

Apocalypse!



A two-day, two-centre symposium organised by John Goodby, Professor of Arts & Culture, (Sheffield Hallam University), Professor Heather Clark, Director of the Centre for International Contemporary Poetry and Dr Steve Ely, Director of the Ted Hughes Network (both University of Huddersfield).

The 1940s, long dismissed as a 'dire decade' for English poetry, is increasingly being reassessed, and many of the poets who rose to prominence in the period are being recognised not only for the quality and importance of their work, but for their roles in developing the methods and techniques of early 20th century Modernism and in transmitting Modernism's influence into subsequent decades. James Keery's groundbreaking anthology *Apocalypse* (2020), is a major development in the further rehabilitation of the poetry of the 1940s, and is the catalyst for the two symposia:

- *Apocalypse I*—Visionary Modernist and Expressionist Poetry of the 1930s and 1940s—will take place on *Saturday 19th March at Sheffield Hallam University*
- *Apocalypse II*—the legacies of *Apocalypse*: Visionary Modernist and Expressionist Poetry Since 1950—will take place on *Saturday 12th November at the University of Huddersfield*.

Apocalypse I

Visionary Modernist and Expressionist Poetry of the 1930s and 1940s

Sheffield Hallam University, Saturday 19th March, 2022

Venue: Sheffield Hallam University, Charles Street Building, 6th floor (rooms 12.06.06, 12.6.13, 12.6.02, 12.6.09). Registration is in the Ground Floor Atrium.

Schedule:

n.b. All events, apart from registration, will take place in rooms on the sixth floor of the Charles Street Building.

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| 09.30 | Arrival, Tea/Coffee |
| 10.00 | Introduction: John Goodby & Steve Ely |
| 10.10 | Keynote: James Keery |
| 11.15 | Panel 1: Apocalypse, Modernism, Expressionism
Steve Ely
Ed Reiss |
| 11.15 | Panel 2: Apocalypse and Media
Andrew Duncan
Brian Whalley |
| 12.30 | Lunch |
| 01.30 | Panel 3: Apocalypse: Origins and Outliers
Simon Jenner
Giles Goodland
Laura Day |
| 01.30 | Panel 4: Apocalypse and Lynette Roberts
David Annwn |

Charles Mundy
Adam Piette

- 2.45 Break, Tea/Coffee
- 3.15 Panel 5: Apocalypse: Ireland and Scotland
Karl O'Hanlon
Paul Robichaud
David Wheatley
- 3.15 Panel 6: Apocalypse and War
Tim Armstrong
John Goodby
- 4.30 Comfort Break
- 4.40 Plenary
- 5.00 End

Conference Dinner: tbc

Poetry Reading: tbc

Abstracts

David Annwm Jones (Independent)

'Apocalypse Ark': David Jones, Lynette Roberts and Hugh McDiarmid, Science, the Prose-Poem and Prose in Poems in the 1930s and 50s.

In *In Parenthesis* (1937), David Jones wrote of an incoming missile as 'some mean chemist's / contrivance, a stinking physicist's destroying toy.' It is a soldier-poet's imaginative retrospective vision tracing back from the exploding First World War trench to the contemporary weapons laboratory. In this paper I will consider the layered engagement of several poets active during the years of the Apocalypse anthologies with developments in science and technology. Moving on from the initial revulsion and mistrust shown to scientific thinking by Jones, Robert Graves and others, I will describe the various means by which poets addressed the dawning of a new age in physics, Dylan Thomas's work revealing ways in which global technological and scientific advances could be folded into imagery of myth and ritual. We can see analogous technical developments in Edith Sitwell's 'Atomic Bomb' trilogy and Robert Conquest's 'Guided Missiles Experimental Range'. Yet, in his prose poem, 'A, a, a DOMINE DEUS', (painstakingly re-worked over years following 1938), Jones, acutely aware of modern societal 'break' with small-scale artisan industries turned back to the world of electrical pylons, the chemically-based production lines of 'nozzles and containers and automatic devices' in attempts to

find a creaturely and sacramental resource intrinsic to such processes. In doing so, he juxtaposed Latin from the Vulgate, imagery of high-rise towers and Paul Robeson's singing of Spirituals. In this quest, his narrator finally gives voice to failure. Hugh McDiarmid, indebted to his friendship to the chemist-poet John Davidson and negotiating his complex relation with Communism, ransacked his Chambers Dictionary and transferred the prose of a Times Literary Supplement review almost verbatim to 'On a Raised Beach' (1934) to explore geological and zoological outlooks. My consideration of these works will also draw in Lynette Roberts' remarkable prose-poem, 'From a New Perception of Colour. And I shall take as my example the Raid on Swansea', (April 1941), where the juxtaposition of pastoral and industrial scapes: 'a glade of magnesium waning' passes into the usage of product and ad names, ID numbers and an actual chemical formula: 'A collyrium sky, chemically washed Cu DH2'. In the jarring fear and wonder of her encounter with the bombing of Swansea, Roberts' narrator reverses *In Parenthesis* victim's view in revealing intrusive scientific influences on human's perceptions of their own bodies: 'our blood distilled, cylindricals of glass'. I will argue that each of these three poets' formal engagement with these themes and their lexical exploration and experimentation draw on their long-term involvement with different linguistic traditions: Welsh, English, Scots and Spanish.

Tim Armstrong (Royal Holloway, University of London)

Eithne Wilkins and WWII

This paper looks at the wartime work on Eithne Wilkins, a poet with a vivid reputation in her own time, but now mainly remembered as a pioneering translator of Musil and others. The paper will introduce Wilkins, taking in her childhood in New Zealand (an important point of reference in later work) and her subsequent context and career. It will look at her war poems, often written in dialogue with male poets or both wars - with poems dedicated to Blunden, Graves and Keyes - but also remembering the dead in personal and arresting terms, and describing a world (like that of D.W. Stonier and others) given up to ghosts - as in 'For Jacques Albala, Killed in France, June 1944': 'These are men who lock themselves at home, / who sit at nightfall, here, / their hands between their knees, / big shadows standing one behind each chair, / while all their darkening love spreads out like blood upon the floor.' Wilkins struggles with the history of elegy, as in her poem 'Person', dedicated to the memory of Alan R. Davis, which depicts the words of the past as issuing 'Out of the open mouth of some great mask left lying'. The result is a world rendered gothic, as in 'Peace in Our time': 'And we are knarled with things that turned against us: / things issuing from our sleep, / grimaces reminiscent of, deep in our dreaming / unexploded mines'. I will also briefly deal with Wilkin's later response to the atom bomb, and to her brother's involvement in the Manhattan Project.

Laura Day (University of Durham)

'Man, Landscape, and the Anthropocene: Norman Nicholson's Rock Face.

Cumbrian poet Norman Nicholson's 1948 collection *Rock Face* is gently apocalyptic. Whilst there are no literal bangs and crashes, there are metaphorical ones. Nicholson explores the relationship between man and nature in this transitional collection with gentle assertiveness. The language is, at times, melancholic, and therefore reflective of man's relationship to the natural world. The poetry is that of lamentation as well as shock; and the effect is that of leaving the reader questioning man's use of the natural space they occupy. Nicholson also grapples with ideas surrounding the emergence of the term 'the Anthropocene', even though the poet's work pre-dates the use of the term. I will argue that Nicholson was an early prophet of ideas grouped under the later 20th century discussion of the Anthropocene. This paper will also explore how the language in Nicholson's work demonstrates the

tension between man and the landscape, as well as the acute sense of interdependency between the two. The landscape is clearly used and abused by man, and Nicholson shows this in the collection by particularly using personification to highlight the suffering of the landscape. Alongside, there will be discussion of modern ideas of the Anthropocene, framed using ecocritical theory, and how it affects the reader's 21st century reading of Nicholson's work. The context behind the poet is also important here; Nicholson himself was a man rooted firmly in the North, in the town of Millom (South Cumbria). He turned his back on the metropolis of London in the south, and instead focussed inward on the place he called home. The immediate landscape informed Nicholson's creative work, and so the collection is also a meditation upon the importance of the natural world in the life of an individual man. Finally, I will argue that Nicholson's role in modern landscape literary studies is often overlooked, and that his poetry is universally relatable, despite the specificity of the industrial south Cumbrian landscape of the 20th century. This paper is taken from my PhD thesis.

Andrew Duncan (independent scholar)

'Something aloof, uncertain, perverse perhaps': apocalypse and melodrama in 1940s film and the poetry of Audrey Beecham and Dunstan Thompson

The paper will look at poems by Audrey Beecham and Dunstan Thompson to describe ways in which certain 40s films are melodramas and some 40s poetry is melodramatic. The plan is to pursue the premise that changing styles of poetry are linked to the changing way in which actors deliver lines, and to connect New Romantic poetry to a line of 1940s films. The paper will cite a 1948 interview with Eric Portman where he says "Something aloof, uncertain, perverse perhaps [...] these are the qualities I look for in film roles." It will follow up Julian Petley's 1986 essay to describe how anti-rational and anti-realist elements can fuse in art which speaks indirectly about the repressed and the primordial. Petley: "These [films] form an other, repressed, side of British cinema, a dark disdained thread weaving the length and breadth of that cinema, crossing authorial and generic boundaries, sometimes almost entirely invisible, and sometimes erupting explosively, always received critically with fear and disapproval." This whole debate is a mirror for Apocalyptic poetry and its frank rejection of realism and social relevance. The paper will suggest that Apocalyptic poetry answered a cultural need which was much wider than the poetry audience, and that the poetry did not always hit that need full-on.

Steve Ely (University of Huddersfield)

'Failure of Nerve': don't mention the E-word

The term 'failure of nerve' and its variants are frequently used by critics to characterise English poetry cultures of the 1930s, 40s & 50s. In his introduction to the 1948 reissue of *Form in Modern Poetry*, Herbert Read lamented that the optimism he had expressed about future of Anglophone poetry in the original 1932 edition had been premature. The 'vital poetic experiments' of Eliot, Pound and Yeats had been replaced in the 1930s and 1940s by 'an epiphytic tangle' characterised by banality and simplicity, from which 'no outstanding talent' had emerged. English poetry was afflicted by a collective 'failure of nerve' and Read somewhat plaintively appealed for the return of poetry characterised by 'rigorous experiment' and 'personal integrity', these being the preconditions for 'great art'. Five years later, Donald Davie's poem 'Creon's Mouse' argued against 'daring' and risk in poetry in favour of, 'A self-induced and stubborn loss of nerve'. Charles Tomlinson, in his 1957 review of Robert Conquest's *New Lines* anthology in *Essays in Criticism*, saw the 'militant middle-cum-lowbrowism', banality and provincialism of the poets—among them Kingsley Amis, D.J. Enright, Elizabeth Jennings, Philip Larkin

and John Wain—anthologised by Conquest, as stemming from their collective ‘failure of nerve’ and called for a greater ‘objectivity’ and ‘ambition’ in poetry. This paper will interrogate the adequacy of ‘failure of nerve’ as an analytical concept adequate to characterise the inability or unwillingness of post-1920s poets to build satisfactorily on the work of the pioneering early Modernists, and will provide an analysis of the Apocalyptic mode in this context, arguing that both Apocalyptic and early 20th century Modernist poetry are best understood as forms of Expressionism, concluding with some reflections on the elision of the ‘E-word’ from literary discourse in the context of 20th century Anglophone poetry.

John Goodby (Sheffield Hallam University)

'Into the ' : Apocalypse, the Blitz and broadcasting in Dylan Thomas's wartime poems

This paper will explore the inter-involvement of bombing and broadcasting in Dylan Thomas's wartime poems. WWII was a war fought in and on the air for the first time, over the airwaves and (to use a common metaphor of the time) by deploying 'waves' of aircraft against enemy cities. I will trace some of the ways in which Thomas's work registered these dual aerial aspects of 'the answering skies' of total war, between 'When I woke' (which takes its cue from the declaration of war on 3 September 1939), via the 'flying breath' of Heinkels and Dorniers in 'Deaths and Entrances' to the (wireless) 'stations of the breath' of 'A Refusal to Mourn', written during the final months of the war in Europe. Thomas's responses will be contextualised by reference other poets' responses to the 'Blitz sublime', including those of Louis MacNeice, Mervyn Peake and Edith Sitwell.

Giles Goodland (independent scholar)

John Goodland and Apocalypse

This paper will discuss my personal (but secondary) involvement in the Apocalypse, as the son of John Goodland, friend of Nicholas Moore and publisher of *Seven*, who was there at the meeting in which the Apocalyptic Manifesto was composed, and also relate the circumstances of the rediscovery of the manuscript of the manifesto. I'd also like to talk more broadly about Dylan Thomas, his importance to the movement, and his current reputation and influence, with special reference to interpretations of his poem 'A Refusal to Mourn.'

Simon Jenner (independent scholar)

'Crying the Miracles': 1940s poetry, neo-Romanticism and Eight Oxford Poets.

'The trouble with the Forties is it ended in 1945'. Challenging such received wisdom, this paper will begin by analysing the way the language of 1940s poetry is united by intense figurative tropes, both as deployed by the generation which included Paul Dehn, Dylan Thomas, David Gascoyne and W.S. Graham, and by the younger Oxford grouping which included Keith Douglas, Drummond Allison, Sidney Keyes, Philip Larkin, Kingsley Amis, Alan Ross, and Elizabeth Jennings. I will briefly trace the sheer variety of (neo)Apocalypse styles, with its multiple poles and freedom from metropolitan constraints, which included Cambridge (Nicholas Moore), to Leeds (Dorian Cook), Wales (Lynette Roberts, Alun Lewis, Vernon Watkins), and the Apocalyptic hub of wartime Cairo. There will be a particular focus on *Eight Oxford Poets* (1941), a publication as important in its way as the *New Apocalypse* anthology in establishing the neo-Romantic tone of the decade. The dismissal and occlusion in literary histories of this rich variety owes much to wartime deaths and post-war silences, but also to the way literary history is shaped by accidents and personalities. Keyes's exclusion of Larkin from *Eight Oxford*

Poets, for example, fuelled a lifelong grudge; writing in 1955 to Robert Conquest on the latter's inauguration of *New Lines* and the Movement, Larkin itched to revenge himself on 'our Sidney', scapegoating him for Forties 'excess'. Yet Keyes's alert pastoralism and internationalism was a crucial influence on Geoffrey Hill, in a line of descent clearly visible in early neo-Apocalyptic lyrics such as 'Genesis'. In short, as James Keery's *Apocalypse* anthology and other recent criticism has argued, the distinctions between Apocalyptic, neo-Romantic and mainstream / Movement styles which emerged in the 1950s and were reasserted in the 1980s are to be seen as postures from an earlier war of position which are increasingly untenable and ripe for deconstruction.

James Keery (independent scholar)

[Keynote]: '*Su Voz Era un Chorro de Sangre*': From Federico García Lorca to Sylvia Plath

This paper has its origin in a letter from Ted Hughes to Keith Sagar, written in the last year of his life: 'After I left, she kept typescripts of *Out*, *Green Wolf*, *New Moon in January*, *Heptonstall*, *Full Moon & Little Frieda* & a few little experimental improvisations & versions of Lorca ... on her desk. They were there when she died'. Yvonne Reddick has explored the interrelations between Lorca and Hughes, including the brilliant scoop of an unknown archive draft. This paper will explore Sylvia Plath's response to the 'versions of Lorca ... on her desk ... when she died'. Firstly, it will argue that recent scholarship on partisan Loyalist and Falangist reviews has overlooked one aspect of the reception history of Lorca in English, namely the way in which his name becomes a synecdoche for the revival of British poetry in 'a new romanticism', citing key reviews and editorials by Herbert Read, Tambimuttu, Cyril Connolly and others. Secondly, it will further argue that Dylan Thomas's 1944 poem, 'Ceremony for a Fire Raid', his first poem for over two years, withdrawn from *Horizon* by the poet in order to publish it instead in a May Day supplement, dedicated to Lorca, of the left-wing journal *Our Time*, finds stylistic and thematic inspiration in *Poet in New York* (and at one stage carried an epigraph from Lorca). Thirdly, that Lorca's essay on the *duende* is as important to Plath as to Hughes; that a key section of his essay on Leonard Baskin, 'The Hanged Man and the Dragonfly', is as much about Plath as about Lorca; and that Lorca's image of a flamenco singer's voice as a 'blood-jet' is a tributary of Plath's 'blood jet', the epitome of the new 'deep image' poetry, celebrated in landmark contemporary anthologies and itself derived in part from the Lorcan *cante jondo*. Fourthly, that the influence of Lorca begins to manifest itself in the last year of Plath's life, with the poems of spring 1962, informing what Diane Middlebrook describes as the 'sudden unaccountable concision of her late style'; and as regards 'Ariel', one of her most surrealist poems, 'that 'the arrow, // The dew that flies' is drawn from the 'quivers' of 'dew' in Lorca's 'Poem of the Saeta', translated in part (though a different part) by Hughes. Finally, a return in the light of these interrelations to the poems by Hughes 'on her desk ... when she died', in particular *New Moon in January* and *Full Moon & Little Frieda*, brings their own Lorcan dimensions into focus, providing further evidence of the poetic reciprocity between Plath and Hughes, which persisted, as has been shown by Diane Middlebrook and Heather Clark, amongst others, with no loss of artistic intensity to the last days of her life.

Charles Mundy (Sheffield Hallam University)

'*Celts and poings*': letters between Lynette Roberts and Robert Graves

I will use letters, published and unpublished, to understand the challenges faced by Lynette Roberts as a writer of wide-ranging interests and radical style seeking allies and a readership at a pivotal point in her career. My focus will be a sequence of letters between Lynette Roberts and Robert Graves from December 1943 to 1954 but will also include unpublished letters by T.S. Eliot. The letters between

Roberts and Graves are extraordinary in their range of reference, their variety, their movement between the domestic and the professional, and provide invaluable insight into the creative processes of two different writers supporting and critiquing each other's work. Both Graves and Eliot assume unofficial elder statesmen roles and take against what they perceive to be the wilder elements of Roberts's style; in turn she asserts herself and her extraordinary range of experiences and geographies. The creative exchange of the letters is instrumental in the development of Graves's *The White Goddess*, published by Eliot's Faber in 1948, and Roberts's historical novel 'Nesta', yet to be published and until recently believed lost. This paper is intended as part of the ongoing process of recovering Roberts's extraordinary texts from their historical inattention.

Karl O'Hanlon (National University of Ireland, Maynooth)

Ireland's Apocalypse

The "Celtic" roots of 1940s Apocalypse poetry are well-documented, yet the brief movement's impact on Irish poetry has not received a great deal of attention. Northern poets like Robert Greacen and Roy McFadden sought refuge from dogmatic "Regionalism" in Apocalypse poetry, publishing in Tambimuttu's *Poetry London*, Wrey Gardiner's *Poetry Quarterly*, and other venues hospitable to the new poetry. They also collaborated with Eithne Strong's little-known Runa Press (Dublin) which published Henry Treece, Alex Comfort and a host of forgotten poets. The Scottish poet Maurice Lindsay even edited a Runa Press pamphlet. In the U.S., Denis Devlin helped left-wing modernist roustabout Norman Macleod put together a "Celtic Anthology", an Apocalypse vehicle that brought Hugh MacDiarmid together with Niall Montgomery, J.F. Hendry with Donagh MacDonagh: this failed venture broaches the links between 1930s Irish modernism and Apocalypse. In this paper, I will investigate Ireland's Apocalypse--ways of navigating poetic nationalism and regionalism outside obvious frameworks, the legacies of 1930s Irish modernism, a forgotten all-island poetic landscape trying to ward off literary stagnation.

Adam Piette (Sheffield University)

Lynette Roberts' 'Gods with Stainless Ears' and the Poetics of Propaganda

The paper will address the combination of Mass Observation and Apocalyptic styles in Lynette Roberts's poetry as well as the impact on British propaganda of having the Soviets as allies from 1941. Written in Wales 1941-1943, published 1951, the long poem *Gods with Stainless Ears* details the imaginary generated by home integration propaganda during the war, registering the psychic material costs of the technological sublime and mass heroism of propaganda ideology. Using *Political Propaganda* (Cambridge: CUP, 1940), the 1940 study of totalitarian and democratic propaganda by F.C. Bartlett, Director of the Psychological Laboratory, Cambridge, the techniques of wartime propaganda are explored in the poem through its satirical staging of the fake uplift and idealization written into integration strategies, the sacral fetishizing of the war machine, the divinization of the warplane. We'll be relating the curious experimental Apocalyptic textures of the poem to the death-propelled propagandized atmosphere of the early war years and as an exercise in the different propaganda styles of the Soviet, Nazi, Italian and British modes of propaganda; and linking these styles to the machinic production lines of the war factories and the propaganda effort. The poem tracks a stylistic shift to a more austere and cold technique to match Roberts' sense of the development on from the exaltation of the 1940-41 propaganda drive to the more ruthless security state manipulation of the later years of the war; and presents various erotic counter-intelligence strategies to outwit machinic state-sponsored mind-control.

Ed Reiss (University of Leeds)

Auden, irony and the 'Apocalyptic'

W. H. Auden features in the Introduction to James Keery's *Apocalypse* but is absent from its two hundred and more poets. He may be among those (including Yeats, Eliot, Edwin Muir and Basil Bunting) from whom 'long suits might have been drawn' but whose 'celebrity will scarcely be missed'. In the Introduction Auden appears to problematise – even undo – the formative distinction between 'ironic modernism' and 'visionary modernism'. For, as Keery acknowledges, 'Auden's ironic modernism has its visionary moments'. This paper explores the dichotomy of 'ironic' and 'visionary' by examining two poems of Auden. The first of these, 'Consider this and in our time', foretells doom, but written in March 1930, precedes the 'Apocalyptic' anthologies. In the second poem, 'The Shield of Achilles' (1952), the anxieties and energies of the Apocalyptic have been contained, refigured and set obliquely within a Christian and Classical framework. The paper will use these poems to broach the question of what 'Apocalyptic' poetry is; and to test the distinction between 'ironic' and 'visionary' modernisms

Paul Robichaud (Albertus Magnus College)

A Passionate Energy: W.S. Graham and Scottish Modernism

Though he was born in Greenock and in his mid-twenties when he first left Scotland for Cornwall, W.S. Graham is difficult to place as a Scottish writer. His relationship to Scottish poetry is deeply ambivalent. While he considered himself a Scottish poet, and often expressed a wish to return to Scotland, he also felt neglected by the mid-century Scottish literary establishment. Graham thought the 'Scottish Renaissance' spearheaded by Hugh MacDiarmid was too overtly nationalistic. He admired MacDiarmid the man, but not his poetry, coming to dislike the artificiality of 'synthetic Scots.' Nonetheless, as John Corbett recently argues, Graham like MacDiarmid struggled with the opacity of language, a conflict informed by the gap between spoken Scottish vernacular and 'standard English.' This paper will explore the ambivalent relationship between Graham's poetry and Scottish modernism, focusing on the ways in which his poetry engages with questions of language and identity. One starting point for reconsidering Graham's ambivalence is a neglected review he wrote for *The New York Times* in 1948. In it, Graham offers a surprisingly laudatory assessment of 'the Scottish Renaissance,' praising the movement for bringing 'a passionate energy to bear upon the problems of writing in Scotland.' His poems about particular Scottish places will also be considered in relation to the way other Scottish poets (including MacDiarmid and Edwin Morgan) think and write about place in the mid-twentieth century.

W. Brian Whalley (independent scholar)

The Apocalypse in Place, Time and Thought: a digital geolocational approach to the poetry of Norman Nicholson

We (usually) know a great deal about a poet. 'Information' is recorded in biographies, collections, educational resources, learned societies and 'multimodal' contexts. This information + interpretation, about a poet's output, behaviour and, perhaps, 'notoriety' accretes, but generally not in digital, searchable form. We might also be able to locate a poet or poem in space and time, where it was written, where an idea arose, or with whom they had correspondence. This approach is used in gazetteers and may add significantly to knowledge about a poet. However, we cannot really know what

the poet was thinking when a poem was written. So literary criticisms are interpretations, which also colours how a poet is viewed and 'classified'. But, qua Stephen Toulmin, 'Definitions are like belts, the shorter they are, the more elastic they need to be'. The Cumbrian poet Norman Nicholson (1914-1987), was a 'Faber poet', but excluded from the 'Oxford Book of Twentieth Century English Verse' yet was considered as 'the most gifted English Christian provincial poet of his century', whose poetry is of 'the Atlantic edge' rather than the Lake District. He might also be considered a nature, war, and a geologists' poet as well as 'apocalyptic'. This paper starts to use (semantic) category theory and digital geolocation to explore some knowledge and classification claims. Geolocation can be useful in the interpretation of other poets' work in guiding 'trajectories of thought' as 'person-place-time' objects. Toulmin's argumentation model is used to develop an appreciation of Nicholson as a member of the 'Apocalyptic' brethren.

David Wheatley (University of Aberdeen)

"An comann buan gun chòmhradh"/"an everlasting fellowship without conversation": Revisiting George Campbell Hay's Mochtar is Dùghall'

Despite its strong Celtic proclivities, the Apocalypse has never, to my knowledge, been linked with the poetry of George Campbell Hay (1915-1984). While his poetry abounds in high-flown rhetoric, Hay is by temperament a classicist, cleaving devoutly to Gaelic bardic tradition. He was also a gifted linguist, a trait that facilitated the cultural encounters of his masterpiece, the long poem *Mochtar is Dùghall*. This work was composed in the 40s but published in 1982, and records the poet's experiences as a combatant in North Africa. At the heart of the poem is a vision of kinship and solidarity across cultures, as concentrated in the figures of an Arab and a Scottish soldier both killed by the same hand grenade. Hay was deeply conflicted about his service in the British army, and offers a humanizing vision of the Arab other rarely achieved in modern war poetry. Contact with the other is not uniformly straightforward, however, as when we encounter a Touareg raiding party in the desert, and a more conventional Orientalist discourse of the irrational and unknowable other – the other of the other – is brought into play. By the end of the poem, however, any position of assumed western centrality has been comprehensively dismantled, and overtaken by a vision of humanity in ruins, and of the epic poem as a funerary gesture. This great but marginalised poem should be central to any discussion of 40s poetry, and is ripe for rediscovery by contemporary readers.

Speaker Biographies

David Annwn Jones is the author of *Inhabited Voices, Myth and History in the Poetry of Seamus Heaney, Geoffrey Hill and George Mackay Brown* and *From A to Eia, A Small Book of David Jones 'A, a, a DOMINE DEUS'*. His study of science and organicism in DH Lawrence's poetry appeared in *Études Lawrenciennes*. His *Re-envisaging the First Age of Cinematic Horror*, describes the influence of science on silent film and *Jerrold Hogle wrote of Gothic Machine*, his study of pre-cinematic media was described as 'a significant advance in Gothic and cultural studies.' His essays on Basil Bunting, David Jones and George Mackay Brown have been widely-anthologised. He is the author of twelve books of poetry and his work appears in *The Edge of Necessary, An Anthology of Welsh Innovative Poetry 1960-2018*. He taught for the Open University for many years in Leeds and Manchester and for Leeds University's Continuing Education Department.

Tim Armstrong teaches at Royal Holloway, University of London. His books include *Modernism, Technology and the Body* (1998), *Haunted Hardy: Poetry, History, Memory* (2010), *Modernism: A Cultural Study* (1995) and *The Logic of Slavery* (2013). He is currently working on mid-century microhistories.

Laura Day is currently in the final stages of her PhD in the poetry of Norman Nicholson, supervised by Dr James Robinson at Durham University. She completed her BA at St John's College, University of Cambridge, and her MA at Durham. Currently, Laura is a teaching assistant on the Introduction to Poetry module at Durham, as well as part-time research intern in the EDI Unit at the university. She also sits on the Yorkshire Dales National Park Management Plan Steering Group, and is a committee member for the Norman Nicholson Society. Inspiration for her doctoral thesis came from growing up on a hill sheep farm in eastern Cumbria, and a lifelong genuine love for rural landscapes. In her spare time Laura enjoys hill-walking.

Andrew Duncan lives in Nottingham and edited *Angel Exhaust* magazine 1992-2016. He has written about Forties poetry in *Origins of the Underground* (2008) and on the web page Metakaluptical Brouhaha. He has written extensively on British innovative and underground poetry and his *On the Margins of Great Empires: Selected Poems* was published by Shearsman in 2018.

Steve Ely has published several pamphlets or books of poetry since 2013, including *Oswald's Book of Hours* (2013), *England* (2015), *Lectio Violant* and *The European Eel*, (both 2021). *Libre D'Ore*, a selection of his poems translated into Italian by Manuela Giabardo will be published by Ronzani Editore in March, 2022. He's also published a novel, *Ratmen* (2012). He teaches creative writing at the University of Huddersfield. His monograph, *Ted Hughes's South Yorkshire: Made in Mexborough* (2015) is an account of Hughes's poetic formation.

John Goodby works at Sheffield Hallam University. His books include *Irish poetry since 1950: from stillness into history*, *The poetry of Dylan Thomas: under the spelling wall*, *Discovering Dylan Thomas*, the centenary edition of the *Collected Poems of Dylan Thomas* and, with Adrian Osbourne, *The Fifth Notebook of Dylan Thomas*. With Lyndon Davies he ran the Hay Poetry Jamborees in 2009-12 and edited *The Edge of Necessary: innovative Welsh poetry 1966-2018*. He is currently working on a biography of Dylan Thomas for the Reaktion Critical Lives series.

Giles Goodland is a poet and lecturer. His most recent book is *Civil Twilight* (Parlor Press, 2022).

Simon Jenner was educated at Leeds University and Cambridge University, where his PhD was on Oxford Poetry of the 1940s. He has taught Creative Writing at Sussex University, was Director of Survivors' Poetry, and runs Waterloo Press. His poetry collections include *About Bloody Time*, *Pessoa*, *Wrong Evenings*, and *Winstanley*, and he has been poet in Residence at the Hackney Archive for Poet in the City, and at New Unity, Newington Green. He was a winner in the London Playwrights shorts competition and reviews poetry and drama for *Tears in the Fence*, *Fringe Review*, and other outlets.

James Keery was born in Coleraine in 1958 and lives in Culcheth, near Warrington. He has published a collection of poems, *That Stranger*, *The Blues* (1996); edited Burns Singer's *Collected Poems* (2001); and contributed to a number of recent magazines and books, including *PN Review*, *Angel Exhaust* and two volumes of essays on Dylan Thomas. He is the editor of *Apocalypse* (Carcanet, 2021) the anthology that inspired this symposium.

Charles Mundy is Head of Humanities at Sheffield Hallam University, President of the Robert Graves Society, and a Fellow of the English Association. His edition of Robert Graves's *War Poems* was published by Seren in 2016.

Karl O'Hanlon is lecturer in poetry and contemporary poetry in The Department of English at Maynooth University. He is working on his first monograph, *Official Voices: Poets and the Irish State*.

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