



Englands of the Mind¹ and John Wain's Restrained Romanticism

Dr. Mohammad Badr AlDeen Al-Hussini Hasan Mansour

Professor of English and American Literature

Department of English, Faculty of Arts, Banha University

Abstract

This paper aims, first, to crystallize the difference between English and American poetry in the post-World War II period, and, second, to investigate John Wain's formal roots in the English tradition, and especially in Wordsworthian Romantic realism.

The paper shows that in the modern period, though many writers were interested in thinking of literature in international terms, in the post-World War II period, this international perspective dissolved—at least in England. Post-War English poetry has been accused of Little Englandism, provincialism, regionalism, snobbery, and insularity. A fairly common view of the post-war period states that whereas American poets have built on the achievements of the modernists and moved into a postmodern period, the English have retreated into a pre-modernist position. Thus, American poetry, which continues to experiment, and which maintains an international perspective, has become vastly superior to English poetry. While American poetry praises the present and emphasizes originality, British poetry tends to be layered with the past and tradition. These fundamental differences between the two “poetries” have ultimately resulted in the neglect of the American readers to British poetry.

The paper then introduces John Wain (1925–1994) as one of the young English poets, whose poetry has been far too ignored over the decades in America to not only prove that he, like many poets of his generation, suffered from a “bad press” and academic snobbery which caused the gap between the “the two poetries” to widen and led to the American neglect of post-war British poetry but also to demonstrate that he was keen on restoring a temporarily lost native English tradition of poetry. It shows that Wain's poetic voice has its formal roots in the English tradition, and his restrained romanticism derives mainly from William Wordsworth's romantic realism in which the “materials” of poetry “are to be found in every subject which can interest the human mind” and in which the poet is regarded as “a man speaking to men” using and adapting their “ordinary language” to the “purposes of poetic pleasure”—the sort of pleasure which any poet may rationally endeavor to impart.

The paper indicates that Wain, like Wordsworth, believes that the language of poetry should be used to describe man's most delicate feelings without any irrational expression or wild vagueness. For both, the act of writing is not a deadening mechanical operation which copies nature in a literal way, but in a kind of an imaginative realism. Wain's consistent belief shows that any good poet writes the kind of poetry which indicates an obvious continuity with the “classical” tradition of English poetry without neglecting the true voice of his personality. A good imaginative work for Wain, though, should not be confined by the prison-house of personality, but should mix precision with feeling, and objectivity with subjectivity to convey a significant message to the people and catch their moods and thoughts.

The paper shows that the working out of this “romantic impulse” led Wain to move away from the anti-Romanticism and anti-modernism of the Movement towards a more balanced way of writing which incorporates aspects of Romanticism into a tradition of realism. He writes with the aim not only of showing how the poet should write but of humanizing the society he happens to live in. The poet's ultimate aim is to tell his readers the truth about the dreams and aspirations of humanity rather than its objective circumstances. Thus, for Wain, the austerity of the modern poet is combined with the freedom and spontaneity of Wordsworth's poet to produce an art which moves humanity forward towards reality and truth.

Key Words: John Wain, William Wordsworth, Post-World War II period, Romanticism, Realism, English tradition

¹ The title is borrowed from Seamus Heaney's 1976 essay, “Englands of the Mind.”



Introduction

Modern poetry has been studied ad nauseam; there is perhaps very little new to add. My emphasis here is rather different; the aim of this paper is twofold: The first is to shed light on the post-World War II period in the Anglo-American culture, the difference between English and American poetry, and the national identities and affiliations of poets, as part of the larger, international community of English-speaking writers. The second aim is to investigate John Wain's formal roots in the English tradition, and especially in Wordsworthian Romantic realism.

Anglo-American Poetry

The consequence of British and American poetry in the twentieth century is astounding. It invites us to assume that English and American cultures were close enough to be often linked, and not too guardedly. The existence of unique national traditions does not contradict this assumption, any more than the existence of a Southern novel negates the idea of an American novel. The historic openness of England and America, even as they remain openly and ostentatiously contemptuous of each other, seems indisputable. Eric Homberger has noted that "Despite the national traditions, such as a line of descent in poetry from Whitman to Pound, Williams and Charles Olson, which do not easily cross the Atlantic in any meaningful form, the Americans and the English have been living out of each other's cultural pocket for a long time." "The pickings may have been selective," he continues, "but they have been plentiful. So much so that it wouldn't be inappropriate now and then to say that it has been, over all, mutually advantageous" (xi).

Hence, we can say that, in the twentieth century, many writers were interested in thinking of literature in international terms (rather than in what they saw as the parochial nationalism common in the nineteenth century). This was, in part, due to the poetics of the Eliot-Pound camp, and also due to the openness in the world, where national boundaries and national differences seemed of little more importance than regional differences, than the differences between a New York writer and a San Francisco writer, say. It did not matter that Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot were Americans, or that W. B. Yeats and James Joyce were Irishmen. What these authors were doing in poetry, drama, and fiction seemed relevant to all literature written in English. American as they were, the poetics of Eliot and Pound were basically international, the outcome of rummaging international literary history from classical Greek and Chinese lyrics to Provençal troubadour lyrics to French symbolism. Irish nationalists as they were, Yeats and Joyce could argue for (and fight for) Ireland's independence from England; Joyce could have Stephen Dedalus, in *A Portrait of The Artist As A Young Man*, reflect, when he is talking with the English Dean of Studies, that the Dean is a countryman of Ben Jonson's and thus "the language in which we are speaking is his before it is mine" (189). But that did not matter. Somehow, the Irish were really British, and the British were part of the larger, international community of English speaking writers.

In the post-World War II period, this international perspective dissolved—at least in England. Contemporary¹ English poetry has been accused of "provincialism," "Little Englandism," "regionalism," "snobbery," and "insularity" (Berke 130; Davie, "A Postscript, 1966" 200).² Roberta Berke's view, like Donald Davie's view, of the post-war period, which is also representative of others, is that whereas contemporary American poets have built on the achievements of the modernists and moved into a postmodern period, the English have retreated into a premodernist position. Thus, American poetry, which continues to experiment and which maintains an international perspective, looking to the literatures not only of Western Europe but also of Eastern Europe, South America, and elsewhere, has become vastly superior to English poetry. These fundamental differences between post-World War II American and British poetry led Donald Hall,



in 1979, to announce, in “Reading the English,” that “the poetries of England and America have become discontinuous” (24), and Marjorie Perloff, in 1980, to declare, in “One of the Two Poetries,” that British poetry in the seventies has been **weak** because the poets have taken Larkin and Hughes rather than the great moderns as their masters (48-51). Similarly, Robert Rehder, in a recent essay, claims that the “difference between English and American poetry,” is in the capacity of American poetry “for radical change” (41).

Yet it can be argued that this evaluation of the relative merits of the two poetries is based on American criteria—criteria which ignore national differences, and which stress a type of modernism developed in good part by American writers. As poets write out of their own society, their own culture, and their own background, Hall claims that “American literature differs from English not only because of the difference between the traditions, but in the extent to which tradition informs the work at all.” For him, “The tradition that matters most, to a nation’s literature, is not the style or the content of its great writers. It is the soil of its history, the bones of its dead ground up in that soil, and the ideas and passions, the battles and revolutions, the glories and defeats of nation and spirit” (27). In light of this, it seems ludicrous to suggest that the post-war period in England was the same as the post-war period in America. The experience of the war itself was very different in the two countries; the United States never experienced anything comparable to the bombings of London and Coventry, nor did the Americans face the prospect of imminent invasion as the English did. In many ways, the war years were a boom period in the States, and America emerged from the war as the acknowledged dominant world power. Although on the winning side, England emerged greatly diminished, relegated to status as a second-class power, and psychologically exhausted. Charles Sisson aptly articulates these changing situations of England and America, after the war, when he stresses, in *Avoidance of Literature*, the “immense international role of the united states, and the diminished and dependent role of the United Kingdom” (524). As soon as America assumed control of “the military guardianship of Europe,” after the war, Robert von Hallberg reports, the other challenge was “could Americans measure up culturally as well as they had militarily?” The Americans, as Hallberg notes, “answered this challenge by assuming the outward signs of European tradition,” when they “suddenly recognized a new relationship not just to their past but to the entire history of the West” (3). The new and increased American military and economic power was accompanied, in Jed Rasula’s words, with “an evident need to consolidate a sense of tradition—which in American cultural life meant a justification of the new political superiority of the United States in world affairs” (148). On the whole, all of these views fall broadly in line with both of Donald Hall’s claim that American “tradition (like it or not) is enlightenment, protestant, and capitalist,” while “In England tradition is inevitably layered” (“Reading the English” 27), and Marjorie Perloff’s remark that the British write under a “persistent and burdensome sense of tradition” (“The Two Poetries” 264).

The war and its aftermath did not, of course, create differences where previously there had been none. English history and culture were and are different from American history and culture. This point seems too obvious to merit mentioning; yet it is frequently ignored. Philip Hobsbaum, in “The Growth of English Modernism,” argues that modernism, in the forms introduced by Pound and Eliot, was actually a foreign imposition on English poetry, and his basic point seems to be valid. Whereas England is a small island rich in tradition, America is a large, relatively new country in which the word “frontier” still magically reverberates. Not only do the English read Pope and Tennyson as part of their literary heritage while the Americans read Whitman and Emily Dickinson, but American and English speech patterns, intonations, cadences, and word usage also differ (103-



105).³ If one accepts Hobsbaum's argument and Bernard Bergonzi's similar concession, in "After the Movement,"⁴ then an English movement into an American type of postmodernism would have meant a continuation of English attempts to assimilate a type of poetry which grew out of American culture and American speech patterns. As Donald Davie argues, in "A Postscript, 1966," certain forms of American poetry are valid only within an American context (198).⁵

As far as the post-World War II critical debate about British and American poetry and national identity is concerned, many critics believe that the major conflicts among the academics, on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean, in the 1960s and 70s, focus on the rejection of the poetry that had immediately preceded, the definite change in the practice of the poets of the new generation, and the change in the public taste. In a speech delivered at Cheltenham Festival of Literature in England, and published in *The Times Literary Supplement* of 5 October 1967, Stephen Spender remarks that, "The centre of poetic activity in the English language has shifted from London to New York and San Francisco just as that of painting has shifted from Paris to New York," where "the English poet easily finds himself in the position of having to become—at a disadvantage—an American poet" (939). In like manner, Keith Tuma argues that "While the question of American influence on British poetry remains of some lesser interest in Britain today, the current interest in British poetry of any variety in America is minimal, as any survey of literary scholarly journals or working dissertations will show" (42). Tuma adds, "In academic literary criticism in America, the work of a few British poets, particularly the late Philip Larkin and Donald Davie, and Hill, Ted Hughes, and Stevie Smith, continues to generate the occasional essay or book. But criticism of contemporary British poetry, like the poetry itself, is hardly thriving in the United States" (42). Along the same line, John Wain, in *The Importance of Philip Larkin*, notes that Larkin "will ever be such a favorite with American readers of poetry as he is with English" because he "is so rooted in English life," and, hence, "his references are so solidly linked to English places and customs and institutions" which would lead "the American reader . . . [to] easily drop into one of several pitfalls [such as] misinterpretation," or faulty readings (349). Significantly, Bergonzi concurs with Wain when he notes, in "Davie, Larkin and the State of England," that "Larkin is rejected, too, by those English writers whose literary allegiances are American" (155). Whereas Wain remarks, "The last considerable American poet to have vital links with English poetry was Robert Frost" (349), Dannie Abse, in *Hutchinson Book of Post-War British Poets*, notes the neglect of the American readers to British poetry "since the death of Dylan Thomas in 1953" (xiv).

In many ways, the ignoring of national boundaries during the modern period can be as seen as an abnormality, while the contemporary situation, in which national differences again seem prominent, even to the point of critics speaking of "two poetries" and "two languages," can be seen as the restoration of the norm. Donald Davie perceives such a tremendous difference between American and English poetry to the degree that he writes, in *Thomas Hardy and British Poetry*,

One is tempted to say that for many years now British poetry and American poetry haven't been on speaking terms. But the truth is rather they haven't been on hearing terms—the American reader can't hear the British poet, neither his rhythms nor his tone of voice, and the British reader only pretends to hear the rhythms and the tone of American poetry since William Carlos Williams. (184)

Similarly, Marjorie Perloff, in "The Two Poetries," attributes the difference between contemporary British and American poetry to the absolute detachment between the poets and readers, and feels we will eventually need dictionaries to read each other's poetry (263, 278);⁶ and Donald Hall, in



“Reading the English,” feels that contemporary English poetry is so foreign to American poetry that Americans should approach English poetry as though they were reading poetry in translation (25).⁷

Yet the English and the Americans do have a common basic language, and they do share, in different ways, much of the same literary heritage. Edward Lucie-Smith, for instance, ascribes the effect of American poets on British poets to the fact that “they point the way back through the old, international modernist tradition, and are the more accessible because they happen to write the same language” (30). Though the emphasis on the “two poetries” and the “two languages” is simply a rather belated re-recognition of the long-standing differences between the two countries and their traditions, it seems to Nathaniel Tarn that there is “an America in England and an England in America” (58), a representative statement of the widespread cross-cultural influences in the two nations.

Despite the engagement of the poets and critics in the 1960s and 70s with the discontinuities between English and American poetry, the reasons for the occurrence of that breakdown, and the characteristics of British poetry recognized as impediments to innovation, spontaneity and effective technique, many critics in the 1980s and 90s challenged and rebutted these earlier negative claims. Michael Schmidt, for examples, devotes his essay “The Common Language,” in 1981, to refute Perloff’s attacks on British poetry. He writes: “She applies what seems to me to be a double standard, and she does this on what I take to be grounds of nationality and of a critical predisposition against certain subjects and modes. Prejudice and patriotism—if that is indeed what they are—are not the most enabling qualities in a critic” (7). Furthermore, Eric Mottram, in recalling struggles of the 1970s, considers the neglect of modernist British poetry, in his editorial section of the 1988 anthology, *The New British Poetry*, “as a treacherous assault on British poetry” and acknowledges the recovery of neglected British poetry when he maintains, “That ludicrous charge is amply rebutted by the work of the poets selected here” (133). Mottram reaffirms his view, in “The British Poetry Revival, 1960-75,” when he notes, “Large-scale poetry readings have never reached the extent and power of those in the American campus and city café scene from the later 1950s into the 1960s and 1970s. The neglect of the presence of living poets and poetry by British universities was and remains a scandal, compared to the American practice” (18-19). In the same vein, James Acheson and Romana Huk, editors of the 1996 anthology, *Contemporary British Poetry*, emphasize an increasing interest in British poetry. They point out in their preface, “British poetry is experiencing a boom—an explosion of new talents, many fine small-and large-press publications, and a resultant rekindling of audience interest” (vii). In his review of the anthology, Keith Tuma outlines the reasons for the eclipse of English poetry in the 1960s and 70s. He writes:

the last twenty years of academic fashion have not been especially good to any contemporary poetry . . . New Historicism and Cultural Studies are still under construction . . . The postwar introduction . . . of the contemporary as a legitimate field of study . . . a boom in poststructuralist and post-Marxist theory . . . an emergent multicultural educational program which usefully complicated American studies . . . postcolonial and anglophone studies . . . the structure of British educational systems and intellectual life itself; an apathy concerning contemporary poetry among academics . . . and an economic catastrophe in education and the public funding of the arts. (313)

“These conditions,” he asserts, “have prevented some of the more exploratory British poets from publishing books in editions larger than three hundred books which anyway would turn out to be unavailable in the United States and therefore unknown to all but a few American readers, most of them poets” (313). Later, in his 1998 book, *Fishing by Obstinate Isles*, Tuma points out:



The particular death of British poetry in the United States is produced by a combination of benign neglect, ordinary ignorance, and the casual half-truths of critical journalism cognizant only of the narrowest field of extant poetry. Even anglophiles out of a bygone era of foppish American professors putting on fake English accents don't care, don't know much about it. For them British poetry is safely historical as medieval architecture. (1)

Likewise, Gerald Butt supports Tuma's claim and explains that the debate "was that of academic and class based snobbery." He writes, it was "this kind of academic snobbery which [was] causing the gap between the 'the two poetries' to widen" (qtd. in Bailey 145).

Unfortunately, even when the differences are accepted, the common assumption is that the English are different to their own detriment. This view can be attributed in part to American confidence and English diffidence. Certainly, despite the long warring debate among the critics concerning the discontinuities between English and American poetry—which had been substantially refuted in the 80s and 90s—much English poetry in the post-war period has been marked by a moderate tone. In the period following the end of World War II, British poetry showed signs of a growing reaction against the war, war poetry, and what might be called the irrational or barbaric life associated with the war.

Although the "Movement" caused considerable debate, with many critics questioning whether it ever was a cohesive school or an actual movement, what the Movement represented was important for it signaled the end of modernism as the dominant force in English poetry.⁸ The Movement poets (including Kingsley Amis, Robert Conquest, Donald Davie, D. J. Enright, Thom Gunn, John Holloway, Elizabeth Jennings, Philip Larkin, and John Wain) turned away from the bardic role of the poet, from the emphasis on the unconscious, and from non-logical structures. They had had enough of both politics and passion. The emphasis was to be on reason, detachment, and control. Through the use of traditional forms, the poets were able to reaffirm the continuum of the past and the present and also to impose a perspective on their works. In short, the Movement is seen as essentially a reassertion of the English tradition.

The Movement's excessive concern with the idea of "little Englandism" led them to stress the importance of restoring a lost English tradition caused by the great war as well as by other continental influences. On his first *BBC Programme, First Reading*, John Wain supplied an image of the new young poets: "They are suspicious of anything that suggests sprawling or lack of discipline. They are keenly aware of belonging to a tradition; not only the tradition of the last thirty years, but the longer tradition that stretches away behind" (qtd. in Morrison 44).⁹ If that "glory that was England," Morrison notes, was temporarily lost, the English poet could restore it by writing a kind of lucid poetry not divorced from the lost past, yet relevant to the present (82).

Donald Davie also emphasizes, in his 1962 essay, "England as Poetic Subject," the preoccupation of the English poets with the English culture and civilization as the poetic subject. For him, "contemporary England is indeed a rich field of poetic subject" (122). He also appreciates Larkin's heroic insularity and "provincialism," which John Press, in "Provincialism and Tradition," defines as follows: "The provincial poet, in my sense of the term, is one who is primarily concerned with the values of his own cultural society, and who is largely indifferent to what lies beyond the world that he knows at first hand" (91). Wain also adopts a similar attitude when he ignores, in his introduction to *Oxford Library of English Poetry*, those who "sometimes describe themselves as 'internationalist.'" (xix). He believes "there can ever be an internationalist idiom in poetry. . . . Literature is the most national of the arts. It uses . . . language which is the creation of a people, a people living in a particular place with its own climate, history, customs, beliefs, assumptions"



(xix). Similarly, Seamus Heaney, in his 1976 influential essay, “Englands of the Mind,” acknowledges the preoccupation of contemporary English poetry with reclaiming England. Heaney’s essay explores new distinctive poetic approaches of characterizing English national identity in the post-war period and deals with three Movement poets whom Heaney sees as “hoarders and shorers of what they take to be the real England” (150). Ted Hughes, Geoffrey Hill, and Philip Larkin, he asserts, all “return to an origin and bring something back, all three live off the hump of the English poetic achievement, all three, here and now, in England, imply a continuity with another England, there and then” (150). In an age of diminished national prominence, he argues, these poets and others “are being forced to explore not just the matter of England, but what is the matter with England” (169). Like Heaney, who, according to Ronald Carter and John McRae, “searches for the roots of English identity, in historical, linguistic, and cultural terms” (427), John Wain (1925–1994) has his formal roots in the English tradition, and especially in Wordsworth’s romantic realism, though the challenge of post-war poetry to the Romantic configuration of the poet as a central “man speaking to men” and the fundamental universalist notions of this position, which survive in the modern poets for all their hostility to Romanticism.

Though Wain was, in Jerry Bradley’s words, “the most qualified member to speak on the Movement’s behalf” (77), yet his reputation frequently puzzles readers on the other side of the Atlantic. One might say that while his poetry has its formal roots in the English tradition, Wain’s work has been far too ignored over the decades in America. Knowing Wain only through anthologies, North American readers frequently fail to “hear” him. Lawrence Ries, for example, contends that Wain writes “feeble poetry” because he does not understand violence (20), David Holbrook cites him as an unsatisfying poet (38), and Derek Stanford finds some points of comparison between Wain, typical of the literal-minded English radicals, and Ginsberg, typical of the American poetic anarchists, but asserts that the American rebels follow the spirit of poetry while the English are disciplined by the spirit of prose (413-19). In America, he is questionable as an Englishman. “Ridiculously,” Donald Hall declares, in 1989, in *PN Review*, “each country refuses to read the other’s poet” (29). While it is true that Americans cannot precisely be blamed for not understanding that the whole of English literary history is theirs, they can be blamed for not reading it, for not making an effort to explore such an immense, significant and beautiful body of work. Furthermore, Keith Tuma adds, to his preceding account of the reasons for the American neglect of English poetry in the post-war era, that “there was no journal with a substantial readership in Britain in the 1950s that was . . . eclectic or . . . responsive to a range of practice in poetry, no journal . . . interested in *both* British and American poetry” (“Thom Gunn and Anglo-American Modernism” 90; emphasis in original). Therefore, if Wain argues that English and American literatures are “out of sight of each other” (*Oxford Library of English Poetry* xv),¹⁰ American readers do not read enough of Wain’s poetry to pick up his characteristic tone, and after the fireworks of Lowell or Plath or Berryman, Wain seems unexciting and boring, like most of the post-war English poets. In England, many of Wain’s contemporary poets and critics recognize his contribution to the modern literary scene. Even those who disparage some aspects of his work eventually agree, in the view of Samuel Morse, that the “cumulative effect” of his work “is one of considerable strength” (198). His critics always emphasize his sturdy independence and his serious concern for the major issues of his time, such as John Lehmann, who considers Wain, in his essay “The Wain-Larkin Myth,” to be:

one of the most interesting and gifted of the young authors who have appeared on the English scene. . . . His work is uneven. And at times appears to me to be flawed by chunks of not very closely examined emotion which have failed to be assimilated or rejected by his



controlling intelligence. Nevertheless, he is still one of the first names I would mention if I were asked by a foreigner who the sharpers of English literature are in the post-war generation. (578)

It is true, though, that Wain recognizes the limitation of his poetic fame and the limited readership of his poetry, when he admits, in his autobiography, *Sprightly Running*, “My poems, which are the best things I have done, are naturally unknown because this is not a poetry-reading age” (202), a careful reading of his poetry will show that it is by no means boring or bland. His achievement might not be on a level with that of major poets such as Yeats, Eliot, or Larkin, but we probably spend too much time doing comparative evaluations, worrying about whether an author is really “major” and what his reputation might be in the future, and too little time enjoying what the author has to offer us in the present. John Wain’s poetry has much to offer.

Wain’s Restrained Romanticism

Wain’s poetry reflects the attitude of a new generation of young poets who were keen on restoring a temporarily lost native tradition of poetry. He had always had pride and confidence in his own native tradition, had seen many traditional patterns with a creative eye, with an ability to ascertain his own independence as a poet whose concern was always the human society. His poetry is generally characterized by emotions controlled by a flexible poetic skill, and by using language with an English intonation and rhythm.

Like the poets of the fifties, Wain’s early poetry is Empsonian in manner and technique; it is dry, cool, precise, and tight-lipped. Wain realized, however, that the imitation of a style often ends in mannerisms and stylistic tricks which clip the wings of genuine poetry. He did his best to make his poetry burn with a new personal touch and escape the snare of mere imitation. In his later and mature poetry, Wain rubs most of the unnecessary polish of his work in the hope of establishing a more common form of address with his reading public. If Wain sometimes wrote in an Empsonian vein, he was eager to discover his own voice which, like the new sun, in his poem “The New Sun,” from *Poems, 1949-1979*, reveals the roughness of imitation and “rises over old ways” (line 10) which have become outmoded. In the poem, Wain describes the new way of writing as follows:

It draws, with a hard forefinger,
a line under the old ways.

Finis! the old ways have become obsolete,
The old skin, the old clothes. (lines 5-8)

The complex “interweaving of the familiar with the abstruse and cryptic,” which characterizes Empson’s verse, Andrew Motion remarks, is abandoned in the hope of objectifying the ordinary and the “familiar” (20). Notably, Wain’s readings of Thomas Hardy, W. H. Auden, and Robert Graves helped him to discover his voice and to gain from a kind of latent romanticism overshadowed by the intellectual quality of his verse.¹¹ Both Hardy and Graves, as D. J. Enright proclaims in “Robert Graves and the Decline of Modernism,” helped the young poets of the fifties to have the courage of their temperamental leanings towards an “ordering of experience” and the preservation of personality “against the forces which in their different ways . . . are out to kill” its uniqueness (330). Anthony Hartley, who recognized a deviation from Empson’s sophisticated method, points out that Wain’s best poetry “would now gain . . . from developing the frustrated romanticism that lies at the bottom of his most intellectual poems,” without sacrificing “the gains in technique and intellectual standards” of the recent past. What Wain aims at, Hartley notes, is a kind of dynamic romanticism,



a “romanticism with the nonsense removed and has no connection with the incantatory rubbish of the Forties” (101).

The second aim of this paper is to show that Wain’s restrained romanticism derives mainly from Wordsworth’s romantic realism in which the “materials” of poetry, as Wordsworth states in his *Preface to Lyrical Ballads*, “are to be found in every subject which can interest the human mind” and in which the poet is regarded as “a man speaking to men” using and adapting their “ordinary language” to the “purposes of poetic pleasure”—the sort of pleasure which any poet may rationally endeavor to impart (383).¹² Wordsworth’s promotion of the ordinary language of common people makes sense as an attempt to discover and foster the poetic faculty in people generally, not just in poets as the imaginative representatives of mankind. His curiosity about the human, the normal and the natural is the key to his poetry and the secret of his originality. Poetry, for Wordsworth, is “the image of man and nature” (395); the poet, in his act of creation, “considers man and the objects that surround him as acting and re-acting upon each other, so as to produce an infinite complexity of pain and pleasure” (395). If poetry sheds only “natural and human tears” (392), the poet is asked to “descend from [his] supposed height; and, in order to excite rational sympathy, he must express himself as other men express themselves” (398).

It may be true that in repudiating as defects such instants when Wordsworth represented the voice of other people or presented his own voice in a direct matter-of-fact language, Coleridge established a tradition which continued to choose the essential Wordsworth by his poems of imagination and by excluding such poems in which the language is not ardently and passionately used. Despite Wain’s recognition of this fact, which, “is not necessarily a merit on Wordsworth’s part,” as he notes, in his essay “Wordsworth up to Date,” he regards Wordsworth as “the first modern poet” because “from his work, we can date the beginning of the kind of poetry that is characteristic of the world we now live in” (25). Wordsworth’s interest in man and his problems, notes Wain, gives “his work a peculiar relevance to our modern situation.” Wain’s ideal, like the Wordsworthian and the Coleridgean ideal, does not admit any “division between the hidden depths they explore, and the human situation in its widest and most social sense” (28).

Like Wordsworth, Wain believes that the language of poetry should be used to describe man’s most delicate and subtle feelings without any “inane phraseology” or without being “betrayed by,” what Patricia Ball calls, “windy or highly-coloured vagueness” (50, 58). For both, the act of writing is not a deadening mechanical operation which copies nature in a literal way. Wordsworth’s eye, as Wain explains in “Wordsworth up to Date,” “was always on the real object, the perception that visits us in flashes from the world we can never quite reach” (27). Reality here is not a copy or a transcript. Its function transcends the work of Wain’s mirror, in his poem “A Gentleman Aged Five before a Mirror,” from *A Word Carved on a Sill*, which “tells you what you do but never why” (1). The “why” or the essence is realized by the poet’s unique individuality, by his imaginative ability to take realism to a new phase of crystallization. The modern poet cannot afford to ignore this kind of imaginative realism: the spare and rare beauty won by a rigorous honesty or spontaneity delighting in its own nature, manifest in the following lines, which Wain quotes from Roy Campbell’s poem “Autumn”:

I love to see, when leaves depart,
The clear anatomy arrive,
Winter, the paragon of art,
That kills all forms of life and feeling
Save what is pure and will survive. (qtd. in Wain, “Beyond the Stony Limits” 11)



Wain has lived through various conflicting literary changes. He was a witness of the Neo-Apocalyptic poetry of the forties as well as the more contained and precise manner of the Movement whose poets endeavored towards a poetry of statement rather than of blurred implication. He admired Empson's formal precision rather than his ambiguous stylistic tricks and his excessive use of scientific imagery, valued Eliot's experimental and complex technique which suited the complexity and fragmentary nature of the modern experience, and he paid tribute to Dylan Thomas's power of "orchestration" and the singing voice of his verse. The fluidity of modern life and the variety of its literary forms helped Wain to a wide field of choices and to make his own choice on the basis of his own individuality rather than on the basis of imitation. He was able to forge his own individual idiom without following one master or divorcing himself from his native tradition. Wain's consistent belief shows that any good poet writes the kind of poetry which indicates an obvious continuity with the "classical" tradition of English poetry without neglecting his individual voice or the true voice of his personality.

It is true that Wain is always regarded as an anti-romantic poet and critic, whose work may be cited to prove his own view, in *Preliminary Essays*, that "it is harder to produce an accurate statement than a careless rupture" (174). He was included with a generation of writers who declared their shared aversion to the willful obscurity of the neo-romantic poetry which was best illustrated in the work of the Neo-Apocalyptics. Wain went so far as to remark, in his essay "New Novels," that in a modern Welfare state "starving authors aren't romantic any more" (9).

Despite Wain's reaction against the neo-romantic mode of the forties, he continued to be a sympathetic exponent of a Wordsworthian Romanticism for its deeply rooted interest in nature and in man's social conditions. If the modern poet wants to put an end to the vague neo-romantic way of writing which "deliquesced into the mushy self-indulgent rhetoric of so much bad verse in the late forties," as Wain argues in his introduction to *The Happy Unicorns*, he must try to be real and precise, without losing the sense of "a devouring hunger for the particular, so that the poem never loses the hardness and bulk of an object grasped in one's hand" (8). A good poet can make a progression from any detailed observation to a kind of generalized truth which can be discovered in definite or sharply visualized setting. A bad poem, on the other hand, he writes in "The New Robert Lowell," "does not get down from the wall and move into our lives" (22). Wain's poem "Ferns," in *Letters to Five Artists* (1969), shows that the poet's need for contrast must urge him to feel the spirit of place:

Those ancient hard heads,
the clustered mountains, some of earth's oldest rocks,
light green or purple, grass, stone or heather,
changing with the light that walks among the clouds,
above the heavy layers of the sea
(unalterably of its own way of thinking,
dismantling and building, eating and disgorging,
cold and sensual with its own salt
and its own secrets): (8-16)

It is a Wordsworthian-like way of deriving enjoyment and wisdom from the objects of nature which are animated with a spirit of their own, and from which the poet gains a private and peculiar interest, similar to the following lines, from Wordsworth's "Poems on the naming of Places":

The Rivulet, delighting in its strength,
Ran with a young man's speed; and yet the voice



Of waters which the winter had supplied
Was soften'd down into a vernal tone.

The spirit of enjoyment and desire,
And hopes and wishes, from all living things
Went circling, like a multitude of sounds. (1.2-8)

The ability to feel the spirit of place or to strike concrete images which connect the poet's mind with the landscape can save the poet from an inadequate subjectivity which ends in vagueness and incoherence. If the modern poet is destined to live in big complicated cities he must not divorce himself from this natural source or from the essential native qualities of his tradition which distinguish him from other poets. Without the existence of this native element or without our ability to discern it in the writer's work, we may fail to appreciate the real quality of his art. This is why Wain, despite his criticism of the forties, did not hesitate to criticize those English critics who failed to appreciate or apprehend the essential Welsh element in Dylan Thomas's poetry; and to commend Thomas's ability to sing with a voice that came from what he called "the ancient woods of my blood" ("Dylan Thomas Today" 14).

Wain's critical observations indicate that the art of the modern contemporary poet is different from the Pound-Eliot tradition and the Neo-Apocalyptic modes of writing which were popular in the forties. These modes, however, should be looked at as adventures of the human soul, which can strengthen the modern poet for his own new adventures rather than a reaction to the world he has to inhabit in his own time. If Eliot's or Pound's poetry reflects the fragmentation and complexity of modern life, if many poems of the forties are vague and sentimental, the modern poet can counteract vagueness and fragmentation, as Wain writes in his introduction to *Anthology of Modern Poetry*, by "consolidation" or by constructing "regular and disciplined verse-forms," which belong to tradition, not only the tradition of one epoch but the longer, durable tradition which stretches away behind. The young poets of the fifties were anxious to produce a type of poetry which was rational, formal and precise, as a reaction against the complex quality of Eliot's poetry or against the poetry of the thirties which turned in the direction of mere "sloppiness and laziness" (35). They discarded most of the vague poetry of the forties which was responsible for the destruction of meaning either by its excessive use of vague imagery or by overemphasizing the importance of the unconscious. Wain himself cannot easily accept the "flights of learning and speculation," he notes in "Beyond the Stony Limits," which exist in Hugh MacDiarmid's poem "On a Raised Beach" (9), whose vague and specialized images may lead the reader "to go to the library and look them up" or to throw out the poem in despair and "switch on the television" (10). In support of his view, Wain quotes the following lines from the poem:

All is lithogenesis—or lochia,
Carpelite fruit of the forbidden tree,
Stones blacker than any in the Caaba,
Cream-coloured caen-stone, chatoyant pieces,
Celadon and corbeau, bistre and beige,
Glaucous, hoar, enfolded, cyathiform,
Making mere faculae of the sun and moon,
I study you glout and gloss, but have
No cadrans to adjust you with, and turn again
From optik to haptik and like a blind man run



My fingers over you, arris by arris, burr by burr, (qtd. in Wain, "Beyond the Stony Limits"
10)

The Neo-Romantics' adaptation of Freud and Psychology had legitimized a damaging randomness in poetry which eventually resulted in a serious collapse of public taste and the failure of the poet's position in social life. To counteract such diffuse and sentimental verbiage, the new poets suggested that poetry should have a clear meaning or should be susceptible to critical analysis and evaluation. What distinguishes the new poetry, as Robert Conquest describes it in his introduction to *New Lines* (1956), is that: "It submits to no great systems of theoretical constructs nor agglomerations of unconscious commands. It is free from both mystical and logical compulsions and . . . is empirical in its attitude to all that comes" (xv).

For Wain, the poem is regarded as a tight and compressed form whose meaning could be apprehended instantaneously by an intelligent reader. It presents "its subject-matter," he remarks in "The Conflict of Forms," "with the immediacy of the sudden shocks" we get in our life, and represents "the ultimate point of compression and significance behind which language cannot go" (23). The poet, too, he claims in "Junk Sculptures," from *Letters to Five Artists*, must drown the "old ruin-language" (2.7) of direct warning or vague, incoherent meaning, and should be guided by "patience," discipline, and love, and, he writes in "Adventures of the Night-Self in the Age of the Machines," published in *Wildtrack*,

. . . he will rule in Reason's town
In future years: yet in his brain
Some saving root will channel down
To where the springs of pity flow:
Some images will live and know
Deep within the human grain. (141-46)

If, however, the modern poet has to express his experience in such a compressed form, he should not forget his personal voice which helps him to interpret his experience from within without inflating his limited feelings or views. The spirit of individualism in each poet is invaluable because of its uniqueness, and because it has always found beautiful and memorable expression in every form of literature. To "screen out" such individuality is to produce an art which is null and dull; he claims in *A House for the Truth*:

Western art, and particularly the art of literature, focused, defined, and in general gave a tremendous push to, the notion of the individual. And the cultural muddle of the present time is due, very largely, to the antagonism between the kind of art which keeps alive the spirit of individualism, drawing strength from it and channelling back strength in return, and the new collectivized art or anti-art which screens out the individual. (210)

Such a view relates Wain's theory of poetry to the genuine Romantic spirit and dissociates it from the quasi-unconscious mode of Neo-Romanticism and even from the dry objectivity of the Movement which produced an art which, though disciplined and precise, is shallow in most cases. From the very beginning, Wain wished to avoid this shallowness and superficiality by mixing precision with feeling, and objectivity with subjectivity. In his poem, "In Memory of Henry Payne," the opening poem of his first volume of verse *Mixed Feelings* (1951), which is a tribute to the porter of St John's College, Oxford, who died in 1948, Wain states his wish to effect this kind of equipoise:

. . . this is the time when we
wish we were poets to strip our stale speech clean,



that out of our posture and gesture some fine thing
might spring, fitting and natural to our sorrow. (16-19)

The poem relates the death of “the grim good man” (15) to the death of an old tradition of writing “stale” and sentimental verse. Though simple, the poem shows how Wain reacts against those poets who deprecated any kind of clarity and saw no need to admit the shaping intelligence into their work. If the modern poet should aim at poise, clarity and coherence, he should also revolt against imported fashions and unstudied innovations.

Without excluding suggestion and inference, Wain repudiates the cloudy gestures, the shapeless, bogged down writing of traditional Neo-Romanticism in which the poet isolated himself in a garret without experiencing his individual self by means of social and human relationships. This cult of subjectivism, Wain notes in his essay “Another Room in Hell,” led the writer to “gather his evidence from the self and leave it at that,” and encouraged him to analyze his own self to present a portrait of his own character and project his own limited world (84). This limited belief in subjectivism in its “modern deliquescence” cannot help the poet to go beyond himself or objectify any significant meaning in his work (84). He further explains that, “we have narrowed the function of art to a series of case histories imaginative concern for the people. The reader of modern literature is supposed to collect individualities like bric-a-brac: curiosities, shrunken heads on the mantelpiece, not intended to go beyond themselves into any larger truth” (84).

The obsessive concern with the poet’s self results in a kind of art which is either confessional or too difficult to understand. In either case, the neo-romantic poet has generally failed to show any ability to experience the world intensely through characters very different from his own. He was only staging a demonstration of selfhood which could not attract the reader because of its vagueness or literal truthfulness. This outgrown way of putting things obliquely or literally led to a rapid collapse of public taste, or to what Alfred Alvarez called, in *The New Poetry*, “a blockage against intelligence” (23); a situation, Wain relates in his essay “Poetry of the Fifties,” in which “the educated public responded by dismissing [the poet] from any serious consideration” (98). For Wain, a good imaginative work should not be confined by the prison-house of personality; it should convey a significant message to the people and catch their moods and thoughts. In *Everyman’s book*, he claims that: “Imagination is the power to escape from the cell of one’s own personality; it is that part of our mind which voyages outside us, and when it voyages it goes towards other people, catching their vibrations and steering by their flashes of light” (28). If the poet is quidded by imagination, by a fundamentally emotional or natural impulse, he can work, Wain writes in his poem “Moondust,” from *Letters to Five Artists*, “the stubborn grain of what is true” (104); and he can in fact be regarded, he notes in “Junk Sculptures,” as a teacher or a “priest” (4.77):

set apart by discipline and sacrifice,
a force of nature also—for nature
re-cycles waste, makes life from husk and dung. (4.78-80)

As a modern classical writer with a genuine romantic impulse, Wain, in “John Wain Talks about Poetry,” an interview with Robin Bell, maintains that a poet always needs the reassurance that if his imaginative spirit leads him in a certain direction, he must be able to go as far as he likes, to possess the one quality without which he can never hope to achieve any real distinction or originality; this quality is the “personal idiom” which allows the poet the liberty to choose the direction of his departure—a direction which will always be towards his individual vision. At the moment of writing, he adds, the poet must dig down to the bare rocks of his own particular idiom,



must have “the courage of his own convictions” and must write “the kind of poem he damn well wants to” (30).

Wain’s romanticism was growing with the growth of his reading habits. “At fifteen,” he recounts in *Professing Poetry*, “I could make myself drunk by repeating certain lines of poetry. They put me into a state of exultation that was almost trance-like” (264). He admired those poets whose interest was the exploration of human consciousness, and whose poetry did not register the external world directly or mechanically. The magical power of poetry flooded his “mind with an extraordinary joy”; and this led the young Wain to “devour the English poets—from Shakespeare I went to the Romantics, burrowed eagerly through them, and came out via the Victorians to the moderns, then swung like Tarzan back to the seventeenth century” (270). His temperament was not suited to “academic” societies, he notes in his essay “The Three-Chancer,” and was dissatisfied with “academic teaching” (402). Rather, he loved those “romantic places” where life was “less orderly and predictable.” The society he needed, Wain believes, must “combine the high civilization of Europe with a romantic verve similar to the dwellers in more remote places” (402). In his poem, “As a Child, I Saw the R 101,” published in *Open Country*, Wain’s love of simplicity and adventure is described in simple verses like the world he cries out for:

I like the White Knight

in Alice: now he, for one, would have found
a lovely mad poetry in taking his seat in a huge
silver cigar-tube. (3.13-16)

For Wain, a genuine romantic poet can deal with any problem without sacrificing his personal voice. He can form or materialize the consciousness of his time by responding deeply and intuitively to what is happening or what has happened or what will happen. He may deal with social, political or moral problems as long as they can elicit response from his whole being or from his “interior landscape.” All that is needful, as he points out in his essay “Should Poets try to Change the World?,” is that the “situation should claim the poet entirely, down to the roots of his being and come up as fresh foliage” (22). The poet’s individuality shows that his experience is no longer confined to himself, nor is it sacrificed for any alien consideration. The poet’s main theme or concern, he notes in “The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens,” is the relation between the “perceiving identity and the perceived universe” (8). The marriage of these two distinct essences or the relationship between the perceiver and what he perceives is the fruitful result of Wordsworth’s “creative sensibility” of *The Prelude* (413), the “blessed mood” of “Tintern Abbey” (2.43), in which “we are laid asleep / In body, and become a living soul” (2.47-48):

well pleased to recognize
In nature and the language of the sense
The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,
The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul
Of all my moral being. (Wordsworth, “Tintern Abbey” 110-114).

Such a state, in which the perceiver is “laid asleep in body” and becomes a “living soul” or in which the poet no longer lives in himself but becomes a “part of that about” him, exerts a similar effect on Wain’s body. The following lines of Wain’s poem, “The day-Self Contemplates the Defeat of Time,” published in *Wildtrack*, aptly reflect that state:

No flesh can walk in the forest. The still air
blows easily into the porous cells of thought



and only thought.

I moved among the trunks
and heavy stems, I heard the dripping leaves
conversing with the moss, and the thick stems
of rubbery marsh-plants eased to let me pass.

I went along the path that was no path
And the forest took me, silent, welcoming:
and as my vision opened in the gloom
of that green stillness, I saw others there.
Calm, solitary shapes resting among the leaves
or standing by the always-motionless trunks,
they disregarded me and each other. (16-29)

For Wain, a good Romantic poet had no fixed identity. He examined himself, and then, as he remarks in "Another Room In Hell," built the results of his self-examination "into works of imagination that offered, at least, to make statements of universal validity" (84). His individuality had its own enormous range which directed its power towards the people by employing the "insights he gathered from introspection to build an art that looked outward upon life" (84). The result is a process of identification in which the reader shares "the poet's damnation because he partakes of the same human condition" (84). The burning-glass concentration on the poet's identity lends its lofty and vigorous purity to his art and enriches it with a genuine truth which is perceived by the poet's creative imagination. Such a genuine truth is not handed down in an increasingly blurred form, nor does its openness of texture carry the cult of accessibility to the point where it encourages triviality and staleness. In "Consulting the Oracles," Wain maintains:

The first wave of Romantic writing was dominated by larger-than-life personalities, both on the page and in life. The romantic megalomaniac had to go everywhere and do everything because his ego was the weapon with which he thumped the universe into giving up its secrets. Werther, Ossian, Childe Harold, Prometheus, the Ancient Mariner, were all Titans who suffered and enjoyed the whole world on their own pulses. (48)

If the concentration on the self is not done in a selfish way, the resultant art may be an invitation to the reader to partake of a general truth including the poet and the reader as well. It is an art which evokes a richness of response to experience not only in the individual who creates but in the group that sustains him.

Wain's reverence for Wordsworth is due to the fact that Wordsworth's aim was to render the human spirit more human. His simple people and dalesmen were the uncorrupted innocent people who still had genuine natural feelings and a spontaneous language compatible with their expression. He was interested, he states in "Wordsworth up to Date," in the "sweat and soil of ordinary human existence," of children and old men from whom we can learn the wisdom and the courage to face the hardships of life. For Wain, Wordsworth's "Resolution and Independence" is "not only the first but the most typical modern poem," in which the leech-gatherer takes on "something of the majesty of a rock or a cloud" and gives the poet himself "a flow of renewed strength" (27). In the following lines, from Wordsworth's "Resolution and Independence":

The old Man still stood talking by my side;
But now his voice to me was like a stream
Scarce heard; nor word from word could I divide;



And the whole body of the Man did seem
Like one whom I had met with in a dream;
Or like a man from some far region sent,
To give me human strength, by apt admonishment. (16.106-112)

The old man's speech, though simple, seems to have the impenetrability of a flowing stream the unity of which the poet is unable to divide. His whole body, too, acquires some qualities and attributes which make him like a man "sent" from "some far region." The very aptness of "admonishment" is a form of release, in which the poet scorns his former self and anxiety before meeting the old man, and in which he learns to accept the leech-gatherer's "apt admonishment" and derive comfort from it, to adopt the old man and take him as part of his own consciousness:

I could have laughed myself to scorn to find
In that decrepit Man so firm a mind.
"God," said I, "be my help and stay secure;
I'll think of the Leech-gatherer on the lonely moor!" ("Resolution and Independence"
20.137-40)

Wordsworth's Romanticism, his love of nature and its simple creatures, did not admit any separation between the explored subjective depths of the poet himself and the human situation in general. It is a concern with life or with people because what he wrote was not an "appetite" but something, Wain explains in his essay "Dear George Orwell," which meshed in "directly with a hunger and a relish for experience and also with the normal aspirations and wishes of a decent person, including the wish for social justice" (21-22).

Wordsworth's love or description of nature, and his outline of her program for Lucy are cited by Wain, in "Wordsworth up to Date," as the most "economical description" ever portrayed by a living poet (26). In arguing this claim, Wain cites two lines from Wordsworth's poem, "Three Years She Grew," which say "Myself will my darling be / Both law and impulse" (7-8), and then points out that if man regards nature as his "law" and "impulse, there can be no ravaging conflict anywhere" in his life (26). This truth is best illustrated in *Feng* (1975) and *Open Country* (187), where Feng wants to kill the pain of fear by seeking solace in the healing effect of nature:

Alone, alone,
I hurried through the park under the trees
and gained the grassy slope, and climbed,
and climbed mad to be near the clouds, livid and gold
that the wind streamed into long ridges, or piled up
in solid towers, dissolving as I watched,
and yet still solid as the autumn earth.

It grew steeper. I left the path
And clambered over rocks, and clutched at roots
and saplings. Laughter bubbled from my chest.
I panted and rejoiced.
The buildings where my name
Is Feng the king were hidden by the rocks.
I was away from lying and pretending. (*Feng* 15.92-105)



Or where Wain himself, he writes in “George Orwell, in Barcelona, Imagines Jura,” from *Open Country*, longs for a life of contemplation, of rustic simplicity and peace, away from the life of “ravaging conflict” and bloodshed:

one day, I shall
be at peace under a roof of sloping stones,
with fowl pecking outside, and the sea’s voice:
a different sea from the hard dark line out there
that slices at the sky with its cutting edge:
a sea with tides, and rock-basins, and seals.
And then I shall mix myself a fuller palette
beyond these blacks and whites and greys, if that
day comes.

Yes, then I shall go back.

to a life more simple than this of war, and more complex. (50-60)

Wordsworth, as Wain tells us in “Wordsworth up to Date,” “was no believer in book learning for its own sake, or in ‘refined,’ other-worldly emotions that left the sweat and soil of ordinary human existence to one side” (26). And so is Wain too. Books, for him, useful though, are not an end in themselves; they cannot represent truth; they are only “calls to action” or to “the slow maturing of attitudes,” as Wain maintains in “George Orwell, in Barcelona”:

All my books so far have been calls to action.
In that stone house with a stack of turf outside
I shall build some shelves, and on the highest one,
almost out of reach even for me,
I shall store my call-to-action books. Not so
as to disown them, just to say *Their war
is over. Stand at ease, good soldier
whose long day’s fighting has earned a quiet shelf.*

.....

Or to the slow maturing of attitudes: (61-68, 76).

Truth can be discovered in nature when looked at with man’s thoughtful and imaginative eye:

the pebbles I coaxed and counted,
crouched in the garden,
were my world of truth: I trusted no trimaran,
galleon, grain-clipper or grim grey frigate
to liberate my life into a loose-knit lightness.
To clamber up clown-high among clustering leaves,
branched against bark, gave enough of the bright
sky for me to taste, to touch and treasure:
a spider-web on a still morning, dew-silvered,
or the luminous white of a pebble, light-laced
with veins of red, was verity’s voice. (“As a Child, I Saw the R 101” 80-89)

Moreover, when the poet is snapped out of his world of books and action to be instructed by the magical power of nature and the beauty he discovers in the elementary world of the simple people from whom we learn a wisdom not found in books, as Wain expresses in his poem,



“Prospero’s Staff in the Earth,” from *Open Country*, an essential Wordsworth-like impulse of “commonality” is substantiated:

The peaceful grass grows on. This is the miracle.
Where Cain struck Abel down, the daisy’s eye
opens each dawn in accustomed innocence.
So on the island of Prospero’s rough magic
the polished staff put knowledge in the earth,
the highest knowledge and yet the commonest, fragrant
as breath of cows, majestic as the clouds.
While off the rocky point, the book sways down
to the sea-bed, and the magician’s house
feels once again the pulse of life, the warmth,
the healing flesh, the young man and the girl. (90-100)

Rather than learning wisdom from books, Wain could learn it from nature, which is regarded, in his poem “Sagittarius-Feeding Pigs,” as the miraculous “priestess” whose “simplest routines are aflame with mystery” and magic. He could learn it from a natural creature, as in his poem “Ode to a Nightingale,” from a nightingale whose “love of the covert / adds that dimension of mystery all art needs.” He would, like Prospero, in “Prospero’s Staff in the Earth,” break his “staff” and “drown” his books, and turn “his face naked to the sunset fire” (38) because they all resemble a limb of truth but not her holy body:

the stored thoughts veining into ocean-streams
brooks of knowledge in the thick salt gloom,
defined channels of wisdom, but not permanent,
dispersed, dispersed, and in the end forgotten:
all this I can see. (19-23)

Wain, then, does not deny that nature should be “man’s law and impulse.” Man can lead a happy life if he obeys his natural impulse. The noble mission of art, as represented in Wain’s poem “Leo-Reaping,” is to remind man of the duality in nature and of resolving it into a clean center which shows:

that man is in nature and obeys the natural law
though his instructed hand is stronger than the lion’s paw
and the beast and man exist by permission of sun and rain;
though man’s fate is always to learn this and forget it again. (34-37)

Wain’s approach to nature is more relevant to the modern situation, and more Wordsworthian, than that of many other poets who tried to justify their love of nature either by calculation or by a kind of artless description which can only evoke sentimentality and cause enervation. The young poets of his age, Wain notes in his comment on Ted Hughes’s winning of “The Signal Poetry Award,” in 1979, were “encouraged to discard nature poetry as a hang-over from the weekend picturesqueness of Georgian poetry” (66). His poem “Reason for not Writing Orthodox Nature Poetry,” published in *Mixed Feelings*, shows that although the modern poet would like to speak of the beauty of nature, he can no longer describe such beauty in Wordsworthian terms. In the poem, Wordsworth’s genuine description of nature is matched against the Victorians’ and the Moderns’ naïve and conventional way with its eye on the market:

So sages never found it hard to prove
Nor prophets to declare in metaphor



That God and Nature must be hand in glove.

And this became the basis of their lore.
Then later poets found it easy going
To give the public what they bargained for,

And like a spectacled curator showing
The wares of his museum to the crowd,
They yearly waxed more eloquent and knowing,

More slick, more photographic, and more proud:
From Tennyson with notebook in his hand
(His truth to Nature fits him like a shroud) (10-21)

Wain's love of nature may be as strong or as deep as Wordsworth's. In the poem, he writes, it "Has brewed a cup whose strength has dizzied me" (6). But the circumstances of modern life do not help him to describe nature as the Romantics have done. Therefore, he is content to note:

How little beauty catches at the throat.
Simply, I love this mountain and this bay
With love that I can never speak by rote,

And where you love you cannot break away. (28-31)

Nature, for Wain, as he states in his autobiography, *Sprightly Running*, was a "tremendously powerful idea" in his mind (31). The last sentence, in the autobiography, shows how he loves his English tradition and nature with equal passion and vigor: "Spirits of my unknown ancestors, speak through me: green hills of Staffordshire, stand firm in my mind!" (265). He points out that he loved natural and wild creatures with a kind of "aching sympathy," a pantheistic love which points out that all are "living in one eternity . . . the eternity of nature" (36). It is true that this kind of love, he writes, was "overlaid" by the difficult problems of life; nevertheless, Wain would go on calling himself a pantheist and "an amateur naturalist" (34) if only because he had

A deep, unargued reverence for all created life, almost a pantheism. This instinct, though it is now habitually overlaid by the sophistications and preoccupations of the world, is just as strong in me today as it was then. I never know the moment when some chance sight or sound will remind me, with a stab of intense emotion, of that old, indissoluble, life-giving link. (35-36)

This is not simply a stated view but a belief in the healing power of nature which "chastens" and "subdues" man's troubled soul—a Wordsworthian belief, portrayed in "Tintern Abbey," in which the "beauteous forms" of nature not only cause "sweet sensations / Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart" (29-30), but they pass even into his "purer mind / With tranquil restoration" (31-32). Similarly, in "The Day-Self Contemplates the Defeat of Time," published in *Wildtrack*, Wain writes:

I trod
the unmapped forest, marvelling, and not
I only, but others among living men:
the thoughtful-eyed, those able for an hour
to turn from the highway of the Here and Now,



leaving the flesh to cool itself awhile,
and wander for their delight in the quiet shade,
meeting now this achievement, and now that:
all turbulent minds now quiet, all fulfilled
in joyous contemplation: how this one had
designed a palace, that one distilled a drug
that could heal pain, another found a sea,
a fourth made fables that enriched men's lives.

All marvelled, and I marvelled with the rest:
but none stayed long: the calm of the great forest
could not be borne by those whose flesh was warm
and cried its hungers and its urgencies,
calling them back with swift and bitter cries:
summoned, they hurried off, and others came,
but scampered in their turn: and I, like them,
feeling my respite at an end, bowed low
to those indifferent presences, and left. (44-64)

The difference between the healthy romanticist and the self-indulgent aesthete is that the first grapples with any human situation as an intrinsic part of his being. He defines or experiences his creative self by means of human relationships which can improve man's life either socially or morally. The latter, on the other hand, does not care to show that what he writes is meant to acquire any significant meaning or any meaning at all. The Romantic poet responds to his experience spontaneously by living at the required depth and by warding off the continual temptation to be verbose and shallow. "Ever since the late eighteenth century," Wain writes in *Everyman's Book*, that the idea of "sincerity and spontaneity" has "been highly valued (25), adding that Wordsworth's definition of poetry as "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" has exerted its due effect on the modern tradition. What "we are seeing in our century is partly a natural development of this tradition" (25). The poem, as Wain, in his article "Along the Tightrope," tells us:

is an affair of the whole man, and the whole man cannot respond to anything that has not been lived out. Hence 'Look in thy heart, and write' is still the primary adage, though it doesn't mean that all a writer has to do is gush and have 'sincerity,' i.e. wear his heart on his sleeve. An artist can only have one principle: to treat whatever seems to him to present itself insistently for treatment, in the bit of life lived by him, in the corner of history and geography he inhabits. (83)

Oscar Labang claims that Wain, here, "sees the writer as one whose duty is to humanize the society in which he lives. He must assert the importance of humanity in the face of whatever is currently trying to annihilate that importance" (69). It is true that in writing his poem, Wain is guided by what constitutes poetic truth. He writes with the aim not only of showing how the poet should write but of humanizing the society he happens to live in. If the poetry, the poet writes, is realistic telling the reader of the objective truth about the conditions in man's life, it should not be literal or too self-conscious; for the poet's ultimate aim is to tell his readers the truth about the dreams and aspirations of humanity rather than its objective circumstances.

Wain's poem "Horses," published in *Poems, 1949-1979*, is a good example of this idea of humanization, or identification with man and animal, where correlation and reciprocal relations



exist between man's life and the life of animals. The horse image is made a symbol of the incessant wheel of life, and of man's patience in facing its hardships, its vale of sorrows and travails. The patient horses, "bred for muscle-power and long obedience" are identified with those persevering and hard-trying men:

The horses pull
nostril-dilated, snorting, and the men

with calloused hands
walk with them, say their names, bring round their heads

their patient heads
that understand the weight of earth and sky. (19-24)

These work horses mirror the life of the poor patient people of Wales whose longings and dreams are let down and left in the lurch and whose load of "day-labour pins them down":

if they wander a few paces from the track
of wage-work, a voice warns 'Get back.

get back for the milking, the kiln-firing.
lay down meekly your dreaming and desiring.

drop your longings like discarded tools,
let them rust by the discoloured pools (94-99)

For such frustrated people, life becomes like a cart-wheel with one iron rim. Their life is completely devoted to work, to the "plodding alliance of man and horse / or man and wife." In spite of their poverty and humiliation, they are good-natured, and are very happy with their own dreams. They cannot choose but feed their sleep with the things they cry out for. Their longings and dreams are also identified with the horses:

And the long foreheads of the horses, do they shelter
dreams of rest in a green delta

where grass is rich and sweet, and from deep shade
birds call? I think they should not be afraid

to dream, who have so clearly nothing to lose.
But the men, afraid or not, cannot choose (136-41).

In this poem, as well as in many others, Wain wants to show that the poet should write his poetry with a deep sense of responsibility towards his fellow-men, not only by insuring his art against vagueness or by establishing a more democratic form of address but by feeling other people's feelings, dreaming their dreams, and identifying his life with theirs. In writing, they "live in me. / Behind my eyes what they saw, I still see" (151-52), he emphasizes a reciprocal relation with them. The flexibility and simplicity of the regular forms he uses in "Horses" help him to achieve that state of complete identification, not only with his fellow men but with the patient horses, feeling the "horse marrow in his nose" and living on "horse-patience and desires." In the last part of the poem, which is divided into six separate sestinas, Wain describes this process of identification by speaking in his own personal voice:



I thank the unknown God who built my bones
and shaped tall colts from mine and their dam's desires.

I watch them run. They snort and crop sweet grass.
In their young bodies I discern my traces.

They are nerve and sinew.
They are nerve and sinew. They stamp, and need no rest.
All trees and flowers are rooted in my pride. (3)

The horse-image claims the poet entirely and elicits response from his whole being. Sympathy and identification with the people, the horses, the trees and flowers give meaning to the unique pattern of individuality which merges the personal experience in, what Clarence Irving Lewis calls, the "corporate life of mankind" (62).

The same idea of identification is delineated in Wain's poem "Thinking about Mr. Person," from *Poems, 1949-1979*, where the poet acquires a plural voice rather than seals himself in a "thick-walled tower" or isolates himself from the common interests of the people. In the preface to the poem, Wain describes how the Portuguese poet Fernando Pessoa (1888-1935) was able to write "four highly differentiated bodies of poetry" which combine the intensely personal with the general and the universal. The "greatest Portuguese poet since Camoens" was full of the "weather of Portugal" and of its life which was "drowned in the deep salt water of goodbye." He was one of the stern Portuguese people who carried Western Europe and finally set her down to become "the exiled queen they call Brazil." Pessoa, or Mr. Person, was able to write in English, "often had English thoughts," could mix with other people and could make "four poets to shape the world for him." The four differentiated bodies of his poetry helped his mind to talk to itself, to walk "familiar places / under a changing sky," and to escape from the prison-house of his personality:

Having nuggets of England in his Portuguese mind
must have helped Mr. Person to feel less defined

and so less hampered. Rather than to be single
he always found it more rewarding to mingle.

He was the choir-master who invented his choir:
their voices' freedom was his heart's desire.

Leaving the centralizing ego to sink or swim
he made up four poets to shape the world for him:

three had imagined names, one had his own:
this set him free to enjoying being alone (69-78).

Mr. Person's ability to acquire this plurality and many-sidedness helped him to respond to life and greet her with love. His aim was to accept the world calmly, and to discover truth for its own sake. Wain identified himself with the Portuguese poet though by combining plain speech with a kind of artificial and studied elegance:

when I think of him, and besides there is the fact
that we share our love of the earth like a secret pact.



Soft Portuguese distances of hazy green
hazy distances of England where my life has been

silver and green of the olive, silver and green of the willow
these are the gentlest colours I shall ever know

waves rolling in to shore, birds walking on the sand
I am rooted and calm in Portugal as in England (152-59)

Wain's aim is to show that the poet should always acquire an intense receptiveness to the immediate touches of nature through the courage of his senses. At the same time, he must draw strength from something more general and more instinctual than his own limited social class or structure. Guided by sympathy and love, his life and art will be "a breathing and a bestowing," and he will always hope for such "truths that find their way with no resistance / and nature that is peaceful in her own existence" (137-38).

The idea of identification seems to be a natural impulse in man's life. Man always seeks to identify himself with a greater power than his own. However, the modern classical poet, it is true, has to preserve some detachment from the immediate situation. His poetry must retain a touch of restraint, a severe elegance and a care for form. But he must not, Wain emphasizes in *Everyman's Book*, "undervalue spontaneity as an important literary virtue (Or rather . . . the appearance of spontaneity, since there is no external means of telling whether a piece of writing was in fact produced spontaneously or labored over)" (25). Wain was against that kind of belated romanticism which claimed any person could be a poet once he was given a voice, or once he could express himself freely and directly irrespective of any social or moral obligations. Such a claim indicates that the poet can scribble down anything that comes into his head without any kind of control or revision. In such a situation, the noble ideals of spontaneity are completely dissolved. In *Essays on Literature and Ideas*, he writes:

Fifteen years ago the most influential doctrine in English poetry was that anybody could be a poet, without any effort, merely by letting the contents of his mental dewlap spill over on to the page: your, or my, or anyone's undisciplined fantasies, not subjected to any kind of artistic treatment, had only to be written down and the result was poetry. (138)

For Wain, the poet should be both "critical" and "unpredictable" (139). He is neither a mere "technician" who masters a discipline and applies it to the solution of problems nor is he an irresponsible "Bohemian" living in his own isolated ivory tower (138). He should be motivated by a passionate love of language, and of matching its texture and weighing it against what is to be described or conveyed. Unlike the self-indulgent aesthete, the responsible poet should stand against "flow-writing," or against the use of language in a reckless way. If he now lives in an age of journalism and publicity, he should try to write responsibly, to make his language spare and clean, to construct his verse soberly, stripping itself down to a new leanness, by shedding extraneous details and by concentrating on those human qualities which distinguish Wordsworth's poetry from the vague poetry of the forties.

Like many poets of his generation, Wain is willing to acknowledge the strength of the Romantic tradition; to show also that the common sense of Movement view of writing poetry could be enriched by a genuine romantic spirit that may enable the poet to include forces unencompassed by a rational or empirical world-view only. A good poem, that is to say, is a combination of the



personal and the impersonal; it is a way of forcing impersonality on a deeply personal experience, or rather, as Coleridge calls it in *Biographia Literaria I*, a way of reconciling a “more than usual state of emotion with [a] more than usual order” (12). It is neither emotion nor intellect, as Wain points out in *Everyman’s Work*: “The impulse to write a poem comes not from the directing intelligence but from something deeper, more mysterious, which the intellect can thwart but cannot command” (29). Poetry is a unique blending of the subjective and the objective, of restraint and excitement, and all such contradictory qualities are combined in “the secure fortress of the self.” Yet poetry should also reveal the poet’s human responsibility and his personal voice as an integral part of an overall pattern. In other words, Wain asserts, in *Professing Poetry*, that if “we think of ourselves as part of a meaningful structure, we take more naturally to the discipline of building meaningful structures in our work, and the public whom we address enjoys them more” (242). In this respect, Wain’s poet is similar to Wordsworth’s poet, who was described as “a man speaking to men” taking them into his own confidence, building useful bridges for them and enhancing his experiences with an imaginative meaning, without surrendering himself to the direct demands of his public. The disciplined romantic poet should always undergo the incessant struggle to bring fresh territory within his own imaginative range without nailing up the doors through which he might emerge into a new kind of genuine communication. If Wain’s poet is traditional, deriving his vigor from a healthy English tradition, he is also, he points out in *Sprightly Running*, experimental, romantic, and always enjoying the unlimited freedom of choice and selection:

To me, each thing I attempt is an experiment, whether or not it involves the kind of fiddling with form that my elders used to call, and still do call, ‘experimental.’ I consider myself an experimental writer because I am willing to try anything, to tackle any form from the most outlandish to the most familiar, if it seems to go naturally with what I have to say. If I have to be ‘modern’—imagist, expressionist, surrealist, anything—I am quite willing to try; on the other hand, I would be willing to work through the most conventional forms imaginable, if I were driven to them. All that matters is to tell the truth. (210)

which means that the austerity of the modern poet is combined with the freedom and spontaneity of Wordsworth’s poet to produce an art which moves humanity forward towards reality and truth.

As a result, it is no exaggeration to say that Wain is an important part of the modern literary history and one of its shapers. He will always be studied and remembered not only for his best poetry, fiction, and criticism, but for his sturdy independence and his wish to take the reader into his confidence, to build a relationship of trust and friendship so that the reader can share his experience which retains, in not a few situations, a classical-romantic flavor, a touch of restraint, a care for form as well as an accessibility unswayed by the immediate or topical demands of his time.



Notes

¹ The term “contemporary” was commonly used by the critics of the second half of the twentieth century to designate the post-World War II period and to distinguish the poets who started writing in 1945 from T. S. Eliot, W. H. Auden, and Dylan Thomas, who continued to publish after 1945, and who are appropriately seen as “modern” poets than as “contemporary” poets. It was not until the 1950s, when the young poets who were gathered together in the *New Lines* anthology were perceived as turning their backs on modernism and writing a different type of poetry, that English poetry entered into a period which required a name to differentiate it from the preceding, “modern” period.

² Roberta Berke points out the fundamental differences between contemporary American and British poetry. “For Americans,” she asserts, “the touchstone is innovation: Pound’s dictum ‘Make it new’ is invoked over every fresh . . . attempt to depart from the poetic norm. Along with this reverence for innovation go an American emphasis on the practical and an attempt to reproduce present reality according to Williams’s ‘No ideas but in things.’ But for the British the past—literary, political, historic and mythical—is inescapable, and British poets feel compelled to work out their relationships, positive or negative, to it” (130). She continues to affirm that the “While British poets have not set the space in the last thirty years, their roots in the past have kept them from bending to every breeze of current fashion.” “A delicate balance,” she suggests, “must be sought between experiment and excellence within a context of tradition, and this is by no means an exclusively British problem” (148).

³ Philip Hobsbaum deals with this issue in two essays. In “The Road Not Taken,” he sees modernism in English poetry as American Imposition. Then, he goes on to argue that a distinctly English modernism would have developed from Thomas Hardy through Edward Thomas, Wilfred Owen, and Isaac Rosenberg if these three young poets had not died during World War I, leaving a leadership gap, which was filled by Pound and Eliot (860, 863). His second essay, “The Growth of English Modernism,” is a reworking of the ideas dealt with in “The Road Not Taken.” He contends that the free verse, free association, and autobiographical content of Eliot and Pound are distinctly American and thus foreign to the English tradition. English verse is at its best when it is reshaping—not destroying—and arranging external material to convey inner tension. True English modernism lost its chief heroes in World War I, but the tradition is continued in William Empson, D. J. Enright, Philip Larkin, Ted Hughes, Peter Porter, and Peter Redgrove (97-105).

⁴ Bernard Bergonzi admits that he accepts the conventional view of modern English poetry in which Pound and Eliot are seen as the arch innovators with Auden and Spender and then Dylan Thomas and George Barker as their successors, but wonders if perhaps Alvarez in *The Shaping Spirit* is correct in asserting that Pound and Eliot brought in an alien tradition. Instead of being in reaction, then, Movement and subsequent poets might be seen as continuing a line of English poetry which goes back through Graves to the Georgians (284-85).

⁵ Donald Davie believes that his collection *Purity of Fiction in English Verse* could have served as a Movement manifesto. Whereas American academic poetry in the fifties “was a refuge from the Philistines” (201), English academic poetry, including Charles Tomlinson’s, was a passionate rejection of the “Bohemia which destroyed Dylan Thomas” (198). He accepts the notion that we have “two distinct literatures, British and American, inside one language” (201), and objects to British poets imitating American styles which have validity only within an American context (198-201).

⁶ Marjorie Perloff contends that since the early sixties, British and American poetries have gone in increasingly different directions. While American poetry journals favor exploratory theoretical discussions



of “postmodernism” which support American poets in the belief that they can do something new and exciting in poetry, British journals tend to be cautious and pragmatic. Lyric poetry emphasizes the growing differences between British and American “languages” and in the not too distant future Americans will need further reference books to “translate” British poetry (263-78).

⁷ Donald Hall contends that contemporary American poets, whose poetry suffers from “diminished sound,” could benefit from reading contemporary English poetry, but because the prevailing English modes are so different, Americans must approach English poetry as though they were reading translations. Whereas English poets breathe an air layered with the past and tradition, Americans—whose gene pool is different, deriving from Europeans who turned their backs on the past—praise the present and emphasize originality. He recommends that Americans read W. S. Graham, George Mackaye Brown, David Wright, John Heath-Stubbs, and Jeffrey Wainwright (24-43).

⁸ Many critics questioned whether the “Movement” ever was a cohesive school or an actual movement, such as Anthony Thwaite, who wondered if it was “a true literary beginning in the 1950s or an invocation by journalists?” (40), Jeff Nuttall, who describes it as a “gigantic confidence trick,” Howard Sergeant, who defines it as an “extremely well-organized, not to say well-sustained, publicity campaign,” and by Christopher Logue “as a conspiracy in which fame-hungry poets ‘promoted themselves by means of a group name’ ” (qtd. in Morrison 3).

⁹ Wain’s six broadcast programmes *First Reading*, which went out between 26 April and 24 September 1953, had been regarded as a crucial breakthrough for the formation of the *Movement* aesthetic. For Larkin, the “*Movement* . . . really began when John Wain succeeded John Lehmann on that B. B. C programme; John planned six programmes called *First Readings* . . . It got attacked in a very convenient way, and consequently we became lumped together” (“Four Conversations” 72).

¹⁰ In the introduction to his *Oxford Library of English Poetry* (1986), Wain states that “Many changes naturally suggest themselves . . . but one . . . is that we no longer think of American poetry as virtually symbiotic with English.” He goes on to argue that “since 1945 the distance has widened until the two literatures are out of sight of each other” (xv).

¹¹ In his own writings, Wain reports the impact of Thomas Hardy, W. H. Auden, and Robert Graves on the formation of his poetic voice. For Wain, Hardy’s poetry, he writes in *Selected Shorter Poems of Thomas Hardy*, is unambiguous and contains little in reference that needs elucidation. Despite the various devices which heighten the impression or ordinariness in Hardy’s poetry, Wain notes, one “must not fall into the trap of seeing him as a poet of direct vision and technical simplicity” (xvi). His plain language is rich, cunning and suggestive. Wain adds, Hardy toils at his art “so devotedly that he has left us nearly a thousand examples of it; none of them quite without interest, and a few fit to rank with the greatest achievements of modern lyric verse (xix). In the same way, Wain points out, in *Professing Poetry*, that he admires Auden because of his innate ability to express himself “not in one style but in a sheaf of styles” (46), to retain his own voice and to react to the world of the 1930s “so incisively and memorably that this epoch seems, in retrospect, to be coloured by his way of perceiving it” (46). Wain also remarks that Auden refused to be tied down, was firm about the need for austerity, for avoiding the “language of the highway” (54), and the fault of becoming the leader of a movement which ruined poet after poet. It is true, he acknowledges, that Auden “deliberately scrambled his message, presenting it in a bewildering a kaleidoscopic of fun-and-games, burlesque, hyperbole and anacoluthon” but he removed himself from any close-knit relationship with one particular group of society” (58). Likewise, Wain praises that Robert Graves’s solid commitment to his values in his writing. He observes in the *New York Times Magazine*: “[Graves] has faith in his own vision and his own way of doing things . . . and when he has arrived at them, he cares nothing for majority opinion. He has never been in the least daunted by the discovery that everybody else was out of step.



Whatever is the issue . . . Graves has reached his own conclusions and never worried if no one agreed with him" (470). Wain concludes his essay by emphasizing Grave's literary significance: "He is not an easy writer. He does not make concessions. He has achieved a large readership and a great fame because of the richness of what he has to offer—its human depth, its range, its compelling imaginative power—rather than by fancy packaging or deep-freeze convenience" (472). Similarly, Elizabeth Hatzilou states that the poetry of Graves "influenced Wain and most of the poets of the Movement" (223).

¹² All textual references to Wordsworth's *Preface to Lyrical Ballads* and poems are to *The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth: Poems Founded on the Affections, Poems on the naming of Places, Poems of the Fancy, Poems of the Imagination*. Textual references to the *Preface* are indicated by page numbers and to the poems by the title of the poem and the line numbers.

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نجلزة الفكر ورومانتيكية جون واين المُقَيِّدة

إعداد

محمد بدر الدين الحسيني حسن منصور

قسم اللغة الإنجليزية

كلية الآداب - جامعة بنها

تستهدف هذه الورقة البحثية أولاً إيضاح الفرق بين الشعر الإنجليزي والشعر الأمريكي في فترة ما بعد الحرب العالمية الثانية، وثانياً استقصاء جذور جون واين الضاربة في نواميس الإنجليز، وخاصةً الواقعية الرومانتيكية التي أرسى ويليام ووردسورث قواعدها. كما ترصد الورقة البحثية أنه على الرغم من اهتمام كثير من الكتاب، في العصر الحديث، بالتفكير في الأدب بشكل عالمي، إلا أن هذا الفكر قد تبدد في إنجلترا على الأقل بعد أن وضعت الحرب العالمية الثانية أوزارها، والتصقت بالشعر الإنجليزي تهماً من مثل "الريفية" و"المحلية" و"الجهوية" و"العجرفة" و"أحادية الفكر". كما ظهرت وجهة نظر شائعة إلى حد ما في فترة ما بعد الحرب ترى أنه في حين استفاد الشعراء الأمريكيون على ركانز أتباع الحدائث وانطلقوا إلى مرحلة ما بعد الحدائث، فإن الإنجليز قد تراجعوا إلى وضع ما قبل الحدائث، وعليه، فإن الشعر الأمريكي، الذي استمر في حدائته محافظاً على منظوره العالمي، ظل متقوقاً على الشعر الإنجليزي. وبينما يعظم الشعر الأمريكي الحاضر ويؤكد الأصالة، فإن الشعر الإنجليزي ظل غارقاً في الماضي والتقاليد. تلك الاختلافات الجوهرية بين صنفَي الشعر—الإنجليزي والأميركي—هي ما أدت إلى زهد القراء الأمريكيين في الشعر الإنجليزي.

تعرض الورقة البحثية بعد هذا الشاعر الإنجليزي، جون واين (١٩٥٢-١٩٩٤)، بصفته أحد الشعراء الشباب الإنجليز الذي طالما كان شعره مُهملاً لعقودٍ طوال في أمريكا، وذلك من أجل إثبات أولاً أنه، مثل كثير من شعراء جيله، قد عانى من إعلامٍ رديٍّ وعجرفةٍ أكاديمية تسببت في إتساع الهوة بين الشعرين "الإنجليزي والأميركي" وزهدٍ أميركي في الشعر الإنجليزي خلال فترة ما بعد الحرب، وثانياً لإيضاح حرصه على استعادة التقاليد الشعرية الإنجليزية الأصيلة التي غابت مؤقتاً عن الساحة الأدبية. وتوضح الدراسة أن صوت واين الشعري ضارب في الجذور الإنجليزية وأنه قد استقى رومانتيكيته المُقَيِّدة من الواقعية الرومانتيكية لويليام ووردسورث، حيث توجد "المكونات" الشعرية في "كل موضوعٍ يثير اهتمام العقل البشري" وحيث يُعد الشاعر "شخصاً يخاطب أشخاصاً آخرين" باستخدام وتطبيق "لغتهم الاعتيادية" وبغرض "الإمتاع الشعري" وهو الغرض الذي يطمح إليه كل شاعر.

تشير الورقة البحثية إلى أن واين يؤمن—مثل ووردسورث—بأن اللغة الشعرية يُستحب استخدامها في وصف مشاعر الإنسان الحساسة والرفيعة دون أي تعبير غير عقلائي أو غموضٍ غير مبرر. ويرى كلا الشعراء أن الكتابة الشعرية ينبغي ألا تكون تسجيلاً مجرداً لمفردات الطبيعة في جمودها بل ينبغي أن تقدم هذه المفردات وتعيد زخرفتها في قالبٍ سحري. يبرز هذا الرأي المتأصل لوين في أن أي شاعرٍ جيد يكتب الضرب الشعري الذي يعد استمراراً واضحاً للنواميس الكلاسيكية للشعر الإنجليزي دون إغفال صوته النابع من ذاته. ومع ذلك، فإن الورقة البحثية تبين إلى أي مدى يرى واين أن العمل الإبداعِي الجيد يجب أن يتحرر من قيود الذاتية وأن يخلط بين الدقة والإحساس من جانب وبين الموضوعية والذاتية من جانبٍ آخر لنقل رسالةٍ هامةٍ إلى الناس والاستحواذ على أمزجتهم وأفكارهم.

كما تظهر الورقة البحثية أنه نتيجة هذا "الباعث الحسي" أن أصبح واين أكثر تبرماً بالحركة الشعرية—الحركة—التي ظهرت في خمسينات القرن الماضي والتي كانت تتميز بشعرها المُتَشَدِّد. وبغرض أن بعض الشعراء في خمسينات القرن الماضي قد ظلوا على موقفهم المعادي والمناوئ للرومانتيكية، فإن واين قد أبحر بعيداً عن جزيرة معاداة الحركة الشعرية—الحركة—إلى الرومانتيكية ومناوئتها للحدائث، ومال نحو طريقةٍ متوازنةٍ في الكتابة تجمع بين الرومانتيكية والواقعية. وفي الحق فإن واين يندفع في أشعاره بما يضمن له صدق ما يكتبه، ولا يكتب فقط ليروي الآخرين كيف يكتب الشاعر، ولكن لإضفاء طابع إنساني على المجتمع الذي يعيش فيه. إن هدف الشاعر الأسمى يكمن في أن يخبر قراءه بحقيقة أحلام وطموحات البشر، بدلاً من حقائقهم الملموسة. وعليه، فإن واين يرى أن صرامة الشاعر الحدائثي تقترن بحرية وعفوية الشاعر في مفهوم ووردسورث، وذلك بهدف إبداع وصياغة ما قد يحرك الإنسانية قدماً نحو الواقع والحقيقة.

كلمات دالة: جون واين، ويليام ووردسورث، فترة ما بعد الحرب العالمية الثانية، الواقعية، الرومانتيكية، الجذور الإنجليزية