sky was gloriously tragic; I sang 'In Flanders' to myself, facing the West, alone in a largely ruined house, spoiled by that unutterable thoroughness of the German destruction; and was somewhat comforted thereby. That has all been said for me in 'In Flanders'.

2

Gurney's song settings, then, can be interpreted as statements through which he defines and explains himself, and claims his place in the world. It is clear that in choosing other poets' words to set, he chose those who offered sentiments close to his own, and he appears not to have compromised that position. (3), It has been perplexing that there are so few settings of his own poems, and Nora Sirbaugh concludes that he could not find close enough parallels between his musical and spoken or written language. The discovery in the mid nineteen eighties of settings of words that were Gurney's own, but which had not appeared in either manuscript or typescript as poems, raised questions about

1. Sensibility, p 191

2. Letters, p 239

3. He does not seem to have been offered commissions, and uses pseudonyms (see below) where he regards the songs as 'potboilers'.

their status. Although Gurney had written music while still at school, during the time he studied at The Royal College of Music before the war, and on active service, his most productive period was between 1918 and 1926. The majority of the song settings Richard Carder listed as new discoveries belong to the end of that period, from around 1925. Gurney set his own poem, *Only the Wanderer*, to music in 1917, and it was given public performance in a concert by the Society of Women Musicians, in the Wigmore Hall in April 1918. This has usually been regarded as the only example of Gurney setting his own words. Carder lists fifteen others, but this is not entirely in accord with Banfield's list. Some of the titles Banfield lists without author, or lists as '? Gurney', (*To the Memory of Max Reger with Homage; Love Song ('Love's pattern'); For the Lands; Lament; Over the Ridge; The First of Lent; After the Ceremony; The Late Rider; Western Sailors; Song of the Canadian Soldiers*). Carder lists *Thy Voice* as Gurney's own words, and suggests that H. Rippon Seymour is a pseudonym he used as the composer. In Banfield's list, H. Rippon Seymour is given as the poet, and the composer is given as Michael Flood, known to be one of Gurney's pseudonyms. He used that name when he set two poems by Winifred Letts - *The Fair*, and *Cowslip Time*, as well as *At the jolly Blue Boar*, all of which were written around 1919-1920, at the same time as *Thy Voice*. Carder suggests that '*Thy Voice* is (surely) pastiche - a send-up of a sentimental Edwardian song'. (1)

Thy voice can charm me or sweetest memory bring
 I could forever list while thou dost sing
 Thy voice can soothe my soul and to tears can wring
 I live in ecstasy when thou dost sing

1. Correspondence between Richard Carder and D.E. Ward, May 1986.

Thy voice can help me to saddest thought out-fling
I know the purest joy when thou dost sing
Sing ere I leave thee of Hope or Love or Spring
I care not what the song that thou wilt sing

1

There is no punctuation. With the exception, possibly, of 'out-fling' the language does not sound like Gurney. If it is pastiche, as Carder suggests, the use of 'list', 'dost', 'thy' and 'thou' are used simply for humour, in the same way that Gurney sometimes entertained the Chapmans and other correspondents with doggerel verses.

Richard Carder makes a similar comment about *Christmas Folksong*, which he says 'is surely too dreadful to be really a folksong'. (2). Banfield lists it as anonymous. The four four line stanzas, in rhyming couplets fit all the conventions of folk song ballad form, (and it does not seem any more dreadful than many folksongs), but there is little to suggest that it could be attributed to Gurney.

The little Jesus came to town,
The wind blew up, the wind blew down.
Out in the street the wind blew cold,
Now who would house him from the cold.

3

The two most interesting examples are *Song of Silence*, and *London Song*. The former is one of a cycle of five songs written in 1918. Carder indicates that they were written at Brancepeth for Annie Drummond, although there is no dedication listed by Banfield. (4)

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1. Correspondence between Richard Carder and L. Ward, May 1986.
 2. *ibid*
 3. *ibid*
 4. The later cycle *The Western Playland (and of sorrow)*, was dedicated to "Hawthornden", [Annie Drummond], and included Housman's *The cherry tree*, which was also in the cycle of five songs.

O my Darling, how shall I give you thanks enough for any song.
Beauty, God has showed me,
Time the strong shall not destroy.
All annoy, all evil things may grieve you,
Pass away to comfort leave you.

Were the throats of all the singing birds of April mine to say,
All the thoughts of wonder crowding my adoring heart today,
even they
Flying to you and bringing
Love of mine, would rest silently clinging.

1

This piece has elements that are characteristic of Gurney's poems. For example, there is craftsmanship in the use of assonance, (destroy/annoy; throats/thoughts). The use of 'annoy', has a somewhat archaic tone, reminiscent of the Elizabethans. The telescoping of syntax in the fourth lines, where there is an absent 'that', ('all evil things [that] may grieve you'), and the inversion implied in 'Pass away to comfort leave you', mark this as unmistakably Gurney's work. Nevertheless, it is clearly written as a song. Structurally, the length of the sixth and seventh lines, and the addition of 'even they' after 'heart today' which already provides the rhyme for the previous line, make this sound like a song even when it is spoken aloud, not sung. It illustrates the amorphous nature of Gurney's creativity - a spectrum rather than a polarisation between music and literature. It also sheds a little more light on one aspect of Gurney's life that is ambiguous on the evidence of letters and poems. In *Song of Silence*, Gurney's love for Annie Drummond is expressed clearly and directly, and although it is 'not good musically', according to Carder, it is, nonetheless, of interest.

London Song is attributed to John Daniels in Banfield's list, but again the

1. Correspondence between Richard Carder and D.E.Ward, May 1986.

themes and preoccupations are those that appear so often in Gurney's poems ('honour'; 'poets in their great hour'; 'guilds and crafts'; 'Hear ..old titles in a strange dark talked';) that it is almost inconceivable that it could have been written by anyone else.

London Song

I will go walking with the crowd in London,
Where the buses rattle and the sun shines grand
On all the places that the poets in their great hour walked,
Hear the old titles in a strange dark talked,
And see the bonny sight, of London City O

I will go walking where the earls had honour,
And the drums beat ensign and the streets had manner
Of a thousand ages of lordly pride - and London yet
With its ocean water flooding
With its ocean water by the bridges white.

I will remember the great guilds and crafts,
Whose honour was of England, whose swords flashed in many paths
of challenge for a names sake,
In the van, in the wake of battle far and wide,
They were dead for London's sake -
World-wide for her sake.

I will go walking dreaming truths of olden tales and poets
golden,
When the fame of the name of London rose in flame,
And great stone grew up white
For God's honour and delight - of England's state
And the great Queen in this London grasped the keys of Ocean
gate.

1.

It is almost certain that John Daniels is a pseudonym for Gurney. It would be tempting, particularly in a study concerned with identity, to read significance into Gurney's use of pseudonyms for his compositions. He used the names Michael Flood, Griffiths Davies, and Frederick Saxby. The latter

1. Correspondence between Richard Carder and D.E.Ward, May 1986.

is primarily associated with songs based on American poems by Louis How. (*Fifth Avenue; Castle Garden; Columbia Heights; Gramercy Park; Mary Murray (Murray Hill); Riverside Drive; Williamsburg; Woolworth Building;*) All except the first, and the last which is missing from the archive, were composed by "Frederick Saxby". (1) Although there are no references to Griffiths Davies or Frederick Saxby in Gurney's letters, he refers to the use of Michael Flood in a letter to J. W. Haines, in February 1921,

This is a beastly life, this houses and drain-pipe streets life - this is the afternoon for Cranham, or the Adam and Eve, or by Stincombe *Country Sentiment* has yielded up 5 or 6 [songs] now, a bad setting of 'Allie' by J.R. Heath gave encouragement. I am Michael Flood with Pot Boilers now.

2

He is even more explicit in a letter sent to Mr Howard in May 1921, when he says,

Here are some songs - some I like under my own name; some potboilers under another. I hope somehow something will hit. Is there any news of the Carnegie awards?

3

These are refreshingly pragmatic references, and Gurney's purpose is quite clear. As a young man from a background without wealth, he had to struggle to make an income sufficient to support himself, and the extracts above show an artist of some creative pride, attempting to produce something for the popular market. (4) There can be no suggestion at all that, at this

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1. There may be some link too, between the pseudonym and "Frederick Saxty" to whom Gurney dedicated a setting of Campion's *Come, O come my life's delight*.
 2. *Letters* p 507
 3. *ibid* p514
 4. One of the five songs Gurney sent to Mr Howard was *Hawk and Buckle*, for which the author, Robert Graves, had also used a pseudonym - John Doyle.

point, in the early nineteen twenties, Gurney is adopting another identity, or confused about his own. (1) It is important to stress this, when so much that has contributed to the marginalisation of Gurney's work has been due to misunderstanding or over-emphasising his mental condition. Peter Pirie's response to Gurney's music does both.

I feel in Gurney's music, and to an extent in his poetry, imagination struggling with lack of technique, sheer eccentricity at war with conventional forms, and a personality in which his greatest talents were a part of that which destroyed him. Perhaps it was the consciousness of this, that his imaginative power, especially in music was the emanation of an unconscious mind out of control, that caused him to believe, in his madness, that music was the origin of that madness.

2

This is a crude and simplistic response that denies Gurney's technical abilities. Stephen Banfield describes it more objectively, appreciating Gurney's abilities and skills, but recognising that his mental deterioration meant that he was not always able to use them effectively.

It is vital to an understanding of Gurney's style to appreciate that traces of imbalance and decay are present in nearly all his songs from this period [post 1926]..... Gurney's manifest insanity of September 1922 is only indirectly a turning point in his composing career, in that as structures his songs become gradually less compelling after this date. The basic style remains, however.

3.

It is important to keep this in mind, so that acknowledging Gurney's mental disturbance in his later years as a composer does not colour, retrospectively, the response to his earlier works in an inappropriate way.

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1. In later years Gurney used a variety of names in poems and appeals. Trethowan also refers to a manuscript from 1925 which has 'a lot of very interesting scrawls by Gurney in which he signs himself by a whole series of names which indicate clearly his disturbed state of mind...
 2. Pirie. Stand. p 24
 3. Sensibility p 180

For critics or scholars attempting to present an overview of Gurney's work, this aspect of Gurney's life has, nevertheless, raised difficult questions. It has also raised practical difficulties. Marion Scott's preface to the first Oxford University Press volume of songs (1938), highlights the first, that

Gurney had a habit, each time he re-copied a song, of making alterations or permutations, some small, some rather considerable, in the music.Nor can it be said the later versions are better than the first, or *vice versa*.

1

Where dates are not clear, and when several versions of songs exist, it is not easy to separate 'artistic development from artistic decay'. (2) Another difficulty arose out of the relationship between Gurney's family, particularly Ronald Gurney, and friends who valued his work and wanted to preserve and promote it. This may account for the fact that there is apparently no music from 1923. Gurney produced twenty songs in the years between 1904 and 1911, fifteen between 1911 (when he was a student at the Royal College of Music) and the beginning of the war, and eighteen during his army years from 1915 to October 1918. The rest, over two hundred and fifty songs, were written during what for Gurney was an intensely creative period between 1918 and 1926, and it is puzzling, therefore, that nothing appears to have been written in 1923. Richard Carder offers a tentative

1. A First Volume of Ten Songs Introduction

2. Similar problems arise out of alterations made to poems, but this often took the form of adding a few lines at the end, and it is somewhat easier to decide which is the earlier version.

explanation for the apparent gap, thus,

It seems that in 1923 - 24 Gurney wrote lots of instrumental music, - Gerald Finzi made a list of it and indicated that most of it was rubbish. Then after he died, his wife Joy burned it, so the rumour goes.

1.

It seems most unlikely that Joy Finzi would have burned any of Gurney's manuscripts, since she was closely involved with Gerald Finzi's work to preserve, edit and publish his music. A more likely explanation can be inferred from correspondence in the mid seventies, between Joy Finzi and Professor William Trethowan, then head of the department of psychiatry at the University of Birmingham, who was interested in the relationship between musical creativity and melancholy. (2). The letters also illustrate the different approaches to Gurney's music taken by Marion Scott, Gerald Finzi and Howard Ferguson . There is no doubt that without Marion Scott's meticulous attempts to preserve everything Gurney wrote, (and her concern for his well-being, mobilising medical and financial support for him, as well as her friendship) there would be little to assess. The result, however, was that although material was preserved, Marion Scott appeared reluctant to release any of it, and despite correspondence and discussion between Marion Scott and Herbert Howells, it was not until Finzi and Ferguson reviewed the whole body of work in 1936 that the songs received the detailed attention and editing necessary for publication. In

1. Correspondence between Richard Carder and D.E. Ward June 1986.

2. Correspondence between Professor W. Trethowan and Joy Finzi,

Trethowan's letter he refers to Ferguson's comment on the contribution made by Joy Finzi.

Dr Ferguson tells me that you are the person who probably knows most about them as he states in his recent letter to me that you "were responsible for extracting both the poetry and the music from the loving but possessive grasp of Miss Marion Scott".

1

The first of four volumes of ten songs was published in 1938, followed eventually by three more in the same series, published in 1938, 1952, and 1959. The fourth volume was published after Finzi's death and edited by Ferguson alone. A Fifth Volume of ten songs was published by Oxford University Press as recently as 1980, edited by Michael Hurd. This still leaves a large body of work unpublished, and unsung. Gurney's instrumental work has fallen even further into obscurity, most of it remaining unpublished, and rarely performed. There are four string quartets, although one is an early piece and not technically sophisticated. In addition there are pieces for violin and piano, *The Apple Orchard*, and *Scherzo*, written in 1919, and two cycles for piano - *Five Preludes*, (1919-20) and *Five Western Watercolours*, (1923). These were all published, but there are still unpublished works, fragments, and pieces, like some of the poems, showing flashes of brilliance en meshed in a background impossible to categorise or untangle.

In his biography of Ivor Gurney, Michael Hurd concludes that

We are left, then, with a song composer: somewhat flawed, but undeniably individual and certainly touched with genius. His finest songs have a rightness that cannot be challenged, and because of this he must be admitted to the galaxy of great British song composers ... alongside such names as Dowland, Parry, Warlock, Finzi, and Britten.

2

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1. *Finzi/Trethowan correspondence*
 2. *Ordeal* p 210

Gurney has not been admitted to that 'galaxy of composers'; neither has his name been added to the list of poets like Sassoon and Owen, as a major contributor to the canon of war poetry.

It is clear that there are striking parallels between Gurney's music and poetry, not only with regard to structure and development, as ontological statements and manifestations of a complex and heterodox identity, but in the way both genres were received. The reclamation of Gurney's poetry from relative obscurity, undertaken by Blunden in 1954, and Clark in 1973 was continued by P.J. Kavanagh with Collected Poems of Ivor Gurney. This mirrors the work of musicians like Finzi and Ferguson attempting to bring Gurney's music to public and critic's attention, and the more recent work by Stephen Banfield, which is the first and only detailed appraisal. In this comparative study he draws attention to the complexity of the situation.

The story of Ivor Gurney is affecting, compelling, and tragic. In considering Elgar, Parry, Quilter, Butterworth and Ireland, an attempt has been made to show that a sympathetic reading of a composer's songs can give rise to a certain amount of biographical or psychological interpretation which in turn can enhance one's understanding of the music. With Gurney, given his 1700 poems and countless letters, the extra-musical factor is so extensive that recent critical interest has focussed on his life and poetry rather than his music.....there is however pressing need for an appraisal of his songs which are still relatively little known and sung and even less understood.....That his hopes of greatness were delusory in their fervour was perhaps a large part of his tragedy, but this need not hinder an evaluation of the songs' originality, a quality which in the context of the period under review should appear considerable.

1.

This emphasises not only that there is room for more detailed study of Gurney's work, but that the context is important too. It echoes the wish

1. Sensibility p 180

expressed by Marion Scott in 1952, in the preface to the Third Volume of Ten Songs, that

his songs need an almost creative sympathy with the thought of a man who was in two senses creative - a poet as well as a composer.

i

Exploring both aspects of his identity, with that 'creative sympathy' Marion Scott requests on his behalf, leads to a better understanding of both his music and poetry, and deeper sense of their fundamental interconnectedness.

1. A Third Volume of Ten Songs. Preface

Quantity 109

Chant for Twenty-Third Psalm with which Mr Gurney used to steady himself when in fear in the trenches out in France in the War. He gave me a copy.



Ivor Gurney

Summer 1914
Term

Used at Fauquissart

July 1916

"We were made a cock-shy of for the artillery, and so have really been part of the advance. One strafe lasted 2½ hours and gave me a permanent distaste for such.Someday I will write out on some dirty scraps of manuscript I always carry with me, my setting of Davies' 'The Sea', which you would like, I think. Will you please send me a penny manuscript book or some MS in the parce; l....."

Letter, Ivor Gurney to Marion Scott,
5th July 1916.

Chapter Nine: There is a Man....

In a chapter called Identity and Power, in his study of the Edwardians, based largely on oral history and interviews with people born at the beginning of the century, Paul Thompson posits that

Every Edwardian's sense of self was shaped by four dimensions. Each dimension not only helped to construct a personal identity but at the same time was a tie in the social order, a link to the wider consciousness:The four dimensions were belonging to a nation, masculinity or femininity, age or generation, and class.

1

These four factors were as important in shaping Gurney's sense of self as they were in the lives of his contemporaries. Indeed it could be argued that in many ways for him they were more significant, because in each of those areas, a close scrutiny of Gurney's life reveals a deracination, and deviation from the expected or the norm. Thompson's assertion that each aspect not only contributed to the construction and definition of selfhood, but that it also defined the individual's place and expectations in the . . . nexus of society, provides a useful framework on which to shape a study of Gurney's writing. Instead of reading his work as 'war poetry', or 'poetry of place', this study attempts to approach his writing as a manifestation of those four major elements in Edwardian consciousness, as evidence that the body of his work as a whole can be read as a search for self-validation and identity. His poetry has too often been regarded as acute observation, but may be better understood as internal rather than external discourse.

The problems of engaging with his work are various, and it would be difficult, without recourse to archive material as well as Kavanagh's and Thornton's extensive selections, to test the validity of this thesis. For

1. Thompson p 180

many readers, only a few of the better known poems have been available. The Penguin Book of First World War Poetry, edited by Jon Silkin, for example includes six. Sometimes the two or three line critiques or biographies mislead by understatement, or emphasise only the aspect of his work that best suits the anthology. (¶) No critical approach to Gurney's work has attempted to consider all his writing. Both P.J.Kavanagh and Kelsey Thornton have spoken and written of the difficulty in selecting poems for publication. Firstly there are so many, preserved largely thanks to Marion Scott, and gathered together in one archive. Many of his poems are illuminated by one or two lines of enormous insight, poignant or startling imagery, or use rare collocations that are risky or occasionally confusing. P.J. Kavanagh's Selected Poems, included almost three hundred, which may seem like a huge body of work in comparison with poets like Gerard Manley Hopkins, or Philip Larkin for example, whose reputation rested on a relatively small output. It could be argued that when a writer exercises control over what is saved, published, or made publicly accessible, early writings, unfinished pieces or work perceived to be lacking in quality will be taken out.

Gurney clearly exercised choice over the two collections published in his lifetime - Severn and Somme and War's Embers. Many of the manuscripts and typescripts now in the Archive have additions or alterations that were carried out in the years of Gurney's mental deterioration. Faced with the need to make a small selection, it is inevitable that the choice will be made from the less problematic poems, or those most easily categorised. What this means for the critic or reader, then, is that a substantial

1. For example in Lads: Love Poetry of the Trenches, Martin Taylor.

proportion of Gurney's output is not used in assessing the essence of his writing. A critical approach needs to consider both quality and content, and although some of his work, it could be argued, inevitably shows signs of Gurney's mental state, it may be precisely this that could illuminate our understanding of him as an individual writer, rather than adumbrate the available, but incomplete, examples of his writing.

Thompson's four categories offer a useful framework within which to examine aspects of identity in Gurney's writing. This is particularly problematic with regard to the question of gender, but less so in the case of 'belonging to a nation'. The majority of poems published in the main collections, edited by Clarke, Blunden and P.J.Kavanagh, as well as in the re-edition of Severn and Somme and War's Embers have been regarded as poems of place or war poems. Both war and the strong sense of regional loyalty were intrinsically bound up with the concept of 'belonging to a nation'. Perhaps in peacetime there is a clear difference between 'place' (as a local, parochial subject for poetry, or vehicle for Nature poetry,) and 'nation', where it implies a grander scale, and possibly a rejection of the provincial vantage point. In times of war, however, the concept of synonymy between 'place' and nation is too useful to ignore. Bravery and sacrifice in the name of patriotism were manipulated by propaganda.

They had not died for England - what did they know of
England and the British Empire? They had died for a
little corner of ground which was England for them,
and the sprinkling of poor common folk who lived in
it. Before their dying eyes had risen not the vision
of England's glory but just these fields with the
ponds and the woods and the red roofs.

1

1. Women's Poetry and the First World War p58, from Little England 1918

Although many saw through this, as the extract above shows, a far greater number of people maintained a confused sense of national/local loyalty and it was reflected in both prose and poetry, and the popularity of some of the trite and simplistic verses that voiced these feelings.

'War', both as an abstract concept, and specifically the 1914 war, brought to the surface of collective and individual consciousness, a proprietorial defensiveness. It may have been given the name of patriotism and national pride, but for many the immediate locality and home were, inevitably, the emotional focus. The feeling of personal possession and identification with a small local area, almost with the earth itself is seen not only in the passage above but in many of the poems and language of the First World War. (1). Although the passage from Little England above was a contemporary view, written in 1918, and suggests that those who died for England knew little of the British Empire, other interpretations have contradicted this. Wiener, for example says that this wider nationalism was easily invoked in a country whose recent cultural history had been steeped in imperialism. If this is the case, it is an identification at a semantic and emotional rather than ideological or political level. Poetic diction used to express noble concepts of glory and honour and a sentimental attachment to the symbolic manifestations of nationhood confirm the interpretation of an emotional response, not a strategic one, and allows for the blurring of boundaries between what constitutes 'nation' and what constitutes 'place'.

'Place' too, contributed to the understanding of self and context, by providing the focal point for emotions about security, belonging, and home.

1. Caroline Dakers deals with this at length in The Countryside at War

Aspects of 'place', extended far beyond a narrow interpretation of topography to include landscape, the regional or local flora and fauna, regional tradition, customs, and dialect, all of which meant 'home'. Under the threat or actuality of war this was inevitably extended to mean ones homeland. Small symbols of what is valued about home or home life function metonymically in many examples of poetry produced during the First World War, from Rupert Brooke's conflation of war dead and the earth itself, 'Forever England', to Katherine Tynan's *High Summer*,

Pinks and syringa in the garden closes,
And the sweet privet hedge and golden roses,
The pines hot in the sun, the drone of the bee,
They die in Flanders to keep these for me. 1

Gurney too writes about his country under threat, and many of his poems juxtapose elegaic references to place with references to war. These sometimes seem like parenthetical statements- literally in parenthesis in *Above Ashleworth*- '(And I'm in France)'. Poems that are *only* about place are in fact rare. *Above Maise more* is one of the few examples where the message of the poem is simple, and the stimulus mostly visual. Many more of Gurney's poems of place are complex in their use of topographical references. In *Buire-au-Bois*, for example, used elsewhere to illustrate aspects of place, there is another dimension. The pastoral celebratory treatment of landscape, both here and in France is well crafted, but the poem has a contrapuntal structure that is held together by the presence of the persona. The careful balancing of England/France, self/other is a 'combination of two independent parts in a harmonious texture' - in the same way that musical counterpoint creates harmony. The climax of the poem is at precisely its mid-point, at the recognition of 'Crickley'. The

1. The Forgotten Army p 22

significance is that both men recognise each other as 'like'. They each identify with the place, and therefore with each other. The poem is as much about identity as it is about place, and in looking at the soldier Gurney sees himself.

There is no sense of a passive narrator or observer. This is characteristic of the majority of Gurney's poems, and if they speak loudly of war or place it is because these form a context into which the sense of self and being is set. Instead of interpreting them narrowly as poems of war or place in Gurney's sensibility they are both symbiotic and synergistic and derive from the focal point of his striving to come to terms with diverse and sometimes difficult selves.

In the face of death, a heightened perception of life is a common enough phenomenon. This often manifests as an acutely visual awareness of the familiar. ('Or can anew see clear familiar faces'). For Gurney, faced with the threat of extinction on two counts, for there is both physical and psychological danger, 'an accumulation of pictures' is not only vital to his survival, but part of what he is, an integral part of his sense of self - as a 'son of Gloucester'. This is explicit in a letter to Marion Scott in October 1915,

As my health and spirits improve, so within me I find a store of poetry, an accumulation of pictures - dead leaves, Minsterworth Orchards, Cranham, Crickley and Framilode each. They do not merely mean intensely to me; they are me.....

1

Seamus Heaney, writing about John Hewitt's poem *Conacre*, says

His attachment to his actual countryside involves an attachment to an idea of country: his cherishing of the

1. Collected Letters p 46.

habitat is symptomatic of his history, and that history is the history of the colonist, who, much like Wordsworth's Michael, has grown to be native to his fields through the accretions of human memory and human associations.

1.

In Gurney's writing the 'accretion of human memory' is not so much an imprint stamped on the landscape but an absorption into his own consciousness of a 'race memory', or link with a collective consciousness that makes him not a historian or an observer but a direct descendant of a fusion between the land and the Danes, Romans, Elizabethans and myriad others who have peopled it. Again there are parallels with Heaney's interpretation of the writer's point of view as either detached or attached. Like Montague, whose poem Heaney uses to illustrate this, Gurney writes from a clear point of attachment, and Heaney's comment could with equal validity be applied to Gurney,

When Montague asks who he is, he is forced to seek a connection with a history and a heritage; before he affirms a personal identity, he posits a national identity, and his region and his community provide a lifeline to it.

2

This is very clearly evident in Gurney's poem, *Drifting Leaves*, in the second stanza,

But man that has a thousand ties
Of homage to his place of birth,
Nothing surrenders when he dies;
But yearns for ever to his earth -

3

There is a further dimension too, in Gurney's frequent references to the Mother, in association with both regional landscape and England. The latter is a conventional, and cliched, image that became part of the symbolic

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1. Seamus Heaney, A Sense of Place p147.
 2. ibid p 143
 3. Severn and Somme p 73

order of the war, and ultimately part of its propaganda, but in many of Gurney's poems it is used in a subtly different way. Again there are resonances with Heaney, and an analogy with his treatment of earth mother imagery he uses in the bog poems. Gurney often shows a mother figure who is stern and unknowable, but with the power to heal and restore, (*Strange Service; Spring, Rouen. May 1917*). More poignantly, and perhaps therefore more significantly as an insight into Gurney's consciousness, there is a sense that he is depicting an idealised vision of what a mother should be, (in *The Mother*, 'she takes us to her bosom at the last;') but finds her hard to please, ultimately falling short of his hopes and expectations.

We have done our utmost, England, terrible
And dear taskmistress, darling mother and stern.
The unnoticed nations praise us, but we turn
Firstly, only to thee - "Have we done well?
Say, are you pleased?" - and watch your eyes that tell
To us all secrets, eyes sea-deep that burn
With love so long denied;.....

1

In the second stanza, the first line shows the power attributed by the writer/persona of the poem, to this synthesis of nation and human mother figure,

Thy love, thy love shall cherish, make us whole,
Whereto the power of Death's destruction is weak.

Thus, a poem where place and war are implicit because we know the context in which it was written, is clearly a poem about self in which the symbolic function of the mother image operates at two levels. On the one hand, Gurney longs for the Hegelian model of mother figure as a refuge, providing

1. *ibid* p51

unconditional love and security, but on the other hand, life has taught him that this is not to be found within the family and those needs are transposed to the anthropomorphised nation-as-mother and 'love' is translated into 'honour' and 'reward'.

The overarching themes used in the examples given above, however, represent the view from a distance. To bring the relationship between place, belonging to a nation, and identity into close detail it is necessary to look at specifics, particularly the significance of place names. There is a sense in which place names literally map out the territory in which the persona or writer exists. They codify that which is publicly accessible into a personal and private landscape, with an extra stratum of meaning associated with experiences, circumstances and events unique to the individual. Gurney's letters as well as his poems testify to the fact that he knew his county well, but it is clear that far from being topographical, Gurney's naming of places is a way of possessing them and therefore of absorbing them into his own identity.

In the villages around his home, names would have held the euphonic appeal of local pronunciation and inflection. Reference has already been made to the fact that Gurney spoke with a marked Gloucestershire accent, and that regional dialects and variations were aspects of language that he valued.

(1) It is likely that the opportunity to explore and use different sounds appealed to Gurney's musical sensibility. He describes himself 'Walking in hunger, or making verses with a hungry head' in a ruminative poem about a village with the shortest name - 'Y' (2) He offsets the short, and to the English speaking soldiers, implausible and unpronounceable, name by

1. See Ordeal for Hurds comment re Barnes.

2. Collected Poems p 176

reciting the longer, mellifluous 'Havrancourt, or Hauracourt or Aichey the Grand', and 'Caulaincourt, Vermand and another to be said'. He is not only playing with the musicality of the sounds, but is annexing them, making them his, and exercising what little control is to be had in a situation characterised by powerlessness for most of the soldiers abroad in the First World War. Gurney not only names places in his poems, but constantly makes links between villages in France and his favourite places at home, and again the reader is left with the sense that he does this in order that his being is actually part of the landscape in which he has been placed. This 'owning' and being owned by his surroundings is necessary because *not* to possess his current surroundings would make it too painful to bear the separation from his rightful location. Sometimes the sense of dislocation is explicit - 'they like I am out of place'.

In addition to 'belonging to a nation' and the inseparability of that concept from place, in the context of the war and Gurney's own relationship with England, Gloucester and the aesthetics of landscape in its widest interpretation, another major factor in the construct of identity is gender. An understanding of what it is to be male or female, what constitutes 'maleness' or 'femaleness' (1) is both culturally and historically determined. As Mrozek observes, 'the concept of "manliness" is an elusive one'. This was, in part at least, because it embodied in the Edwardian era, what might be regarded as 'contrariness' if not contradictions or mutually exclusive parameters. Although it was in some respects the idealised developmental stage to :

1. For example expectations and opportunity re gender determined roles and social mores determining what is appropriate behaviour etc.

follow 'boyhood', it was a state more easily defined as different from 'womanliness' or 'femininity' than a state contrasting adulthood with childhood, or to be equated with maturity. It was a complex concept, described by Mrozek thus,

In a time increasingly alive to the issues of developmental psychology, then, the striving for 'manliness' constituted a search for passage into some discernible social, personal, and sexual identity in the midst of significant personal and social change.

1

In the passage from childhood to adulthood, boyhood to manhood, Gurney had no empathetic male role model (or class solidarity) upon which to build an identity of his own. He had little in common with his father, or other male family members. There is a wistful recognition implicit in the unpublished poem, *Joseph*, that the natural order, where son follows father into trade or craftsmanship, has failed. In ascribing to Joseph the feelings of regret and bewilderment, Gurney is making it clear that he is aware of this disjunction in his own life. By disrupting the given and accepted pattern, both father and son are unsure of their own identities

In his family life, the physical environment and his mother's temperament provided conditions less than ideal. Florence Gurney was regarded as the strong parent, and David as the gentler natured of the two, whose warmth and placidity were often overridden by his wife. The families Gurney 'adopted' were, by contrast, characterised by having strong, well loved and respected father figures and mothers less cold than his own in their relationships with their children. Warmth and

1. Manliness and Morality, p 221

affection were extended to include Gurney too, in a way that seems to have both pleased and embarrassed him on occasions

I wish you were not so good to me. I like my friends to be willing to give to me in proportion to what I myself would give, and you are all too generous in affection and otherwise.

1

Other letters show him referring to all the members of the Chapman family in very close and affectionate terms, including references to the parents as Ma and Pa, ma Comtesse, and Dad in a way that shows a poignant longing to have them for himself, to construct a family where he is at ease with his own place in it.

Gurney's detachment from his own family was not a physical separation, but was an emotional and psychological difference consequent upon his shift of focus from the family's interests. Canon Cheesman, as his godfather, had a legitimate interest in Gurney's upbringing. This extended beyond spiritual welfare into both formal and informal aspects of Gurney's education, but as an unmarried childless man of the church he did not present an alternative family model, or the kind of model of 'maleness' or 'masculinity' that Gurney could emulate. Nor did he present a conventional 'father figure' from whom Gurney might traditionally have learnt skills and social behaviour. Cheesman offered instead, qualities of scholarship and wisdom, support and encouragement, as well as specific aspects of education in literature and the study of the local flora and fauna.

There is a significant interplay between gender values and class.

1. Collected Letters p. 28

Gurney's somewhat anomalous position in relation to his own class background according to family status, compared with that of the people like Cheesman who were to exert the greatest influence on him, was a cause of tension. In an earlier chapter it has been shown that there were resentments within the family, particularly from Ronald Gurney, that what little material wealth the Gurneys had was being sacrificed to provide for Ivor's advancement. From reading letters between Gurney and his friends, accounts written by his sister, as well as Michael Hurd's biography, this seems to have happened not because the family understood the nature of his talent, but because they accepted the value ascribed to him by others who were perceived to be socially superior.

One result of the influence of people from a different class, was that Gurney was confronted with constructs of masculinity that were at odds to a large extent with the role models of masculinity in his own family. It is hard to imagine even in the Edwardian era, that a family of builders would have regarded a boy whose interests were in books, wild flowers, music and poetry, as anything other than a 'mollycoddle'

An awareness of some of Freud's work had reached the public consciousness, and some of his ideas, or rebuttals of them, were translated into accessible books for self-help and advice that help to give an impression of the attitudes and beliefs of the day. One such was Nerves and the Nervous by Edwin Ash, who was a neurologist at the City of London Red Cross Hospital, who describes the symptoms of such 'nervous children'

his mobile mind will find interest in many things that do not trouble the average boy, in consequence of which he may be, and is, very often put down as a weakling and spoilsport. His usual interest in books, and perhaps the

the lighter indoor games of skilloften jeered at and made object of scornful contempt by his contemporaries.and such may so successfully shatter the nerves of a delicate boy that neurasthenia for ever haunts his life and plays havoc with his chances of a successful career in later years.....he is in many ways out of tune with his environmentnerves are shattered, health is impaired, and the genius of a poet, an artist, or a thinker may be irretrievably damaged.

1.

Ash also quotes a colleague, a Dr. Guthrie, who claimed that if such children were mismanaged or misunderstood, it would lead to

Melancholy and discontent....sooner or later general health becomes impaired. Chronic dyspepsia...hysteria, hystero-epilepsy, epilepsy and even mania are met with in such cases - and from this class are derived the neurasthenics and hypochondriacs who haunt our hospitals and consulting rooms in after life.

2

Ash regarded this kind of nervous debility as a condition faced by hundreds of children, but especially boys. He was dismissive of the effect it had on girls

Now of the two sexes, there can be no doubt that the lot of the girls in this connexion is happier than that of the boys. Delicate girls receive rather more consideration and attention at school, and in any case there are not the hardships for a nervous girl to combat that may present themselves to her equally nervous brothers.

3

It could be argued, now, with the benefit of hindsight and feminist insight, that women have always been marginalised and have therefore not contributed to definitions of the norm; that nervous girls did not necessarily receive better treatment at school, but that their (delicate) behaviour was not perceived as deviant for females and was not remarked upon. Definitions of gender roles, then, polarised placing

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1. Nerves and the Nervous, p 56
 2. *ibid* p 60
 3. *ibid* p 55

acceptable or appropriate behaviour into the extremes of action, adventure and physicality for the boys, delicacy and passivity for girls. (1).

This was partly a legacy from the Victorian period when 'it was a striking feature of late Victorian culture that its emotional focus was on boys'. The proliferation of boys' adventure stories, the growth of boys' clubs and leisure organisations all testify to this, and it was a cultural phenomenon that undoubtedly shaped the mind-set of the generation who were to become soldiers in the First World War. Eternal 'boyishness' was a quality admired not denigrated, that carried with it the potential for a variety of relationships. Although 'grounded in the concept of 'manliness' it resulted often in a developmental state equivalent to the axolotl.

The distinction has to be made, and emphasised, between interpretations of boyishness ascribed to children, and the quality as it manifested in adults. Hurd, using information from personal reminiscences of people who remembered Gurney at school, says that he played football and was 'an ordinary schoolboy', but also quotes telling comments that suggest a boy who was 'not boyish', 'never took part in any pranks', and seemed to live more often than not in a world of his own'. (2). Winifred Gurney in her reminiscences also comments that he was referred to as 'dotty Gurney' or 'batty Gurney'.

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1. This is closely related to the question of class, because the gender based expectations are reversed, with an acceptance of working class women doing hard physical labour associated with work both in and outside the home, and the acceptability of non-physical (commercial, arts, etc) occupations or leisure pursuits for middle class men.
 2. Ordeal p 14

'Childhood' is itself a term that is non-gender specific and carries with it a notion of asexuality, whereas 'boyishness', especially viewed from a late twentieth century perspective is ambiguous. Factors such as the later onset of puberty, the physical aspect of development, and adolescence as the emotional state accompanying it, meant that the social mores and emotional climate in which young people existed was very different from the circumstances today. Young people were often segregated during education and by codes of behaviour which meant that the sexes functioned in a dialectical relationship of simultaneous opposition and complementarity. A piece in the Foreword to the collection of verse published in 1917 as a memorial to Harold Parry, killed in Flanders at the age of 21 is a typical illustration of the contemporary attitude.

It is the privilege of youth to be extreme. His mysogyny, so very young and so intensely sincere, was a malady, if it be a malady, which time would have cured. In a boy of his temperament it was natural. His school friendships were so complete and perfect that he scarcely felt the need of other society. He ignored girls even more than he disliked them. He saw the falseness and fatuity of the modern convention which regards girls as somehow vaguely better and finer and cleaner than boys.

1

This is followed by an extract from one of Parry's own letters, in which he writes,

I have studied the effect of the Modern Girl upon the Modern Boy, and without a single exception the effect was adverse. I could give you no less than five names of boys who have suffered this way - boys whom fortunately I and others were able to get hold of, and in the long run, after incredible effort put in the right way of thinking again....

2

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1. Poems by Harold Parry, privately printed by his family, 1917.
 2. *ibid*

The writer of the forward goes on to say that

this is all very young and, no doubt, laughable: it is also true. With all this he had a deep respect for what is best in woman; and in face of the usual temptations of twenty, and the perhaps more than usual ribaldry of army life he preserved a quite singular purity of mind. He was, in short, much too good for the average girl.

1

The First World War first emphasised but ultimately helped to break down the boundaries between men and women. War itself has been regarded by many critics and writers as an expression of 'maleness' - " a manifestation of a particularly brutal kind of masculine madness" but one which

helped to reveal the futility of of a social and political pact that made men and women play infantile games with each other, and to over invest in definitions of 'femininity' and 'masculinity'

2

The polarisation between the sexes, firstly by physical separation because such a vast number of men were away at the Front or in training camps, and secondly in an emotional sense because each regarded their war experience as hugely significant but very different, served to re-inforce solidarity within each camp. The social and political impact on women is well documented, but the circumstances in which many men lived together, segregated from families home and society for long periods of time also contributed enormously to the shaping of gender and identity.

It was certainly significant in the ambivalence with which homoeroticism

1. *ibid* p 7

2. Fighting Forces. Writing Women p 217

was regarded. Fussell deals with this at length in The Great War and Modern Memory, in chapter VIII, *Soldier Boys*, sub-titled *Mars and Eros*. Sexual imagery, predicated on power, is foregrounded in the language of militarism. Conversely, in the omnipresence of death and the potential for their own imminent destruction, it is hardly surprising that life affirming emotions had to find some form of expression. Fussell defines the term 'homeroetic' as 'a sublimated (i.e. "chaste") form of temporary homosexuality.' (1) To some extent, the idealism of masculinity, whether chaste or physically consummated, is a predictable extension of the relationships engendered in schools, particularly the public schools.

It is important to recognise that despite the polarisation between male and female, due at least in part to the constructs of gender imposed by society, what lies between the two extremes does not necessarily fall into neat or clearly demarcated divisions. In Gurney's case, his regard and affection for fellow soldiers was complementary to his affection for close friends like Will Harvey. It is seen throughout his poetry, both in pieces dedicated to particular friends, or simply in passing references, and to regard these as 'homeroetic' would be a misreading. In a letter to Marion Scott, dated 7th June 1916, for example he refers to meeting a group of Welsh soldiers.

But O what luck! Here I am in a signal dugout with some of the nicest and most handsome young men I ever met. And would you believe it? My luck I mean; they talk their native language and

1. Fussell p272. Nor is this state confined to men. Helen Zenna Smith skirts delicately round the issue of lesbianism on active service, in Not So Quiet.

sing their own folksongs with sweet natural voices. I did not sleep at all for the first day in the dugout - there was too much to be said, asked, and experienced: and pleasure in watching their quick expressions for oblivion. It was one of the most notable evenings of my life.

1

The same episode also inspired the poem *First Time In*, written after the war, and appears again in a later poem using the same title.

More problematic are poems like *To His Love*, and others where the beloved or the lover is not clearly defined, and the stance of the persona of the poem is ambiguous. The date it was written may be significant. It has been suggested that it may have been written in response to the news that Harvey was missing and feared dead, but as R.K.R Thornton points out in his notes to the re-dition of War's Embers, Gurney knew at the time that Harvey was safe. The focus of the poem is ambiguous, and the title - *To his Love* - implies more than companionship, unless it is interpreted as a poem written to a wife or sweetheart to give the news that a comrade has been killed. This is unlikely, because Gurney never assumes a persona in his poems. He writes with the personalised anonymity of the folksong, or without trying to disguise the autobiographical nature of the experience or emotion. This poem is deeply personal and conveys the idea that the writer is intimately close to 'his love', although the mixing of first second and third person - 'His love', 'our plans', 'not as you knew it', add to the ambiguity about who is being addressed and the relationships between all three. There is an emphatic finality in the punctuation of the first line. As so often with Gurney, the reference to 'Cotswold' is expanded

1. Collected Letters p 86

as if he cannot bear to mention one of the 'Good Places' without giving a little bit of detail - 'Where the sheep feed/Quietly and take no heed', but it is more than merely adding local colour. As Fussell points out in the chapter *Arcadian Recourses*, juxtaposition of rural pastoral images with images of war provides its own comment. In this first stanza, the juxtaposition is not a conventional one of damaged landscape or the portrayal of noise or fighting, (although Gurney uses these things in other poems) but a poignant image of the finality of death, and the way it negates the future. In the face of this, the continuity and timelessness implied in the image of sheep feeding and taking 'no heed' confirms the futility of such a death. Devastating though it is to loved ones, it will be forgotten.

The choice of 'quick' as a description of his body, does not in itself convey an image of sexuality, but it is the implication of the physical awareness of the other's bodily presence, and admiration of his body, that has connotations of sexuality rather than friendship. The short lines, and predominantly monosyllabic diction give the poem a spare pared down to the bone quality, devoid of decoration or the trappings of honour and glory that are often used to deflect the emotions away from the waste of a life towards the rationale of sacrifice.

In the third stanza, the first line offers a ruminative pause, but in the second takes on a note of practicality and compliance with convention, evoked by 'still', and a tone of resignation. There is an intimacy in the visual image of a body covered with violets, because the flowers themselves do not carry the symbolic weight of poppies, or the generality of unspecified flowers. If there is a conventional symbolic

reference in the choice of violets, it is associated with shyness and modesty. These are much more likely to be considered as feminine attributes, and imply the antithesis of glory, bravery and masculinity, not in a pejorative way, but in a way that evokes a relationship predicated on intimacy, (a female or sexual mode), rather than on masculine comradeship. The last stanza confirms this, with the extreme physical awareness of the 'red wet thing'. The fact that it is undefined, reduced to the impersonality and inhumanity of 'thing', is a horrific contrast to the vitality and beauty of a 'body that was so quick'

This poem particularly has been responsible for linking Gurney's work with homoeroticism in the literature of the First World War. It is interesting because it draws attention to Gurney's uncertainties about himself and his place in the world - his identity - not because it offers anything conclusive about his sexual orientation. Any attempts to classify him thus have not been made by Gurney himself, but retrospectively by others. Set against these are examples where Gurney's writing shows a fairly conventional response to women. Some are faintly ironic, as in the final stanza of *Companion - North East Dug-out*.

O what a lovely friend!
O quiet easy life!
I wonder if his sister
Would care to be my wife ...

1

Gurney had had correspondence with Mona Shimmin, sister of Sidney Shimmin, a fellow student at the Royal College of Music. His letters sometimes refer to her, and to the fact that she was kind enough

to send things out to him in France, but none of her letters appear to have been kept. A letter written to Shimmin in August 1917 suggests that Mona died, unexpectedly, and Gurney requested that his letters to her be destroyed. (1). It is impossible to know what the relationship with Mona Shimmin was or might have become. Anthony Boden records that

In 1914 Ivor found his feelings for Kitty developing into an emotion much deeper than affection. He approached Mr Chapman but was told that Kitty was much too young to consider engagement. Without rancour their relationship ended.

2

Other contemporary accounts, for example Vera Brittain writing about her relationship with Roland Leighton, confirm the degree of circumspection and formality society demanded in the relationships between men and women. To understand the significance of 'masculinity' or 'femininity' with regard to identity, it is necessary to consider not only of the cultural constructs of gender, but also the sometimes parallel, sometimes divergent, constructs of sexual identity. This clearly was not called into question in Gurney's relationship with Mona Shimmin, or with Kitty Chapman. It is difficult to assess from the evidence in letters and poetry, whether his sense of self included a perception of himself as a sexual being. Michael Hurd asserts that "Sex, as such, does not appear to have entered his life in any serious way". (1) . John Lucas shared that view. There are few love poems, and those there are have a less personal tone than many of the poems Gurney wrote about place or events. *The Love Song*, for example, says more about the

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1. Collected Letters p 300
 2. Stars in a Dark Night p 11
 3. Ordeal p196.

creation of a piece of music than the girl, and the persona admits that the compliments implicit in the song were inspired by the landscape. The last lines express despair at the duplicity involved in trying to forge relationships between the sexes. This theme is repeated in *Song of Urgency*, where the persona begs for inspiration to produce words to demonstrate his love. The poem conveys an awkwardness and lack of confidence that contrasts sharply with the exuberant and celebratory tone often seen in poems about companionship with other soldiers or about landscapes. This is evident too in *Praise*, where in a similar mood of self doubt the persona escapes back to the uncritical and pre-sexual state of childhood - Say ' Children loved him'.

Nevertheless, it could be argued that Gurney's short lived affair with Annie Drummond, a VAD, offers an alternative perspective. Hurd suggests that Gurney's advances were not reciprocated, but his feelings are shown in the letter he wrote to Herbert Howells, from Bangour, in January 1918, some 3 months after meeting Annie.

She is 30 years old and ^{most} perfectly enchanting. She has a pretty figure, pretty hair, fine eyes, pretty hands and arms and walk.she is more charming and tender and deep than you will believe till you see her.
O Erbert, O Erbert.....
I forget my body walking with her

1

There is a note of practicality, or perhaps more accurately an example of Gurney's disarming directness and lack of guile, in that he also tells Howells

A not unimportant fact was revealed by one of the patients at hospital.....I believe she has money. Just think of it! Pure good luck, if it is true

2

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1. *Collected Letters* p 395
 2. *ibid.*

Marion Scott seems to have implied that Annie Drummond 'played fast and loose with him', a somewhat harsh judgement for which there seems to be little evidence. Hurd offers the more charitable explanation that although she undoubtedly liked his company, for her he was 'just another soldier, wounded and far from home', but for Gurney the relationship held far greater significance. A later letter to Howells tells him that "it is just perfectly and radiantly All Right. I have reached Port, and am safe". (1) He goes on to say that "to get her and settle down would make a solid rock foundation for me to build on - a home and a tower of light". These are telling and significant comments about Gurney's self awareness. They are probably the most optimistic and positive statements about his feelings and existence. Even the terms he uses - solid rock foundation, tower of light - are both safe and optimistic. There is a contrast between this sense of lightness of being and Gurney's often troubled and shadowed interpretation of events and circumstances. Compare for example the poem in Severn and Somme, *To an Unknown Lady*.

You that were once so sweet, are sweeter now
That an even leaden greyness clouds my days;
A pain it is to think on your sweet ways,

2

Although Severn and Somme was published in November 1917, after Gurney had met Annie Drummond, this poem first appears in a letter to Marion Scott on December 22nd 1916. Gurney says that the unknown lady is "but a figment or a dream of passion". (3). It is not surprising therefore that

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1. Collected Letters p 396
 2. Severn and Somme p 31
 3. Editorial notes, S and S, p 122

it appears to be a somewhat melancholic and theoretical (or at least imaginary) approach to love, and the pathetic fallacy is a stereotyped image of darkness that contrasts sharply with the way Gurney describes his feeling for Miss Drummond. It may be that Gurney regarded his identity as poet and musician, as necessarily melancholic, an inevitable pre-requisite for the creative process. An unpublished poem, *Dark are the Ways* certainly suggests this,

Dark are the ways that make
Music or verse on the page;
Stars outside, desires that shake
The heart; from an age of age.

If only for pain's sake renew
Your love, if I did, in the sight
Of my work Love willed me to do...
Whose comfort was my lone delight.

1

The last line leaves an ambiguity, in suggesting that work, the writing and music, is his only comfort to compensate for the withdrawal of love. In fact it would be reasonable to assume from the first two lines that 'darkness' is an essential pre-condition for creativity, not a result of the failure of love. The metaphors of darkness occur frequently in Gurney's writing, and the image of dark skies with stars as distant pinpricks of light stands in sharp contrast to the expansiveness and openness of the 'tower of light' in his letter to Howells.

Nevertheless, many of the terms in his letter are also self-conscious and self-reflecting. He tells Howells about what it will mean to him, rather than what he can offer to her. In an age when to be able to provide for a wife was crucial to the success and propriety of paying

1. G.A. MS 44.35

court to her, this fact is more significant than it would be in the context of the social mores of today. Gurney appears to be looking for security, even perhaps to be rescued from an unspecified but implied future of emotional and physical discomfort. His references to forgetting the body are odd, when many poets describe the experience of being in love in terms of a heightened sense of physical awareness, if not in terms of physical desire. Gurney uses synaesthetic imagery, frequently, to describe landscape, skyscape, or music, but seems strangely bereft of words to convey his feelings. He says to Howells, of Annie Drummond, that he sees in her

first of all a beautiful simplicity - her very first characteristic, - as you see in Dorothy. The kind of fundamental sweet first thing one gets in Bach, not to be described, only treasured.

1

Gurney had written to congratulate Howells on his engagement to Dorothy, in May 1917, and it may not be too cynical a speculation to consider whether perhaps Gurney felt a need to keep up with his contemporaries, especially if Howells with a fiancée was likely to have a little less time for his friend.

There is certainly a contrast in the terms in which Gurney expresses his relationship with Annie Drummond and the situation implied in *To His Love*. It suggests that Gurney is more in touch with his own feelings and better able to articulate them in relation to a beloved dead, male, than he is capable of in a real face to face relationship. Whatever the reality, the relationship with Annie Drummond ended, in circumstances not entirely clear, expressed sadly in *Looking There*. Notes in

1. Collected Letters 396

In this time without folly, ardent, you protest,
You say verses, you die of love, your flight droops and fails
You hold out arms of flesh, or arms of fairy tales,
And when Phedre comes, we are equal with her at least.

Running upon Death, you draw our hearts as swift -
We have seen your tears fall, without eyes we have wondered.
All the tears of our souls are in your free gift.

But also, O Mistress, you know well that in your magic unpraised,
You feel tenderly touch, in homage unpondered
The lips of Shakespeare on the tips of your fingers placed.

1.

Sarah in the title is Sarah Bernhardt, and the poem itself is written very much from the vantage point of the audience. The reader watches with the persona, and is aware of the polarity of real and unreal - 'arms of flesh, or arms of fairy tales' - and the essence of theatre, but there is perhaps a subtext offering an oblique comment on Gurney's relationship with Annie Drummond, to whom it is dedicated. The final three line stanza follows this with an image of the revered actress receiving homage from the writer, again perhaps a thinly disguised reference to the relationship between Gurney and Drummond. It is given an element of eroticism in the ambiguous use of 'Mistress', and the image of lips on finger-tips, despite the fact that ostensibly this is the spectre of the writer congratulating the actress in a conventional social gesture of kissing the hand. It is also a very stereotyped set of images, where gender roles are clearly defined. Scrutinising Gurney's poems and letters to try to assess where he fits in to Thompson's framework, particularly in relation to gender, the reader is left with a sense of some of the things he was capable of being, rather than, in a finite way, a closed definition of what he was.

1. G.A. Unpublished 42.10

A third major aspect that determines identity is the notion of 'belonging to a generation'. Both belonging to a nation - 'Englishness' - and the social and cultural constructs pertaining to gender, already discussed, are aspects of identity that are modified by events in history, and thus subject to this third factor. To be English, especially male and English, in the war years of 1914 to 1918, affected identity and selfhood in an unprecedented way, and gave rise to, or at least fuelled, generational theories that implied cohesion and 'sameness' across swathes of the community. Belonging to the 'generation of the 1914 - 1918 war' and adopting the collective identity of 'soldiers' became not only an overbearing force in many men's lives, but demanded, often, the need to hold mutually exclusive values.

Men who enlisted (or were conscripted after the change of legislation in 1916), had in effect two identities. Brought up in the late Victorian and early Edwardian years, the majority of combatants in the First World War had to shed the values their society had taught them to adopt as the norm, in order to live in appalling physical conditions and extreme danger. Although it has been argued in some quarters that aggression and bellicosity are innate in males, the social mores of the pre-war era dictated the need for some degree of control. The persona of 'soldier', or 'combatant', had somehow to be accommodated as an embodiment of all that was 'English' and 'noble', despite the fact that it manifested in practical terms in killing and wounding fellow human beings. There is little wonder that for many it became an existence 'in parenthesis'. It has also been suggested that pre-occupations with nobility, sacrifice, and love for one's fellow soldiers provided a way of justifying what was happening and making it bearable. There is evidence in Gurney's writing that he

was aware of the divergence, so that although he is emphatic that army life has been beneficial to his state of mind, he condemns war quite unequivocally, for example in a letter to Marion Scott

the thing that shocks a soldier is that not many civilians guess at. The fact that men at last do things not from courage or for their Country, but because of discipline (as I was told in 1914 and more still in 1915, but refused to believe.) It is that which revolts one, and makes one long for the finish. And O, if men died in a mood of glory occasionally instead of a mere state of being fed-up!

1

It would be difficult to separate Gurney's need and longing to belong from the effects of propaganda and pressure to conform. and despite his undoubted condemnation of war, there is ample support in his writing to suggest that in order to validate his own identity he sought constantly to align himself with groups that had already established their existence. Whether this had been family units, people of Gloucester, or poets, it had been successful only in parts, whereas the sense of belonging Gurney felt when he was thrown together with a wide cross section of men in the army was significant in shaping his sense of identity. It related closely to being part of a social generation, where some of the more problematic aspects of selfhood for Gurney - gender and class - were subsumed by the needs generated by war.

To be part of a war that engulfed the world on an unprecedented scale was to become a part of history, and thus to acquire a historical identity. A strong sense of history and the ability to see, in his mind's eye, the symbiotic relationship of place and war, but also the historical continuum

1. Collected Letters p 375

of people and the past, are characteristics of Gurney's writing.

And strange: so queer a thing is Time, so difficult^{is it} to
realise that these men we read of were men like ourselves.

1

In *The Old City - Gloucester*, place, time and war synthesise,

If one must die for England, Fate has given
Generously indeed, for we have known
Before our time, the airs and skies of Heaven
And Beauty more than common have been shown,
And with our last fight fought, our last strife striven
We shall enter unsurprised into our own.

2

Thus a poem, ostensibly of place, mutates into one of war, but ultimately is a poem that stakes a claim on a place in history, for both the writer and his contemporaries. There are many instances where Gurney uses the collective pronoun to express a feeling much more universal than 'we two friends', and aligns himself to a generation. But there is a danger in regarding the whole population as a homogenous generation. This has become one of the most potent myths in First World War history, where the stereotyped image of a 'lost generation' of 'gilded youth' denies the possibility of a wide variety of experiences happening synchronically to a wide variety of people of different age, class and gender. Fussell in The Great War and Modern Memory, regards the war as 'ironic', and one in which paradox and contradictory circumstances induce a dislocation and cognitive dissonance in individuals caught up in it. Part of this dislocation was indeed the tension between personal and individual identity versus the acceptance of the soldier-identity. It was on the one hand a source of

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1. Collected Letters p 360
 2. Collected Poems p 52

pride to put on uniform, a 'mantle of honour'. It was necessary to the whole war process that the population should believe this, and propaganda fed those beliefs. Language as well as uniform reinforced the soldier identity, and life for 'Tommy Atkins' became a collective rather than an individual process. There are common themes in much of the writing, particularly evident in anthologies of poetry published during the war. (1) To deviate from the norm was perceived to be a threat to the successful operation of the army, and carried heavy punishment. Disobedience in even () minor matters () brought serious punishment. In an incident for which there is documentary evidence in letters, (2), two men from Coventry who deserted after being beaten for not cleaning their buttons were subsequently executed.

Gurney's poems question and condemn some of the petty practices in a way that few other poets admitted quite as openly. In *The Bohemians*, for example, which has striking similarity to the example above, he shows contempt for those who 'burnished brasses, earned promotion' but recognises bitterly that whether they 'died off one by one, or became officers', buckles polished or not, the most likely fate was death, in which case the institutionalised (and institutionalising) obsession with petty details is wholly irrelevant - "In Artois or Picardy they lie, free of useless fashions".

1. For example, A Treasury of War Poetry, Clark, G.H. (ed), Hodder, 1917

2. Research by member ^{of} Western Front Association. A letter given to a fellow soldier sent to relatives after his execution, and corroborating evidence from Anthony Babbington, author of For the Sake of Example, although this case came to light too late to be included.

Apart from risking punishment however, belonging to an army unit, battalion, or any identifiable group demanded conformity in order not to let down fellow soldiers. There were then, enormous pressures, both pragmatic and psychological, on individuals to behave and think collectively, and thus perhaps inevitably to have a heightened sense of belonging to 'a generation' where the notion of 'generation' is based on a shared experience. Robert Wohl explores the meanings and definitions of generational concepts, offered by generation theorists from Europe as well as the British interpretation. He suggests that "Historical generations are not born; they are made. They are a device by which people conceptualise society and seek to transform it". (1)

It is too narrow to interpret a generation in chronological terms. Wohl quotes the definitions offered by Francois Mentre whose book *Les Générations sociales*, (published in 1920) was influenced not only by the war, but by the rise of youth culture and the critical analysis it had spawned in France in the early years of the century. Mentre pointed out that there is a need to distinguish between familial and social generations, where the succession of grandparent, parent, child is a continuous process within biological families, whereas the notion of social generations links together people of diverse age and circumstances on the basis of a common historical focus. Paradoxically however, the age-old image of rebellion by a rising generation against its fathers or elders in society was re-created in the disillusion and inequalities of power between the 'generals' directing the war from a place of safety, and the 'Tommys' who had to obey orders and fight.

1. The Generation of 1914 p 5

As a historical focus, the First World War, more than any event in the preceding century, became a reference point that had no equivalent, and was beyond comparison with any other aspect of life. This is still evident in oral history accounts and interviews with survivors of the First World War, and appears to have been universal. (1)

Universal though the pre-occupation was, it manifested itself in somewhat different ways. Wohl's research suggested that

different nationalities had a tendency to express themselves in different forms. Thus the Germans were more likely to produce full-fledged social theories dealing with the generation problem, whereas the English wrote poetry, novels, memoirs, and letters commenting on their generation's fate. The French were given to generational portraits organised around groups of writers:the focus nonetheless remains the same.....the effort of consciousness to come to grips with and to understand a social phenomenon that was one of the most prominent characteristics of the age.

2

When the historical focus was an event of such enormity, and a collective response vital, previously existing boundaries had to be transcended. The question of class is an obvious example which will be discussed later, as a fourth factor that contributes to identity, but other values and boundaries were changed beyond measure. In the light of Wohl's comment above, it is to be noted in passing that the First World War marked a radical change in what were considered to be appropriate and acceptable subjects for both prose and poetry in the canon of English literature. The boundaries between literature and history were blurred, too, when 'truth' became almost an obsession with some writers (of which Herbert Read and Edmund Blunden are examples), and there is a sense of protectiveness where

1. *ibid* p 17. Quotes Massis, "We shall live our entire lives with what we have done during this war".

2. *ibid* p 3

the 'generation of 1914' seek to prevent such damage happening to the next generation, and the tone is often of warning.

In the literature produced both during the war and afterwards, the notion that high culture is something set apart from accessible mass culture was eroded with the acceptance of a diverse collection of written responses to both collective and individual experience. This in turn helped to shape the sense of belonging to a generation. The generation of 1914, almost inevitably meant combatants. The sense of 'war identity', having been exploited by propaganda to serve the over-riding national need for more and more soldiers, was re-inforced at the end of the war in the perceived differences between combatants and 'the rest'.

The contrast between the adrenalin-charged existence in the front line, under fire, and the triviality and mediocrity of life at home, 'on state-doles, or showing shop patternsin borrowed tatterns' is amply demonstrated in *Strange Hells*. This is a retrospective poem, probably written after 1922, although precise dating is difficult, but on close examination it shows a complex response to a stereotypical situation. Many of Gurney's poems are characterised by their insistence on the debt of honour owed and largely unpaid to soldiers and particularly poets, by an ungrateful nation and public. *Strange Hells* begins by acknowledging that the legacy of war is the mental agony of living with memories of being under fire - a predictable response that is given an oblique perspective in that the writer uses a double negative statement, "not so often, not so humiliatingly afraid/As one would have expected". In these two lines, despite the implicit admission that indeed there were times when the soldiers were afraid, he says this happened less frequently than one might

have expected. Nevertheless, the choice of 'humiliatingly afraid' is anti-heroic in style, especially with the emphasis achieved by the strong end rhyme at the end of a short line. The very act of denial in fact subverts itself, because the effect of placing 'humiliatingly afraid' at the end of a short line, with a strong end rhyme with both preceding and following lines, is to emphasise the fear. The poem as a whole however, highlights the sense of lost identity for those who had shared the exigencies of war as a communal experience, but were now living in isolation, alienated from civilian life.

Such alienation arose to an unprecedented level. Thousands of men and women had experienced such a rapid, destabilising, and destructive period in their lives that although the effect on individuals was often to disintegrate and separate, paradoxically it re-inforced the notion of a generation, as a group of people whose common experience set them apart. As a 'damaged generation', they were as removed from the image of gracious Edwardianism as they were from the flappers and the jazz age. The sense of 'never the same again' is repeated in countless examples, both contemporary

I see how peoples are set against one another and in
silence, unknowingly, foolishly, obediently, innocently
slay one another. I see that the keenest brains of the
world invent weapons and words to make it yet more
refined and enduring. And all men of my age, here and
over there, throughout the whole world, see these things;
all my generation is experiencing these things with me.
What would our fathers do if we suddenly stood up and
came before them and proffered our account? What do they
expect of us if a time ever comes when the war is over?
Through the years our business has been killing; - it was
our first calling in life. Our knowledge of life is limited
to death. What will happen afterwards? And what will become
of us?

1.

and retrospectively, in Larkin's words, 'Never such innocence again'.

1. All Quiet on the Western Front p 289 (1929)

Although Gurney inevitably regards himself as part of that generation, there is much evidence to suggest that he needs constantly to state and re-state who and what he is, as an individual. As has already been pointed out, the feeling that one's integrity and emotional balance are under threat, whether from within or without, engenders the need to proclaim the 'I' more strongly. (1). This ^{is} seen in many of the poems, but in the preface Severn and Somme ^{it} is made explicit in a very personal statement. The preface is informal, humourous, even conversational in tone, written like a letter to his readers, and very different from the solemn, formal, third person introductions to many volumes of poetry written at that time. The publishers, Sidgwick and Jackson, note that the publication of certain military details is forbidden by the military authorities, but it is clear from Gurney's remarks in the preface that this is not the reason why

those who buy the book (or even borrow), to get information about the Gloucesters will be disappointed.

He is disarmingly direct about his intentions - that ² 'most of the book is concerned with a person named Myself'. The comment is a reference to Walt Whitman's *Song of Myself*, which had excited Gurney enormously when he read it, but that does not alter the clear intention to make a personal statement. There is more ambiguity in the comment that 'I never was famous and a Common Private makes but little show'. It invites contradiction, and is at odds with Gurney's repeated theme of honour, and the fact that poets, particularly poets who have served their country are owed more honour than has been paid to them.

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1. As is seen in the poems by Sylvia Plath, for example.
 2. Severn and Somme p 19

Characteristically, the assertion that the book is about 'Myself' is linked in the same sentence with Gloucester. Hurd points out that although Gurney's love of nature and countryside are of fundamental importance, he is in fact a town dweller. (Or as Peter Pirie puts it, 'Nothing if not a provincial.')

(1) Although the course his life was to take set up anomalies about expectation and opportunity, his family background and his own start in life placed him firmly within the lower middle class, and as has been suggested, this is another reference point by which identity is determined or understood.

In an analogy not unfitting to be used in a study of the son of a tailor, Paul Thompson observes that

Edwardians were socially stratified into those who wore tailor-made clothes, those who wore new ready-mades, and those who wore only other people's cast-offs.

2

"Few Edwardians", he asserts, "were unaware that they lived in a class society", but this was an era during which the process of social change was given a somewhat different direction by the advent of the war. The effect it had on Gurney has been both under-estimated and over-estimated, and in reading his poetry as a search for identity, it is important to see how the dynamics of class and war affected his sense of self, and thus his writing.

First of all, although the war broke down many of the barriers between the classes it is easy to be seduced into false extrapolations from a small number of factors. (For example, changes in the franchise laws, or the lack

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1. Stand Vol. 30, No. 3. p24
 2. The Edwardians p 287

of living-in servants after the war.) Thompson suggests that 'at the age of twenty an Edwardian had rather more chance of social mobility than his successors today'. (1). For Gurney, however, the move away from the class background into which he was born in fact began at a much earlier age, and perhaps significantly, this was not by his own choice. Evidence of Florence Gurney's aspirations are well documented, and have been noted in an earlier chapter. Hurd places the Gurney family quite specifically as

typical of its class and period. David Gurney, the father, was a tailor and ran his own business. The small house in Queen Street was home and shop in one.....By the standards of the time they could be considered to have gained a tenuous foothold on the ladder of middle-class comfort and respectability. They were certainly not rich, but neither were they poor. The horizons that opened up before them were clearly defined....

2

Comments recorded in Winifred Gurney's reminiscences and elsewhere refer to Florence Gurney's separation from the extended family out of a sense of superiority. As a schoolboy, Gurney may not have been aware of some of the implications that arose out of Cheesman's interest in his upbringing and the friendship with the Misses Hunt. He was, perhaps, one of a minority who, in Standish Meacham's words 're-classed themselves without ever fully realising the fact'. The result was that he stood outside both the class into which he was born, and the class he had, in the beginning at least, unwittingly adopted, and yet had access to both.

It has been noted earlier that there is an inter-relationship between class and gender. Interests in the Arts and intellectual pursuits were often perceived as 'soft' and unmanly by working class families, where manliness was traditionally measured in terms of physical strength, or skill with

1. *ibid* p 285

2. *Ordeal* p 7

3. *A Life Apart* p 29

tools of one's trade, both of which were bound up with the ability to earn a living. Gurney's writing embodies an ability to embrace multiple values, sometimes in one poem as in *Felling A Tree*. On the one hand he celebrates poets, musicians, landscape and flora, includes classical references, and shows a genteel and Georgian pre-occupation with tea-time and firesides. In other poems, he writes from a very direct point of attachment and experience not only of sharing the privations of war with other Tommies, but with an empathy for their way of life whether or not it matched his own. It could be argued that Gurney's writing shows an awareness of class difference, in a variety of ways, but does not hold a fixed point of reference.

Army life inevitably threw him together with men from all kinds of backgrounds, and Gurney appears to have the capacity to treat them all with interest, often with affection, celebrating their individual qualities. Very often the image he conveys is one of pre-occupation with bourgeois small town life, portrayed kindly because it is so clearly a part of a history and heritage with which Gurney himself identifies. An unpublished untitled poem, written in Vlamestinghe in August 1917, is a good example, and the incident upon which it was based appears in a letter to Marion Scott.

Last night after lightsout I had a long talk with a Cotswold man lying next to me - of his ambition to be a gardener; of Cotswold gardens; of the beauty of those churches; of certain jolly old masters-of-life there; of old songs; of the joy of life there in those homely and friendly-seeming houses of grey stone with so wonderful an array of flowers round each. I could hear music that I should make mixt with the older music respiring from his talk - language of Shakespearéan comedy...

1

1. Collected Letters p245

The poem shows the same affectionate empathy here for the small business of daily life, highlighted in the commonplace-ness of 'sheds', and the sense of 'making do with' in 'contraptions' and 'curious adaptations'.

How strange it was to hear under the guns
That slow sweet Cotswold voice go droning through
His tales of flowers and trees, his little ones,
All that in years to come he hoped to do ...
The things he'd plant, the sheds he'd build, contraptions
Cunningly plotted, curious adaptations...

1.

Although the incident translates into poetry with almost nothing changed for artistic effect, the extract from the letter suggests a dual perspective on Gurney's part. He is clearly, 'inside' the situation, sharing the nostalgia of things and places dear to both of them. He is also, simultaneously, an observer, 'outside' looking in, when he hears the musicality of the man's talk rather than responds to what is being said, and in the way his 'Cotswold' voice conjures up an aural image of Shakespeare's Rude Mechanicals. In regarding himself as writer and music maker, he allies himself with Shakespeare as well as the Cotswold character, and there is a synchrony implicit here that can only be valid if the individual at the centre is diverse and heterodox.

The poem also has a resonance with the better known *The Silent One*, in which Gurney contrasts the 'infinite lovely chatter of Bucks accent' with 'the politest voice - a finicking accent'. (Gurney also mimics the officer's finicking syntax in 'Do you think you might crawl through there; there's a hole.')

The poem is ironic in tone, foregrounding the futility of such activities, rather than commenting on class *per se*, but it gives the

1. GA 20.6 , from Songs from the Second Fifth

reader, nevertheless, a picture of where the persona places himself. He clearly aligns himself, here, with the rank and file, not with the officer.

There are several poems that are interesting because they help to shed some light on Gurney's sense of identity within a class structured society. They describe the lives and concerns of artisans and craftsmen, or the technicalities of, or pleasures to be found in, mundane tasks. This has been seen in the untitled '*How strange it was to hear under the guns*' poem, above, and is also demonstrated in *The Lock Keeper*. Here, Gurney celebrates a simple man who is good at what he does,

And so the man who goes in my dark mind
With sand and broad waters and general kind
Of fish-and-fox-and-bird lore, and walking lank;
Knowledge of net and rod and rib and shank,
Might well stretch out my mind to be a frame -
A picture of a worthy without name.

1

The list of tools of the trade has a resonance with some of Gerard Manley Hopkins' descriptions, particularly in *Felix Randal*, but the first four lines personalise the issue in a way that is absent from Hopkins' writing. The observation that 'Men delight to praise men', and that to keep memory alive is a poet's privilege, carries with it an intimation of the writer's pre-occupation with honour. There is a sad modesty in the persona's presence in the fourth stanza, when he says, "It would have needed one far less sick than I/ To have questioned, to have pried each vein of his wide lore." This was a knowledge 'transcending books', and Gurney is emphatic, in the line 'There was nothing he did not know; there was nothing, nothing.', that this kind of wisdom was of great value. Again, the metaphor of darkness is used, with the image of stars in the darkness that Gurney

1. Collected Poems p 103.

uses in so many poems, to make the contrast between the Lock Keeper's knowledge and the knowledge acquired by mere 'book poring'. The strong visual images of flickering flames giving 'shadow and bright flare' imply a more vibrant and inspirational kind of knowing than existence in the steadier more even-textured light of 'full day shine', 'half light' or 'dark star-light'. It is also an allusion to the pseudonym, John Halflight, Gurney sometimes gave himself, and is loaded with layers of meaning apertaining to knowledge and the archaic use of 'light' in this context but with an oblique reference to the melancholy darkness of mood that Gurney felt was an inherent part of his existence and creativity. Thus, a poem in which Gurney celebrates the skills and craft of a simple man, tells the reader much about the persona's sense of identity too, and there is no reason to believe that the persona engaged in discourse with the *Lock Keeper* is anyone other than Gurney himself.

The poem *Joseph* has been discussed in an earlier chapter to illustrate aspects of family relationships. It is similar to *The Lock Keeper* in tone, in that it portrays a simple man, skilled and hard working, but who is ultimately, betrayed and bewildered as much by events that subvert the accepted order, (that sons follow fathers in their trade), as by the spiritual meanings attached to the happenings he has witnessed and been part of. The imagery in *Joseph* is an interesting and oblique treatment of a religious theme. It has resonances in *Barth Woolwich*, another poem that offers a strange mixture of classical references but ends with an almost surreal image of Christ,

May, rather, for that ugly, that evil smelling
Township, a Christ from Heaven must come down,
Pitiful and comradely, with tender signs,

And warm the tea, and shield a chap from fines.
A foreman carpenter, not yet full-grown.

1

The climax of the poem is the contrast between the self-consciously poetic diction of romantic names - Hellene, Sappho, Marathon, Ithaca, exotic in their foreignness and euphony as well as in their mythical associations - and the portrayal of Christ as a much more accessible figure. The focus of the last few lines, however, is not on Christ's qualities *per se*, but on the need for him to fit in as one of the common men. The images of 'warm the tea', 'shield a chap from fines', not only imply empathy on the part of the persona/writer, but make it clear that these ordinary working men are worthy of such divine attention.

The worthiness of men in simple occupations is a theme repeated in *The Hedger*, whose manual dexterity Gurney admires. The terms in which he praises this country craftsman, 'deft', 'loving', 'quick', 'quiet courage unhastening' are qualities Gurney would like for his own piano-playing, but in saying this there is no sense that he rates musical ability more highly than hedge laying. He simply recognises (and honours) the skill needed for both.

Objectively, Gurney acknowledges that the pre-war social structure that allowed the continuation of such occupations, cannot survive. In a letter to Marion Scott in October 1916, he comments upon an article by

A.G. Gardiner of the *Daily News*, that

...he cares, as I care, more for liberty for Englishmen,
than for liberty of England. Perhaps in the long run they are
identical, but that serves to show the difference of two
standpoints. It is of more importance that the Duke of Bilgewater
should respect and sympathise with Bill Jones than that the sun
should never set on the British Empire...

2

1. Collected Poems p 58

2. Collected Letters p 353

Gurney's ability to be both 'inside' and 'outside' the class question, to observe affectionately and in close detail, as well as to live a life that crossed class boundaries both by choice and by default, re-inforce the argument that his work is the manifestation of the quest for validation of a diverse and heterodox identity.

Although the reference points of nation, gender, generation and class provide a useful basis, and one which takes into account the mind-set of Gurney's era, it is not the only basis on which to understand identity. The relationship between constructs of illness and health are also hugely significant in an understanding of self-hood and identity. There is ample evidence in Gurney's writing, both poems and letters, to show that this was an important factor. Susan Sonntag has explored the literary images of illness as a reflection of attitudes prevalent in wider society, as well as the effect on individual belief. She suggests that

There were also similar fictions of responsibility and of a characterological pre-disposition to the illness: cancer is regarded as a disease to which the psychically defeated, the inexpressive, the repressed - especially those who have repressed anger or sexual feelings - are particularly prone, as tuberculosis was regarded throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (indeed, until it was discovered how to cure it as a disease apt to strike the hypersensitive, the talented, the passionate.

1

She refers to Erving Goffman's term "spoiled identity", and suggests that it is the stigmatisation of particular diseases that determines their 'capacity to create spoiled identity', and that

It seems that societies need to have one illness which becomes identified with evil, and attaches blame to its "victims", but it is hard to be obsessed with more than one.

2

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1. AIDS and its Metaphors p 12
 2. *ibid* p 16

In the early twentieth century, a major obsession with health focussed on mental health and 'nerves'. Edwin Ash, a physician and neurologist at the City of London Red Cross Hospital whose self help books typified contemporary beliefs about 'nerve problems', cited earlier, called it 'A disease of the age',

The prevalence of nervous disorders cannot fail to attract the attention of any discerning observer of social conditions today. So common, indeed, are neurasthenia and other similar maladies that they have been spoken of as 'the disease of the age' a 'national ailment' or the 'fashionable illness'.

1

'Nerves' and 'neurasthenia', (as a condition of nervous debility before the term became associated with shell-shock), replaced tuberculosis as the condition associated with "many great poets, painters, thinkers, writers, statesmen, and scientists", according to Ash. Gurney clearly regarded his capacity to work, to create music particularly, and to function adequately as a social being, at the mercy of his condition, which in turn he regards as inherently part of his essential identity - a 'spoiled identity,' therefore, following Sonntag's model.

Throughout Gurney's poems, there are numerous phrases that suggest imperfection and marginalisation as poignant asides about himself.

If only I could be convinced that there was nothing unique, nothing that was not easily paralleled in me, I would not care. But to be neurasthenic - To wonder what my capabilities are - to have patience only because, someday, there may come something to give joy to men and especially Englishmen to suffer all this in the thought-vacuum in which the army lives, moves and has its being, is a hard thing.

2.

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1. Nerves and the Nervous p 11
 2. Collected Letters p 52

Letters suggest that he is also disproportionately pre-occupied by the illnesses suffered by his friends and correspondents, as if the state of their health was an integral part of their identity, rather than something that happened to them. This too, offers an oblique comment on himself.

These concerns, however, co-exist with his often schoolboyish ebullience in letters, and what Howells called 'an astonishing creative pride'. It suggests an individual who is unsure sometimes about what he can do, but more fundamentally, about what he is. Re-reading his poems with this as a reference point offers another way in which to understand a body of work that has appeared inconsistent and hard to classify. The question of identity is thus a key to Gurney's poetry. All the aspects of his work that have hitherto been regarded as the dominant mode - War, Place, Georgianism, Music, even the sense of struggle against forces beyond his control, whether external or the endogenous struggle against his own mental state, can more productively be regarded as component parts contributing to a multiform self. Gurney's varied output mirrors this. Rather than being inconsistent it should be regarded as the logical expression of his diversity as he himself points out, with slightly self-mocking humour but which is nonetheless to be taken seriously,

No, I don't want to lose all this. There are so many parts for an ambitious young man to play, from disciple of Walt Whitman, lover of common men, to the composer of 9 (Immortal) Symphonies, all English every bar. And what about sailing?

1

1. Collected Letters p 130

As a post-script to the notion of identity as a central theme in Gurney's writing, it is worth considering the possibility of another dimension to the dedication of a group of poems to "Hawthornden". It has been suggested that "Hawthornden" represented 'a cluster of ideas' for Gurney. The word association of 'Drummond of Hawthornden' links it clearly with Annie Nelson Drummond, to whom the Hawthornden poems were dedicated. An aspect that does not seem to have been explored is the possibility that Gurney is making reference to a resonance in his own life with that of the central character in Edward Thomas's short story - *Hawthornden*. It was published in 1911, in a collection called Light and Twilight. Gurney was aware of Thomas's work, and admired him greatly. As one of a group of poets associated with John Haines, Gurney refers often to his work, from a brief reference to Thomas's review of Rupert Brooke's poems in the *Chronicle*, to a very warm and personal appreciation that developed later. In a letter to Marion Scott, for example, in February 1918,

When you have done with Edward Thomas, please send him back, will you? Haines showed me the first draft of the last poem in that book about Words. Almost without alterations in a beautiful neat hand. He must have been lovable.

1

And again in March 1918, acknowledging Thomas's influence on his own writing,

If I go - (when I go, rather; there seems to be little enough doubt surely!) out again there will probably be any amount written, influenced by E.T. chiefly, perhaps by Robert Graves - a true poet.

2

It is inconceivable that Gurney would not have read one of Thomas's major

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1. Collected Letters p 404
 2. *ibid* p 412

publications. The eponymous Hawthornden is described thus,

As a young man, clever above the common, reckless (within certain limits) and open-handed, he had attracted men of very different types, both at the university and in his bachelor lodgings.....

Hawthornden sought to recover this freedom by allowing no middleman between art and himself as a human being.

He used to sit by the roadside, or in the taproom of an inn, waiting for what would turn up. But something always stood in the way - himself.

Among the people of the neighbourhood he received a reputation for unconventionality. He was said to know the country and the people better than anyone. He was mistaken for a genius, a poet, an artist, a Bohemian, an eccentric millionaire.....

1

The climax of the story is the death of Hawthornden, who rebels against being 'home in time for tea' - the symbol of his entrapment in a life he wishes were different. Death occurs because 'the afternoon had been hot, and he had run too fast for a man of his build...', rather than a conscious choice of suicide, giving a sense of helplessness and lack of control, even if the ultimate result was to be relieved of a life become burdensome. The picture is of alienation, told in a linear narrative form.

In Gurney's writing there are glimpses of his sense of dislocation, as a constant theme running through all his work. Whether the work in question deals with war, or place or love or, as in the letters, is conversational in tone, there is very often a strong sense of 'otherness', setting Gurney apart from, or on the edge of, whatever situation he is in. There are numerous images of being on the outside looking in, being outside towns,

1. Pilgrim and Other Tales p 90-94

outside familiar surroundings, separation from loved ones, from his own countryside, watching from the edge. The final stanza of *Sea-Marge*,

And by the cliff-edge, there, the oakwood throws
A shadow deeper to watch what new thing
Happens at the marge.

1

is echoed in an unpublished, untitled, poem,

By the sand dunes
Two lovers are waiting
But know not sorrow of parting

.....

Alas, when they have kissed
And gone from each other,
The fondness for each
And the impulse now smothered
With delight of sight,
Will rise and be tears, and ache ...
And more than now the need
Of boy and girl's love actual prove,
And more than beauty, bleed.

2

The juxtaposition of 'beauty' and 'bleed' is a poignant comment on the joy and pain of human existence, echoing the second stanza of *Song*, 'And who loves joy as he/ That dwells in shadows?'

The existent is not just an 'it'; the existent says 'I', and in uttering the personal pronoun lays claim not just to a unique place and perspective in the world but to a unique being.

3

Gurney's uniqueness of being was not monistic, but embodied a multiple and divergent vision of the world and the ways he could live in it. His sense of dislocation is evident in much of his writing, but so too is a pervading sense of endeavour and the attempt to draw the 'criss-cross' purposes together. Whether this was played out against the backdrop of war, or in the idealised tranquility of the Gloucestershire countryside, it is the sense of self that is the heart of the matter.

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1. *Collected Poems* p 214
 2. G.A. Unpublished. 64.12 (126)
 3. *Existentialism* p 72

Allowed

Gurney 12.10 WRITTEN IN
DARTFORD
ASYLUM
REVISED

It is allowed to confine men, but not
So as their manhood ever be forgot.
Without work, ~~without~~ hope, and made fill their bodies
With dull food, that leaves nor hope nor ease,
To lie wasting in spirit, hurting of flesh!
Dreadful indeed this terrible unhuman mesh
That's yet put on by humans, by men known,
Is not God's compassion to be here shown?
Is not sweet charity left in hearts of men,
Death to grant would be pity, show pity again
O dwellers in the houses and the streets
Whose pain is passing and as snow-drift fleets
A passing pain, but this weighs heavy on
From waking till the dark, or set of sun
Bed-time. Unprofitable held, who need no rest
In house of dull pain held for day-length a guest,
Grant End to pain, give life a rest in death,
What use to hold a soul in bonds of breath?
Such end needs not a funeral, nor a wreath.

Ina Gurney
March 1923

CONCLUSION The Last of the Book

To be one self is not to be...

Gurney's poems are the formal enactments of many selves. It is rarely necessary to attempt to separate his empirical self from his literary self or from the persona of a poem because he writes from such a close point of attachment that he is all of them. His poems, without being egocentrically autobiographical, are suffused with his presence. There are, however, many facets to his sense of self, and he proclaims them, often energetically, sometimes despairingly, sometimes as if doubts about what constitutes self drive the need to proclaim it the more emphatically.

Gurney's poetic and musical selves have been seen sometimes as opposing forces, but are enantiomorphic. The stimulus for both aspects of creativity was Gurney's deep desire to be a 'creator of beauty'. This is particularly the case in the songs he wrote, and there are no attempts to reproduce the harshness and brutality of war in experimental or discordant music.

The evil and destruction Gurney saw all around him in the war, posed a threat both emotionally and symbolically to all that he valued - despoilation of the French countryside was no more acceptable to him than damage to his own countryside. His poetic voice, here, is often an antidote to despair in the face of extreme physical hardship as well as the emotional trauma of front line service. It is not, however, the voice of passive suffering. Gurney is clearsighted enough to recognise 'useless fashions' and the futility of 'uselessly doing fatheaded things eternally'.

Gurney is one of the men, a ranker not an officer, and his identity is grounded very firmly in the details of army life as commonplace as small town life, and he speaks with the voice of one concerned with the close-to-hand, and the particular. Gurney the soldier, however, is Gurney the displaced civilian, at odds with his occupation yet finding it good for him, and at odds with his surroundings because they are not Gloucestershire.

One aspect of identity Gurney regards with a sense of responsibility, is his place in the chain of continuity from the Danes and Romans to the descendents of his own generation. He wants his voice to be an instrument for calling into the future and repeating the echoes from the past. 'Poetryflows through history and collaborates with real life.' (1) He is the go-between turning alternately to past and future generations, just as he is the interpreter linking man and nature for those lacking his sensibility and eye for detail.

Like Ezra Pound, Gurney engages in

the search for 'sincere self-expression', one gropes, one finds some seeming verity. One says 'I am this, that or the other', and with the words scarcely uttered one ceases to be that thing.

I began this search for the real in a book called *Personae*, casting off as it were, complete masks of the self in each poem. I continued in a long series of translations, which were but more elaborate masks.

2

Gurney's voices are his own. They are none of them voices muffled by masks - he is a poet who rarely hides behind other people or attempts to

1. The Truth of Poetry p 213 quoting Pasternak on poetry.

2. *ibid* p 130, from Gaudier-brzeska: A Memoir, (1916), Ezra Pound.

speaking for them or through them, because there are no deliberately imagined selves. Gurney is present, sometimes with a naivete and endearing directness, putting himself into the frame, unconsciously, because he has never made the pretence of writing as anyone else. Gurney's multiplicity is not that of Browning - he is true to himself rather than some pretended Cynara; nor is he, like Pessoa, rejecting the orthodoxy of a single self by intentionally creating several more, keeping them on parallel but separate tracks. With Gurney, the strands are all intertwined. His various voices and ways of being are not compartmentalised, thus Gurney at war looks at the sky and the poplars, or walking the Gloucestershire hills thinks of France.

In *Honouring Ivor Gurney*, Jeremy Hooker regards him as

a man greatly gifted as both musician and poet, who is therefore essentially a maker and instrument of order, and a voice of the language which composes and confirms our human world

1

The notion of Gurney as both maker and instrument is an important one, to support the assertion that Gurney's are not pretended voices, and closer to P.J.Kavanagh's view that where there are echoes of other writer's work, Gurney is not using conscious pastiche, but 'acts of ventriloquism'. His eclecticism has sometimes been seen as inconsistency, and his resonance with other writers seen as derivative, whereas Gurney himself has a strong sense of paying homage to those he admires by absorbing them into himself, in order to proclaim and celebrate both.

1. *Honouring Ivor Gurney*, P.M. Review 1980, p 16

The fact that Gurney's later years were characterised by the disintegration of his emotional and psychological capacity, and ability to order his life, is both poignant and terrible. For him, Pessoa's perception that 'to be one self is not to be', was transmuted into a state where to be oneself was not to be.

But the knowledge of what Stephen Banfield calls 'the extramusical factor' and therefore the 'extra-literary factor' too, should not be allowed to detract from our willingness to engage with his work as it exists. The fact that there are letters and poems that show signs of his dislocation from conventional realities should not detract from the numerous, rich and varied poems that show him at his best. Gurney speaks for himself through the poems, and there is no need to make excuses.

"Being dead yet speaketh the dear Ivor we didn't know what he felt like" is the bewildered comment, written in pencil, probably by his ^Ssister-in-law Ethel Gurney, at the top of one of his asylum pieces. The fact that so few of his poems reached a reading public until after his death give her comment an irony she could not have predicted. Nevertheless, there is a sense of continuity, and a sense that Gurney's voices will continue to be heard. The elusive quality of Gurney's *oeuvre*, is epitomised in his poem *Yesterday Lost*. Gurney's title was *The Miracles*, and in it he describes

A sense of mornings, once seen, for ever gone,
Its own for ever: alive, dead, and my possession.

There is an addition to the TS in the Archive, in Gurney's hand,

My possession, and a part of my man's history.

This is characteristic of Gurney, in his later years, returning to poems and adding lines. This one reaffirms the message at the heart of the poem. It is an acceptance of the transience of even the most predictable things, because 'each new time is miracle'. He is stating, too, the enigma of being, as a spectrum of co-existent possibilities - 'Its own for ever: alive, dead, and my possession'. He has caught the moment, and it has become part of him. His poems and music express many ways of being and seeing, making the new familiar, and the familiar new, but possessing - and living- them all.

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Songs by Ivor Gurney:.. from
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1. Mandalay (fragment) (Kipling)
2. Saw ye him whom my soul loveth? (Song of Solomon, chapter 3)
3. Who hath desired the sea? (Kipling)
4. Passing by ('There is a lady sweet and kind')(Anon. 17th century)
5. On your midnight pallet lying (Housman)
6. Dearest, when I am Dead (W.E.Henley)
7. Gulls in an aery morrice (incomplete) (W.E. Henley)
8. The full sea rolls and thunder (W.E.Henley)
9. I dreamed the peach trees blossomed (incomplete) (Rosamund Marriott
Watson)
10. I would my songs were roses (Heine, trans Oddie)
11. A visit from the sea (Yeats)
12. The country of the Camisards (Stevenson)
13. Looking-glass river (Stevenson)
14. The hill pines were sighing (Bridges)
15. O tall white poplar (no author listed)
16. When you are old and grey (Yeats)
17. I will make you brooches (Stevenson)
18. When June is come (Bridges)
19. Song and singer ('Bright is the ring of words') (Stevenson)
20. Song of Ciabhan (Ethna Carbery)
21. Fate (Bret Harte)
22. The sea is full of wandering foam (W.E. Henley)
23. I love all beauteous things (Bridges)
24. To the isle of peace (no author listed)
25. I praise the tender flower (Bridges)
26. Star of the morrow gray (no author listed)
27. West Sussex drinking song (Belloc)
28. The night of Trafalgar (Hardy)
29. * Orpheus (attributed to Fletcher) * Five Elizabethan Songs
30. * Tears (Weep you no more, sad fountains) (anon)
31. * Under the greenwood tree (Shakespeare)
32. * Sleep (Fletcher)
33. * Spring (Nashe)
34. The twa corbies (anon)
35. Edward, Edward (anon)
36. Dear lady (Bridges)
37. Dreams of the sea (W.H. Davies)
38. Kennst du das Land (Goethe)
39. Captain Stratton's fancy (Masefield)
40. Calm with the calm (no author listed)
41. The bells of Aberfeldy (no author listed)
42. By a bierside (Masefield)
43. In Flanders (F.W. Harvey)
44. Severn meadows (Gurney)
45. On Wenlock Edge (Housman)
46. Even such is time (Raleigh)

47. The folly of being comforted (Yeats)
48. The fiddler of Doone. (Yeats)
49. The lowlands of Holland (anon)
50. All night under the moon (W.W.Gibson)
51. Song from *The Sad Shepherd* (Ben Jonson)
52. The lake isle of Innisfree (Yeats)
- 53.* Thou didst delight my eyes (Bridges) * Five Songs
- 54.* The cherry tree (Housman)
- 55.* Song of silence (? Gurney)
- 56.* Red roses (W.W.Gibson)
- 57.* The white cascade (W.H. Davies)
58. Sowing (Edward Thomas)
59. The county Mayo (Rafferty, trans James Stephens)
60. Epitaph on an army of mercenaries (Housman)
61. Desire in spring (Twilight song) (Francis Ledwidge)
62. The scribe (de la Mare)
63. O happy wind (W.H. Davies)
64. The apple orchard (Sappho, trans Bliss Carman)
65. Cathleen ni Houlihan (Yeats)
66. The bonny Earl of Murray (anon)
- 67.* Love shakes my soul (Sappho, trans Bliss Carman) *Two Sappho Songs
- 68.* I shall ever be maiden (Sappho, trans Bliss Carman)
69. On the downs (Masefield)
70. The halt of the legion (Masefield)
71. Last hours (John Freeman)
72. The singer (Shanks)
73. Since to be loved (Bridges)
- 74.* When smoke stood up (Housman) * Ludlow and Teme
- 75.* Far in a western brookland (Housman)
- 76.* 'Tis time, I think (Housman)
- 77.* Ludlow fair (Housman)
- 78.* On the idle hill of summer (Housman)
- 79.* When I was one-and-twenty (Housman)
- 80.* The Lent lily (Housman)
81. Carol of the Skiddaw yowes (Ernest Casson)
82. Lonely night (Sappho, trans Bliss Carman)
83. The quiet mist (Sappho, trans Bliss Carman)
84. Soft was the wind in the beech trees (Sappho, trans Bliss Carman)
85. Hesperus (Sappho, trans Bliss Carman)
86. When on a summer morn (W.H. Davies)
87. A town window (Drinkwater)
88. Alone on the shore (incomplete) (? Robert Nichols)
89. The dying patriot: Day breaks on England (Fletcher)
90. Dinny Hill (F.W. Harvey)
91. In praise of ale (F.W. Harvey)
92. If we return (fragment) (F.W. Harvey)
93. Cranham Woods. Walking Song (F.W. Harvey)
94. Fain would I change that note (attrib Tobias Hume)
95. The eagle (Tennyson)
96. The owl (Edward Thomas)
97. Traveller turn a mournful eye (incomplete)
98. Winter ('Clouded with snow') (de la Mare)
99. Ralph Roister Doister (Nicholas Udall)
100. John Day (W.H. Kerr)

101. Counting sheep (W.H. Kerr)
102. * Reveille (Housman) * The Western Playland
* Loveliest of trees (Housman) (and of sorrow)
103. * Golden friends ('With rue my heart is laden') (Housman)
104. * Twice a week (Housman)
105. * The aspens ('Along the field') (Housman)
106. * Is my team ploughing? (Housman)
107. * The far country ('Into my heart') (Housman)
108. * March (Housman)
109. When death to either shall come (Bridges)
110. Song ('The boat is chafing') (John Davidson)
111. An epitaph (de la Mare)
112. Brittle bones (Robert Graves)
113. * Nine of the clock (John Doyle = Robert Graves) * Two Songs from
'Country Sentiment'
114. * Goodnight to the meadows (John Doyle = Robert Graves)
115. Loving Henry (Robert Graves)
116. Star talk (Robert Graves)
117. The Latmian shepherd (Shanks)
118. Dover's Hill (Shanks)
119. The fields are full (Shanks)
120. Meadow and orchard (Shanks)
121. Brown is my love (anon)
122. Thrice toss these oaken ashes up in air (Campion)
123. Thou art not fair (Campion)
124. Time, you old gypsy man (Ralph Hodgson)
125. When icicles hang by the wall (Shakespeare)
126. Clown's song ('When that I was') (Shakespeare)
127. Blow, blow thou winter wind (Shakespeare)
128. Come away, death (Shakespeare)
129. Orpheus with his lute (second setting) (attrib. Fletcher)
130. A sea dirge ('Full fathom five') (Shakespeare)
131. Take, O take those lips away (Shakespeare)
132. When daisies pied (Shakespeare)
133. As I lay in the early sun (Shanks)
134. You are my sky (J.C. Squire)
135. * To a snowflake (Francis Thompson) * Three Songs
136. * Epitaph in old mode (J.C. Squire)
137. * The ship (J.C. Squire)
138. The ship (another setting) (J.C. Squire)
139. I have loved flowers that fade (Bridges)
140. Cashel of Munster (Samuel Ferguson)
141. The darling black head (Samuel Ferguson)
142. Down by the salley gardens (Yeats)
143. The cloths of heaven (Yeats)
144. Cradle song (Yeats)
145. We who are old (Yeats)
146. The happy townland (Yeats)
147. The crowder (W.W. Gibson)
148. Black Stichel (W.W. Gibson)
149. Blawearry (W.W. Gibson)
150. The mugger's song (W.W. Gibson)
151. Sam Spraggon (W.W. Gibson)
152. To violets (Herrick)

153. Lullaby (Herrick) for voice and violin.
154. Ha'nacker Mill (Belloc)
155. Most Holy Night (Belloc)
156. Heart's Pain ('All suddenly the wind comes soft') (Brooke)
157. Ploughman singing (John Clare)
158. A Lyke Wake Carol (Arthur Shearly Cripps)
159. Nocturne (Vivian Lock Ellis)
160. Aspatia's Song ('Lay a garland') (Fletcher)
161. When Shall I Who Wander Weary (Heine)
162. The Penny Whistle Lights Out
163. Scents ('Today I think)
164. Bright Clouds
165. Lights Out
166. Will you come?
167. The Trumpet
168. Adlestrop (Edward Thomas)
169. The Bridge (Edward Thomas)
170. The Gallows (Edward Thomas)
171. The Mill-pond (Edward Thomas)
172. Three Hills (J.C.Squire)
173. In Youth is Pleasure (Robert Weever)
174. Country Love Song (F.W.Harvey) Composed under pseudonym Michael Flood
175. Snow (Edward Thomas)
176. Hawk and Buckle (Robert Graves as John Doyle)
177. Beware! (Exile) ('Had the Gods loved me') (de la Mare)
178. Alexander. (de la Mare)
179. All that's past ('Very old are the woods') (de la Mare)
180. Bread and Cherries (de la Mare)
181. Farewell (de la Mare)
182. The Ghost (de la Mare)
183. Since thou, O fondest and truest (Bridges)
184. Fair Lady's Mantle (J.W.Haines)
185. The High Road (J.W.Haines)
186. Come, O come my life's delight (Campion)
187. It was the lovely moon (John Freeman)
188. The Birds (Belloc)
189. On Sussex Hills (Belloc)
190. Spring (Katerina Boganoff)
191. Old Friend (Noel Ferris) Composed under the pseudonym Michael Flood
192. Pedlar Jack (W.W.Gibson)
193. Pity Me (W.W.Gibson)
194. The Little Waves of Breffny (Eva Gore Booth)
195. The Happy Tree (Gerald Gould)
196. The Voice (H.Rippon Seymour) Composed under pseudonym Michael Flood
197. Echo's lament of Narcissus ('Slow, slow, fresh fount') Ben Jonson
198. The Fair (Winifred Letts)
199. Cowslip Time (Winifred Letts) Composed under pseudonym Michael Flood
200. I will go with my father a-ploughing (Joseph Campbell)
201. A piper (Seumas O'Sullivan)
202. At the Jolly Blue Boar (H. Kenniston Wynne) Composed etc Michael Flood
203. Song from The Land of Heart's Desire ('The wind blows out') (Yeats)
204. The Death Of Nelson (S.J.Arnold)
205. A Sword (Robin Flower)
206. The cherry trees bend over (Edward Thomas)

207. My lady's lips ('Lady when I behold') anon 16th Century
 208. Burning of Auchindon (anon)
 209. To the Muses (Blake)
 210. The treasure *Five Songs of Rupert Brooke*
 211. There's wisdom
 212. One day ('Today I have been happy')
 213. All Suddenly
 214. Clouds
 215. When Rooks Fly Homeward (Joseph Campbell)
 216. Carol (William Canton)
 217. The Cuckoo Sings in the Heart of Winter (Nora Chesson)
 218. The Moon (W.H. Davies)
 219. Early Morn (W.H. Davies)
 220. Fine knacks for ladies (attrib Dowland)
 221. I saw my lady weep (attrib Dowland)
 222. Change should breed change (William Drummond)
 223. Who would have thought that face of thine (Thomas Howell?)
 224. Consolator afflictorum (F.W. Harvey)
 225. Against weeping ('Dry those fair eyes')
 226. Sleep O sleep, fond fancy. (attrib Morley)
 227. Faith (M.A. Radford)
 228. Everyone sang (Sassoon)
 229. Isabel (Skelton)
 230. Cock Crow (Edward Thomas)
 231. In Memoriam (Edward Thomas)
 232. It Rains (Edward Thomas)
 233. O dreamy, gloomy, friendly trees (Herbert Trench)
 234. Christmas folksong (anon)
 235. Rose cheek'd Laura came (Campion)
 236. The Ruin ('When the last colours')
 237. Summer and Frost (Weelkes)
 238. Maid Quiet (Yeats)
 239. A Bird's Anger (W.H. Davies)
 240. Bonnie George Campbell (anon)
 241. In the Black Winter Morning (Hardy)
 242. The Peasant's Confession (Hardy)
 243. The Phantom (Hardy)
 244. County of Peebles (Stephenson)
 245. The Idlers (Blunden)
 246. Farewell Rewards and Fairies (Richard Corbet)
 247. The Douglas Tragedy (anon)
 248. When my love was away (Bridges)
 249. Fifth Avenue (Louis How)
 250. Castle Garden (Louis How)
 251. Columbia Heights (Louis How) Composed under pseudonym Frederick Saxby
 252. Gramercy Park (Louis How) Composed under pseudonym Frederick Saxby
 253. Mary Murray (Murray Hill) (Louis How) Composed etc Frederick Saxby
 254. Riverside Drive (Louis How) Composed etc Frederick Saxby
 255. Williamsburg (Louis How) Composed etc Frederick Saxby
 256. Woolworth Building (Louis How)
 257. Love Song ('Love's pattern')
 258. The Heart's Prevention ('I found today out walking') (Bridges)
 259. Dear Lady 2nd setting (Bridges)
 260. Tarantella (Belloc)

261. A la Flandre (Leon Boucquet)
262. La Langua Catalana (Justin Pepratx)
263. Gar Nel (chanson de Tarois (anon)
264. Merciles beaute: I (Captivity) (Chaucer)
265. The sea hath its pearls (Longfellow)
266. The Pear Tree (Edna St Vincent Millay)
267. A la roca latino (Frederic Mistral)
268. Song of the Canadian Soldiers
269. Snowflakes (Longfellow)
270. Birds in the high Hall-garden (Tennyson)
271. Heraclitus (Callimachus Trans William Cory)
272. Come you whose loves are dead (Fletcher)
273. Aftermath (Longfellow)
274. The Hill pines were sighing *Two songs by Bridges*
275. My spirit kisseth thine
276. A love lyric (Bridges)
277. To the memory of Max Reger with homage
278. The sea poppy (Bridges)
279. Words (Edward Thomas)
280. The lowlands of Holland, 2nd setting (anon)
281. Out in the dark (Edward Thomas)
282. I heard a soldier (Herbert Trench)
283. Off Trafalgar (browning)
284. World Strangeness (William Watson)
285. Wassail chorus at the Mermaid Tavern (Theodore Watts Dunton)
286. By broad Potomac's shore (Whitman)
287. To Paumanck (Whitman)
288. The song of Chicago (Whitman)
289. Reconciliation (Whitman)
290. The county of Mayo (Thomas Lavelle trans George Fox)
291. All the words that I utter (Yeats)
292. For the lands
293. The dead at Colomacnois (Enoch O'Gillan trans Thos. Rolleston)
294. Stillness (Flecker)
295. London Song (John Daniels) (almost certainly Gurney)
296. After the ceremony
297. To music for calm (Herrick)
298. Song from *Epicene* ('Still to be neat') (Ben Jonson)
299. Song ('On the wide lakes')
300. To do this if not old ('When the Spring comes') (?Austin Dobson)
301. Voices of Women (Frank Prewitt)
302. The World's Great Age (Shelley)
303. Lament
304. The fiddler of Dooney , 2nd setting (Yeats)
305. Then Hercules who felt within his heart (fragment)
306. On Eastnor Knoll (Masefield)
307. The late rider
308. Western sailors
309. Silent music (Campion)
310. The first of Lent
311. Over the ridge

Taken from
Sensibility and English Song
 Volume 2 by Stephen Banfield

NINE UNPUBLISHED POEMS

Some of these are included in full in the text. Other unpublished works are referred to only briefly in passing and have not therefore been included here.

Joseph and the untitled poem '*How strange it was to hear under the guns*' were published in Stand, Vol. 30, No.3, Summer 1989.

Dark are the Ways

Dark are the ways that make
Music or verse on the page;
Stars outside, desires that shake
The heart; from an age of age.

If only for pain's sake renew
Your love, if I did, in the sight
Of my work Love willed me to do...
Whose comfort was my lone delight.

G.A. MS 44.35

Birds

There were small birds would fly in the trenches at times,
Loved to our Gloucester eyes -
Who would see with surprise
Some visitor from home with a touch of rhymes
Ending a talk and poetry becoming esy and wise.
There were the hedge sparrows (music) by Maisemore, Her green
Small hill, and Minsterworth starlings flocking in clouds
Of whirring black ones on the gold stubble and half seen
Lovely weeds of heartsease, pimperl, ladies bedstraw.
Blackbirds of Wellington Street, martins of Leadon's law,
One king fisher, one laughing linet in the shrouds
Of April, under the luminous azure white heaven's measure.
Linnets with wavering flight going over Corse way to delight
Boy with as sure ^{of}
A sense of earth as any birds - but earth's friend and more
So some good spirit friended to the music or verse ended.
There was a yellow hammer by Hartpury manor
And robins by High Hartbury were good as crumbs to me.
(Had I been Robin - or yellow hammer a loving human).
(If crumbs are dear to robins like the heart's touch of humans)
They were my brothers, but I a prince above others,
Having music within my blood, verse eager to say my mood,
The fire of sword and steelshine with pity of woman.

G.A. 21.59

Untitled

Pines like the sea are still,
 That like the sea are loud
 When the wind tears doglike
 Teeth bared, on the hill
 And night is black cloud.

G. A. MS 42.3

Untitled

By the sand dunes
 Two lovers are waiting
 But know not sorrow of parting.
 For the sea's colour
 This autumn passing ...
 The gray sea's runes
 Sing boyishly in measures
 Of delight of long tales:
 And the sea-pink and rushes
 Sway with the good wind
 Like friends at shared treasures...
 Alas, when they have kissed
 And gone from each other,
 The fondness for each
 And the impulse now smothered
 With delight of sight,
 Will rise and be tears, and ache...
 And more than now the need
 Of boy and girl's love actual prove,
 And more than beauty, bleed.

G. A. MS 64 12
 TS 20
 TS 60
 TS 65
 In Clark.

Untitled

How strange it was to hear under the guns
That slow sweet Cotswold voice go droning through
His tales of flowers and trees, his little ones,
All that in years to come he hoped to do ...
The things he'd plant, the sheds he'd build, contraptions
Cunningly plotted, curios adaptations...
And all the while, under the sullen guns
I heard the sound of lovely words I'd read
Secretly reading, long ago, in bed,
And surely Shakespeare knew such men as these
And chose to shape out of their artless talk
The mellow wonder of his comedies.
Though shaped in London where the vulgar walk
Nor ever speak of flowers or good grey stone
But stumble in an evil dark alone...
How should they know who have not seen our Spring,
What England, name and flame under the name
Holds for her children? Outcast and exiled,
They love no longer greatest or smallest thing
Nor can their inmost spirit, being defiled
Of blindness and dull-heartedness take shame.
O thought! The high transfiguring fires
Of sunrise made her eyes glow deep.
Deeper, her passionate desires...
Thus Royal Ypres waked from sleep!.

Ivor Gurney

Vlamestinghe August 1917

G.A. 20.6
G.A. 52.7 MS version
G.A. 64.11 (119) TS
Marion Scott with
corrections by IBG

To Sarah

In this time without beauty, you alone, you alone
Know how to descend, pale, a wide, clear stairway;
Ribbon your forehead, carry a lily, with a sword make play
Queen of attitudes - Princess of gestures of calm or passion.

In this time without folly, ardent, you protest,
You say verses, you die of love, your flight droops and fails
You hold out arms of flesh, or arms of fairy tales
And when Phedre comes, we are equal with Her at least.

Running upon Death, you draw our hearts as swift -
We have seen your tears fall, with our eyes we have wondered.
All the tears of our souls are in your free gift.

But also, O Mistress, you know well that in your magic unpraised,
You feel tenderly touch, in homage unpondered
The lips of Shakespeare on the tips of your fingers placed.

Ivor Gurney

after Edmond Rostand

(To Sarah Bernhardt)

Allowed

It is allowed to confine men, but not
So their manhood ever be forgot
Without work, or hope, and made fill their bodies
With dull food, that leaves nor hope nor ease,
To lie wasting in spirit, hurting of flesh!
Dreadful indeed this terrible inhuman mesh
That's yet put on by humans, by men known
to not God's compassion to be here shown?
to not sweet charity left in hearts of men,
Death to grant would be pity, show pity again
O dwellers in houses and the streets
Whose pain is passing and as snowdrift fleets -
A passing pain, but this weighs heavy on
From working till the dark, or set of sun -
Bed-time, unprofitable held, who need no rest
In house of dull pain held for day-length a gues.
Grant End to pain, give life a rest in Death,
What use to hold a soul in bonds of breath?
Such an end needs not a funeral, nor a wreath.

March 1923
G. A. 12. 10

Joseph

The carpenter of craft - worker for his wage,
 Wedded Mary, beautiful and good - There was nothing
 Joseph would not do, save spoil craft, for this lady of young age
 They had a child of love, travellers hearing his beauty
 Came in to see, gave presents rare, laid on the clothing
 Of the cradle - These were good men, travelled, reputed sage...
 Who uttered strange blessings over the babe quietly
 Breathing his life through in a helpless wait-on-kindness.
 The son became a carpenter, meditated lon; following the
 Precepts of God, - but leaving no tale of poetry -
 Or more Psalms as of David, to exalt Israel or Her heritage.
 Wandered and drew followers, loved by men to blindness
 And noble against the Roman-Official hot in accusation...
 Suffered crucifixion... no man is yet sure why.
 So Joseph, blamed for his son fault in his fifty-third
 Year - spake little, being of evil report afear'd
 And said only -"The Psalms of David, the King
 Of Israel, when Israel was free, now by Rome conquered...
 Were beautiful enough, the boy should have made such a thing -
 Or poems of Jerusalem or his own Bethlehem.
 Shall not God please His spirit to hear a boy sing
 Praise of the high hills, or low valleys - in verse inspired,
 Or made carefully as a carpenter plots and makes.
 He turned and kissed Mary: "Many lies have they uttered
 About the birth of our son, and what he desired.
 But they also lied, also paid tribute betrayed.
 Israel cares no more for poetry's many sakes,
 Music is not a worship, Beauty not obeyed.
 Priests under Rome's rule, wasting soul of Israel.
 And our son gone to the dark with few words scattered,
 After such anguish, insult, my son trained to my trade".

Signed and dated 'Ivor Gurney March 1925'
 TS copies only G.A. 42.3 (90) and G.A. 42.3 (91)

An Ending

His body so still that swift was in flight
As any summer's swallow: and blind to the light
His eyes are that saw with blue eagle glance
The smallest pennon borne aloft on farthest lance.
That pride of him, that power laid low in the dust,
Death on him has put strong edict, the dread'must'.
And he has obeyed thereto, as all must soon or late;
Will ride no more to clatter of hoofs through the gate;
Will take no more the first soft breathings of Spring
With welcome surprisal, nor hear the birdsing
Any more in the midnight brake or see far hung
May's crescent of silver in clear heaven swung.
For these are of earth, far off he may recall
The twin wonders sacred of dayspring and night-fall
With longing hardly to be borne, scarce supported
So strong his love was, his faith so great-hearted.
While we the unworthy watch that pageant change
Of fresh and ruddy colour of pride, the Seasons range;
And he naught knows of any wonder of wide skies
Or May's hedges foaming, fast-closed are his eyes,
Hands folded, limbs loose, pallid, unwilled,
His burial awaiting with hot heart stilled;
Passionless, uneage; a story is done.
Let us pile earth to hide him from his Father the Sun,
Raise a stone of honour, weep, turn, and begone.

G. A. 42.2 (33)